

Family influence key in spread of opioid use

August 5 2019



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Introducing an opioid painkiller into a home can double the chances someone else living in the home seeks out the addictive drugs on his or her own, according to a new paper from two UC Berkeley researchers.

The study, published in the *American Sociological Review*, found the

chances that a person gets a prescription for opioids climbs between 19% and 100% when a relative living in the same household already uses the drugs, depending on circumstances.

"Our research finds huge effects on the likelihood that [family members](#) who are influenced by other family members will start using opioids," said Mathijs de Vaan, an assistant professor at the Haas School of Business who studies economic sociology and [network analysis](#).

De Vaan and co-author Toby Stuart, a professor at the [business school](#), examined hundreds of millions of medical claims and roughly 14 million opioid prescriptions created between 2010 and 2015 to come to their conclusions.

The findings suggest ways opioid addiction, which killed 47,000 Americans in 2017, spreads, the researchers said. Family members can observe the effects the painkiller has on loved ones and may be tempted by excess pills sitting in the family medicine cabinet.

The exposure to opioids in the home may also cause people to ask their doctors for the drugs by name, de Vaan said, further spreading the effects of exposure to the drugs.

"The actions of one doctor toward one patient affect the requests that that patient then makes of other doctors he or she visits," de Vaan told the Haas Newsroom. "We find that physicians are not only influencing each other directly when it comes to opioid prescriptions. They're influencing each other by steering patient demand."

The conclusion that family behavior plays a role in spreading the use of opioids suggests ways doctors, researchers and policymakers could attempt to address the spread of the drugs, the researchers said. This could include alerting doctors if a patient's family members already

make use of opioids or paying people to safely dispose of excess drugs sitting in home medicine cabinets.

More information: Mathijs de Vaan et al. Does Intra-household Contagion Cause an Increase in Prescription Opioid Use?, *American Sociological Review* (2019). [DOI: 10.1177/0003122419857797](https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122419857797)

Provided by University of California - Berkeley

Citation: Family influence key in spread of opioid use (2019, August 5) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-08-family-key-opioid.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.