

One in every 5 deaths in young adults is opioid-related in the United States: Study

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"Despite the amount of attention that has been placed on this public health issue, we are increasingly seeing the devastating impact that early loss of life from opioids is having across the United States," said Dr. Tara Gomes, a scientist in the Li Ka Shing Knowledge Institute of St. Michael's. Credit: St. Michael's Hospital

One out of every five deaths among young adults in the United States is related to opioids, suggests a study led by researchers in Canada.

The study, published today in *JAMA Network Open* and led by St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto, ON, found that the percentage of deaths attributable to opioids in the U.S. increased by 292 per cent from 2001 to 2016, with one in every 65 deaths related to opioid use by 2016. This number varied by age group and sex. Men represented nearly 70 per cent of all opioid deaths by 2016, and the highest burden was among [young adults](#) aged 24 to 35 years. This study expands on research in Canadian populations.

"Despite the amount of attention that has been placed on this public health issue, we are increasingly seeing the devastating impact that early loss of life from opioids is having across the

United States," said Dr. Tara Gomes, a scientist in the Li Ka Shing Knowledge Institute of St. Michael's. "In the absence of a multidisciplinary approach to this issue that combines access to treatment, harm reduction and education, this crisis will impact the U.S. for generations."

Researchers reviewed all deaths in the U.S. between 2001 and 2016 using the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) WONDER Multiple Cause of Death Online Database. This record captures mortality and population estimates across the U.S. by age and sex. The most dramatic increase in illicit and prescribed opioid-related deaths was seen in those aged 24 to 35. By 2016, 20 per cent of all deaths in this age group were related to opioid use—up from only 4 per cent in 2001.

Dr. Gomes, who is also a scientist at the Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences in Ontario, and her team found that a total of 1,681,359 years of life were lost prematurely to opioid-related causes in 2016, which exceeds the years of life lost each year from hypertension, HIV/AIDS and pneumonia in the U.S.

"These numbers show us the dramatic impact of [opioid](#)-related harms across all demographics in the U.S.," Dr. Gomes said. "We know this is not an isolated public health issue—it is one that spans across North America."

Provided by St. Michael's Hospital

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