

School and job failure may increase drug users' risks of suffering a fatal overdose

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For the first time, researchers have found that problem drug users with less successful educational and employment careers are more likely to die of an overdose. Moreover, there is no link between parents' professional status and the likelihood that their problem drug-using child will die from an overdose.

"Overdose victims are roughly twice as likely to have failed to finish secondary school successfully and one-and-a-half times more likely to be unemployed than problem drug users who are still alive," said Alain Origer, Luxembourg's National Drug Coordinator and lead researcher on this topic. He worked with Prof. Michèle Baumann, health [sociologist](#), from the University of Luxembourg, Research Unit INSIDE, Institute health & Behaviour. "However, there was no difference in the type of work done by the parents of problem drug-users and overdose victims," he added. "One may speculate that socioeconomic disadvantages act on individual lives rather than being determined by up-bringing."

These ground-breaking results from a University of Luxembourg research team followed cross-analysis of uniquely rich data on the lives of over 1,300 problem drug-users resident in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg between 1994 and 2011. This included multi-layered life histories of 272 fatal [overdose](#) cases and 1,056 problem drug-users with comparable profiles. Problem drug-use in this study relates to the taking of opioids, most commonly heroin, and cocaine.

This is the first study to be based on such a large and rich set of long-

term data about problem drug-users' life stories. The researchers had access to anonymised national data from drug misuse agencies, the national drug monitoring system, toxicological and autopsy reports. Thus the University of Luxembourg team were able to take a more multidimensional approach than previous studies in the academic literature. Other studies attempting to use similar methodology proved to be inconclusive due to a lack of data.

"Educational programmes, professional training and occupational reintegration may contribute to reducing [drug](#)-related mortality," said Mr Origer. "Incorporating these measures into harm reduction programmes and developing risk-assessment tools could save lives," he added.

More information: Alain Origer, Etienne Le Bihan, Michèle Bauman: "Social and economic inequalities in fatal opioid and cocaine related overdoses in Luxembourg: A case–control study." *International Journal of Drug Policy*. 2014. hdl.handle.net/10993/18191

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