Studies in the News
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Poor, white patients more likely prescribed opioids because of physician bias

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CULTURE & DEMOGRAPHY

https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamainternalmedicine/fullarticle/2723625?guestAccessKey=7fe163de-0ce6-4464-bf27-3c0dfafbc437

“A new study of prescribing practices across all of California’s 1,760 ZIP codes helps explain why opiates, some of medicine’s most addictive drugs, have wreaked more havoc on white communities than on communities of color. The answer … appears to lie in unconscious physician biases about race, ethnicity and pain that more typically leave minority patients underserved and undermedicated…. The result is now all too familiar: an epidemic that has cut a swath of death and destruction through poor, rural white communities while largely sparing minorities. (That has begun to change in recent years as the opioid street drugs heroin and fentanyl have become cheaper and more widely available, ensnaring more
minority users. Between 2016 and 2017, the biggest increase in opioid-related drug overdose deaths – 56% – as seen among African Americans, according to the CDC.” (Los Angeles Times, Feb. 19, 2019).

From the report: [A] Opioid overdose deaths (per 100,000 residents) and [B] prescription prevalence (percentage of population receiving at least one prescription), in California zip codes sorted by income and proportion of white population.

EDUCATION

https://ticas.org/sites/default/files/pub_files/what_college_costs_for_low-income_californians_0.pdf

“Low-income students at public colleges in California cannot afford to pay for college costs through their own resources, grants, and a moderate amount of work, and their affordability challenges present themselves in different ways….Affordability challenges can also present themselves in low rates of full-time enrollment, as seen at the community colleges, which hinders students’ ability to persist, graduate, and transfer. Attending college part time reduces the amount of time needed to be a student, and frees up more time to work. However, spending more time engaged with school – whether in classes or focusing on course material – increases students’ ability to learn, pass their courses, and graduate.”


“Experts agree that there is no safe level of lead exposure. Sugary drinks are the largest single source of added sugar in the American diet and are among the top single sources of calories. Drinking water in place of sugary drinks is an important public health strategy to help all children grow up at a healthy weight and to promote oral health. However, for students, families and decision makers, concerns about school water quality may inhibit consumption. Water must be safe to drink in order to promote its consumption. This report describes the features of statewide initiatives in operation between January 2016 and February 2018 to test for lead in school drinking water. It also estimates the prevalence of elevated lead concentrations in tap water in public schools based on the available data in 12 states.”
EMPLOYMENT


“Prior to the decline of the manufacturing sector, working class whites had privileged access to the jobs therein and to stable middle-class lives that came with them. When those jobs declined, so did the life narrative of these workers, as well as their relative status compared to minorities and immigrants.... Another part of the narrative of white working class—strong marriages and religiosity—has also suffered. Marriage rates and civic and religious participation have fallen more for the working class relative to the college educated since the 1970s, in part related to labor force dropout....There is much more to learn about these worrisome declines in labor force participation and the associated ill-being that comes with them. There are policy lessons and interventions to enhance well-being, but “More generally, our findings suggest a broader need to re-think our models of growth and indicators of progress.” *(Brookings, Feb. 12, 2019)*.

ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT


Lead has traditionally been the popular and inexpensive choice for fishing sinkers and tackle. But in the last few decades, concerns have been raised about the risk to wildlife and the environment when lead sinkers are lost in lakes and streams. Some states have limited the use of lead fishing tackle, or banned it completely. This report discusses the available literature, and includes a survey of known fishing tackle injuries and deaths among birds and mammals at wildlife refuge centers along the West Coast.

GENERAL GOVERNMENT


https://www.nber.org/papers/w25538 *(Available with a .gov account or from the California Research Bureau)*

“[A] new working paper … [takes] a look at the costs, distributional effects, and possible labor-market effects of UBI [Universal Basic Income] programs in advanced economies with existing social safety nets. They find, in line with many of the most prominent criticisms of the UBI, that such programs, if they were truly universal, would indeed be very expensive and, in comparison to the existing social safety net, would likely redirect spending to better-off families, potentially leaving low-income families worse off than they currently are.... If a UBI in the U.S. were to replace other safety net programs, as some have proposed, such a program would also result … in ‘a massive distribution up the earnings distribution, along with a redistribution from the elderly and disabled towards those who are neither, primarily but not exclusively those without children.’” *(Pacific Standard, Feb. 14, 2019)*.
HEALTH


“[F]indings indicate that more gay male decedents had diagnosed mental health problems, were currently being treated for mental illness or ever had treatment, disclosed their intent to die by suicide, had a history of suicidal thoughts or plans, and had previous suicide attempts than non-gay male decedents. More lesbian decedents had a history of suicidal thoughts or plans, disclosed their intent to die by suicide, and had previous suicide attempts than non-lesbian decedents. Approximately half of lesbian and gay male decedents reported a current depressed mood compared with one third of non-lesbians or non-gay males. These differences may be linked in part to the minority stress and discrimination that lesbian and gay male populations experience …. It is important for clinicians to become well versed on the diversity within these communities and to consider that adolescents, elderly, and racial/ethnic sexual minority clients may have additional needs (e.g., additional minority stressors and discrimination). There are opportunities to incorporate suicide prevention efforts into primary care medical settings, where most individuals receive services prior to their suicide.”

HUMAN SERVICES


“Millions of households rely on the $64 billion Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly known as food stamps, to buy food. But some stores are defrauding the program by ‘selling’ cash instead of food. For example, a store might give a person $50 in exchange for $100 in benefits—then pocket the difference. How widespread is this ‘retailer trafficking’? The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) reports that $1 billion in benefits are trafficked annually. However, the real extent is uncertain and could be anywhere from $960 million to $4.7 billion. We recommend ways to improve how FNS measures and addresses trafficking.”

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