

Policy Memo on Parental Opioid Abuse

SPA Leadership Program

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The opioid epidemic has been gripping the nation for the past five years; countless numbers of people have lost their lives, hundreds of families have been torn apart, and there is no end in sight. As people continue to lose their lives at an alarming rate, an unforeseen causality of the epidemic has become clear: the children of parents suffering from opioid addiction.

Research on the effects of parental opioid abuse has been limited, but it also has discovered that parental opioid abuse has a negative impact on the child's well-being, specifically their educational opportunities. In order to cater to the struggles of these children, it is necessary to understand the effects opioids have not only on the parents, but as well as their children as they develop and mature.

BACKGROUND

It has been estimated that around 12 million adults in the United States are abusing opioids, but also within the United States, about 74% of all adults are parents (Benoit). Therefore, there is an unknown number of children living alongside adults who are addicted to opioids throughout the United States. Opioid abuse can affect parenting styles in either one of two ways: parents abusing opioids are more likely to either neglect their child or abuse their child (Kepple). Regardless of the type of abuse, children are often removed from the care of their parents which places further strain on a child's ability to succeed; this is seen most clearly in Florida. From 2012 to 2015, researchers reported that as the amount of opioid prescriptions increase, the amount of child removals also increased (Storch).

Over the years, a multitude of studies have been conducted to examine the effects of parental opioid abuse, and they all have shown that there is long-term, aversive effects. Children

whose parents who are addicted to opioids experience increased educational struggles and behavioral struggles (Benoit). Educationally, the effects of learning disabilities, such as ADHD, are magnified in children whose parents abuse opioids. This translates into poor performance and difficulty in social situations. Studies shows that children whose parents have been addicted to opioids are less likely to be resilient adults. More so, it was found that males whose parents are, or were, addicted to opioids are less likely to be resilient than their female counterparts (Catalano).

KEY STAKEHOLDERS AND AFFECTED COMMUNITIES

- **Families:** *Children, Parents, and Extended Family Members*
 - Children, as previously mentioned, are deeply affected by parents abusing opioids. They are in close proximity to the addiction and therefore the suffer because of it. They have decreased educational and social opportunities that harm their well-being. Parents are often the individuals who are battling the addiction; they often, inadvertently due to their addiction, either abuse or neglect their child. Extended family members often attempt to fill the void for child that are left by the parent - this can be as intense as taking guardianship after a child removal by the state.
- **Government:** *Schools, Healthcare, Law Enforcement, and Child Protective Services*
 - Government services such as schools, the healthcare systems, law enforcement and child protective service not only interact with parental opioid case, but also have the ability to advocate for increase assistance from the government in order to combat the opioid epidemic. Furthermore, school official have the power to

craft programs to assist children educational when there is addiction in the home.

Finally, the healthcare system, law enforcement and child protective service must come together in order to redefine addiction as a disease, rather than a crime.

PAST SOLUTIONS

Governments, both local and federal across the country have been attempting find a solution for the opioid epidemic for the last five years. Federally, Congress just passed the STOP Act of 2018, with the goal of curbing the amount of synthetic opioids being shipped into the country (Pear). Locally, both Tennessee and Ohio have attempt to craft legislation that would bring an end to the epidemic. In Ohio, the midterm season Issue One was on the ballot with the goal of limiting jail time for drug offenses and emphasis rehabilitation instead (“Ohio: Issue 1”). The government of Tennessee came together in order to pass the TN Together legislation that would limit the amount of opioids that can be prescribed (Nelson). Although the success of these actions are minute - the STOP Act was just ratified last month, the TN Together initiative does not begin until 2019, and Issue One failed to pass - there are all attempts at combating opioid addiction. These attempts fall short though; none of them are comprehensive and none of them allocate a program or funding to assist the children that are impacted by parental opioid abuse.

CONCLUSION

The conversation surrounding the opioid epidemic has been focused on rehabilitation of current addicts, this conversation has excluded the children of addicts completely. Due to the evidence that has been presented, it is obvious that this is extremely problematic. Children’s well-being has been a silent causality of the opioid epidemic. It is absolutely imperative that

comprehensive solutions are crafted in order to not only bring an end to the opioid epidemic but also provide relief to the children who have been living in and through this epidemic.

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