

## ***Social Determinants of Health and Opioid Use Disorder***

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## Social Determinants of Health and Opioid Use Disorder

**Background and Objectives:** The opioid epidemic has been a public health crisis in America since the 1990s. Previous studies have identified that unstable housing, lack of education or job opportunities, and inadequate health insurance contribute to opioid use disorder. In this study, we aimed to investigate further how social determinants of health affect persons who inject drugs in the Tampa Bay Area, one of the hardest-hit areas in the nation in this respect<sup>1</sup>, to gain a better understanding of how to ameliorate the opioid epidemic.

**Methods:** We examined demographic data and indicators of low socioeconomic status (SES) in patient enrollment forms from IDEA Tampa, a syringe services program in Hillsborough County, Florida. The enrollment forms include patients' responses to questions about their racial and ethnic background, employment, education, housing, health insurance, and mode of transportation. We then quantified how many patients were characterized by various demographic traits or indicators of low SES to determine the pervasiveness of each.

**Results:** From January 2021-March 2022, IDEA Tampa enrolled 623 patients. Regarding demographic background traits, 87% of those patients were white, 68% were non-Hispanic, and 98% primarily spoke English. Additionally, 58% were male, and half were single (as opposed to partnered/married, divorced, or widowed). Regarding SES indicators, 89% of the patients didn't obtain a college degree. Unemployment for under one year and over one year afflicted 23% and 31% of patients, respectively. Additionally, 41% had an annual income below \$15,000 (for reference, the federal poverty level for 2022 is \$13,590 for one adult). Notably, 43% of patients were homeless, 31% homeless for over one year, and 56% had no health insurance. Finally, 66% of patients reported not driving themselves to the clinic that day, instead walking, biking, using public transit or rideshare, or being dropped off by someone.

**Conclusion:** Our study affirmed that socioeconomic disadvantages are heavily associated with opioid use disorder. Initiatives to increase household income and social support would likely lessen these inequities. Given these findings and the existing body of knowledge, it's evident that healthcare systems, policymakers, and community leaders need to work together to lessen the economic burden that drives much drug usage. With an understanding of the interplay between social determinants of health and opioid use disorder, healthcare professionals can more empathetically connect with their patients, better attend to their needs, and refer them to social support services they need.

<sup>1</sup> Hollenbeck S. Opioid deaths skyrocket across US; Tampa Bay one of worst in nation for overdoses. ABC Action News WFTS Tampa Bay. <https://www.abcactionnews.com/news/region-pinellas/opioid-deaths-skyrocket-across-us-tampa-bay-one-of-worst-in-nation-for-overdoses>. Published January 31, 2022.