

Handcuffs or Stethoscopes

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Handcuffs or Stethoscopes: Best Opioid Misuse Practices Background

This country has an issue in terms of opioids, as 4.4% of individuals above the age of 12 have misused opioids (Ahrnsbrak, et al., 2016). However, the language used around this issue has varying. In a content analysis of media stories, the majority of those who discussed solutions to the opioid epidemic were revolving around law enforcement (McGinty et al., 2016). In fact, the focus of these stories on opioids has been on the illegal activities performed by people, not on how this was affecting health or various other important discussions.

Labeling theory explains how being labeled a certain way creates a self-fulfilling prophecy where one goes to satisfy that label they have been given (Skaggs, 2016). When the media labels those who misuse opioids as people needing law enforcement, they are being labeled as criminals. Being labeled as a criminal, aside from opioid misuse you are a law abiding citizen may cause you to rethink how one lives their life. And possibly participate in a secondary deviance to create a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Social media differs on how the issue is discussed; perhaps due to whose opinions are coming out. With a great focus being on public health statements (25%) and a small minority (8%) being focused on negativity regarding opioid use (Chan, Lopez, & Sarkar, 2015). This represents a language shift online which is discrepant with what the media has presented. This study is examining how community members and opioid misusers feel opioid misuse should be handled. It will also examine how opioid misusers feel they are portrayed by the media.

Methods

After looking at various sources, the question remaining is how do users feel they are discussed and how do they and the community as a whole feel the issue should be dealt with. To answer this surveys were created to understand opioid users perceptions as well the entire community. These surveys were disseminated in various ways. The survey for the community was implemented in union with the Social Science Applied Research Center (SSARC) through the use of the CATI system, which allows for random number dialing and phone surveys (n=2492). The survey for those who misuse opioids was printed up and left at the North Carolina Harm Reduction Coalition (NCHRC) for those who use its services to fill out (n=200). Both surveys were anonymous.

After a month of surveying; making phone calls or picking up the surveys from the NCHRC, data collection was complete. The results were input to SPSS and analyzed with descriptive statistics. Unfortunately, the amount of completed surveys was too small to go beyond descriptive (n=20). However, descriptive results were attained and are presented below.

Results

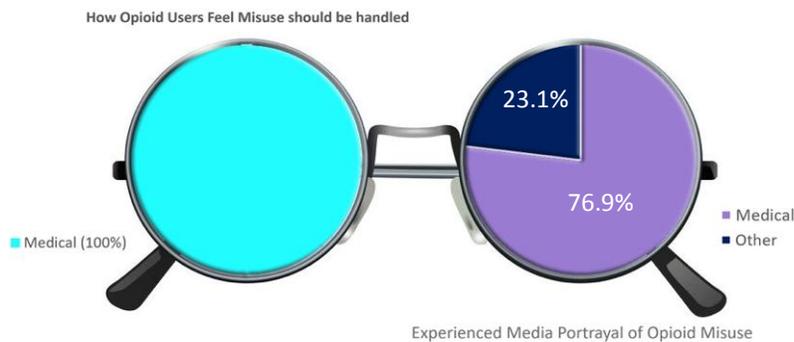
Of the total population who took the NCHRC survey (n=20), 100% agreed that the issue of opioid misuse was best handled through the medical as opposed to the criminal justice system. When asked how opioid misuse is primarily portrayed in local media, 76.9% said it was portrayed as a criminal issue. Additionally, the community as a

whole was asked how they feel misuse should be handled. Of those who took the community survey (n=) 102, or 72.3% said they felt the issue of opioid misuse should be handled medically. The majority of those who answered the question regarding personal opioids misuse (n=107), 90% had never misused. Within the NCHRC survey income was also lower overall than the Community survey.

Discussion

These results are valuable as these represent the clients at the NCHRC, who would be experiencing the treatment. They have insight to the issue, as some may have already experienced these treatments. What is more, those who haven't misused agree, the issue would best be dealt with medically. This is taking into account any income disparities between the two groups as these could lead to unequal health care or legal aid access. Considering the media paints the issue differently than those who receive the media feel, perhaps changes should be made. If we refer to those who misuse opioid's needing medical help as opposed to criminal, perhaps fewer would become the latter. These results could also be taken into account when sentencing for opioid related crimes is passed.

Figure 1: NCHRC Survey



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Figure 2: Community Group

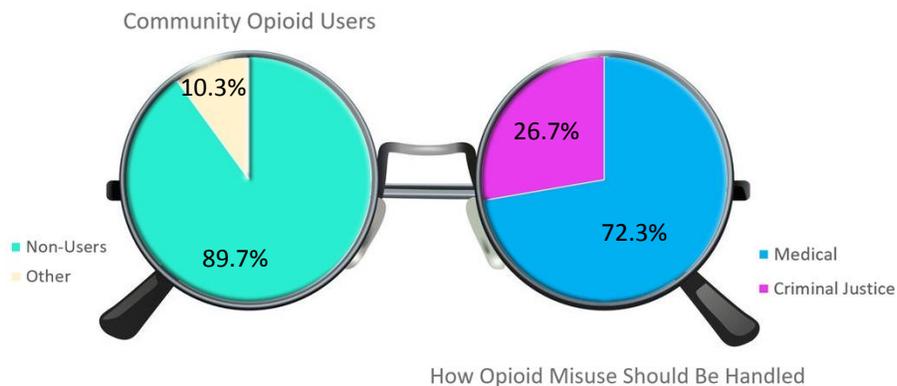
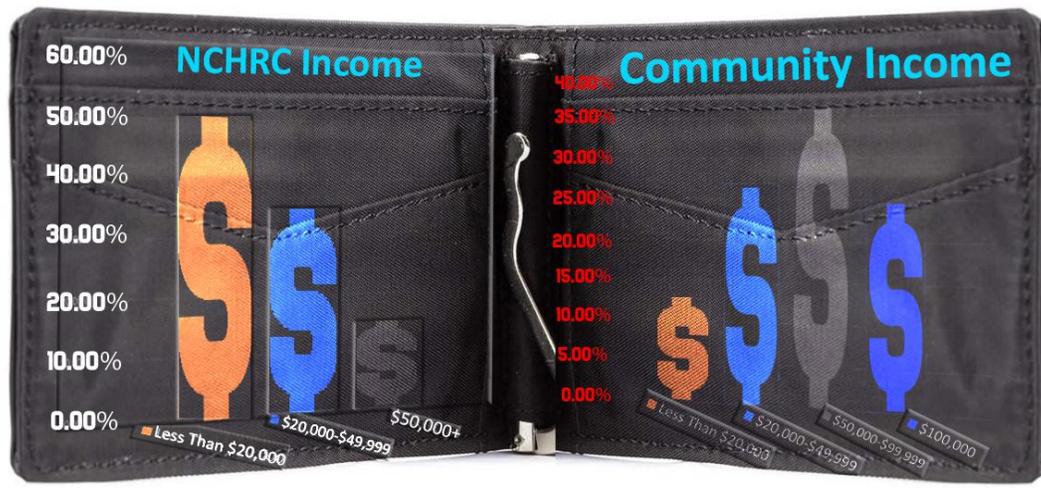


Figure 3: Comparative Income



References:

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Chan, B., Lopez, A., & Sarkar, U. (2015). The canary in the coal mine tweets: Social media reveals public perceptions of non-medical use of opioids. *PLoS One*, 10(8) doi:<http://dx.doi.org.liblink.uncw.edu/10.1371/journal.pone.0135072>

McGinty, E. E., Kennedy-Hendricks, A., Baller, J., Niederdeppe, J., Gollust, S., & Barry, C. L. (2016). Criminal activity or treatable health condition? news media framing of opioid analgesic abuse in the united states, 1998–2012. *Psychiatric Services*, 67(4), 405-411. doi:10.1176/appi.ps.201500065

Skaggs, S. L. (2016, October 09). Labeling theory. Retrieved November 05, 2017, from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/labeling-theory>

Resources:

www.nchrc.com

<https://uncw.edu/ssarc/>