

Researchers explore the role of psychology in responding to opioid addiction

September 30 2019, by Bert Gambini



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

The literature on addictive substances such as alcohol and tobacco has developed consistently over decades of study within the field of psychology.

Now with an [opioid epidemic](#) that has seen overdose rates increase exponentially on the order of 300-500% in the last 15 years, there exists a clear need for the discipline to work toward developing an equally rich body of research that guides researchers and practitioners in how best to respond to this crisis, according to Jennifer Read, a professor in the University at Buffalo Department of Psychology.

Read is the co-editor—along with Brian Borsari, a professor in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of California, San Francisco and staff member of the San Francisco VA Medical Center— of a special issue of the *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* published online Wednesday (Sept. 25) focused on the crisis.

The work in this issue is an important step toward expanding knowledge and understanding, through commentary and empirical research in a manner that addresses psychology's role in responding to the crisis and the possibilities researchers might pursue in the future.

"As much as providing people with an understanding of where things are today, much of this issue is devoted to where the field needs to go next," says Read.

Read (pronounced Reed) and Borsari devote the research in the issue exclusively to clinical psychology. They say these are the practitioners within the field of psychology who are often interacting in a variety of public health contexts with many of the hundreds of thousands of individuals affected by [opioid](#) use and misuse.

Borsari characterizes the opioid crisis in the journal's introduction as "the most significant public health, social, economic, and [mental health](#) burdens the United States has faced in decades."

Since 2017, when the [federal government](#) declared the opioid crisis to be

a public health emergency, approximately 47,600 people have died from opioid overdoses, more than those killed by car accidents or gun violence over the same period. And the numbers may be even more startling, since not all opioid-related deaths are being reported as such.

With sections dedicated to assessment, diagnosis, treatment and prevention, the papers in the special issue offer new insights on critical issues, identify gaps in knowledge, and provide suggestions for how the field can take steps to provide effective and compassionate care.

"One of the big challenges in the field is how psychologists can work with people who experience chronic [pain](#)," says Read.

Roughly one in five Americans report [chronic pain](#), defined as pain on most days or every day over a six-month period, and several articles in the journal address the challenges of developing innovated pain management approaches and delivering them to those in need.

"Are there ways we can work with people who are prescribed opioids for pain management that might prevent them from becoming addicted, misusing, or diverting them to others? Or are there other ways to manage pain that don't involve any drug at all? Several papers address behavioral interventions for pain," Read said.

The current state of the crisis and the factors contributing to it are complex, and though progress is being made, there remains much work to be done.

"Psychologists have a long history of working individually and within multidisciplinary systems to improve the prevention, assessment diagnosis, and treatment of major health conditions," Read writes in the issue's conclusion. "The articles [here] demonstrate just a few of the many opportunities that we have before us to continue in this tradition,

as we respond collectively to this crisis now facing our country."

Provided by University at Buffalo

Citation: Researchers explore the role of psychology in responding to opioid addiction (2019, September 30) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-09-explore-role-psychology-opioid-addiction.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.