

Abstract

Diploma thesis addresses the topic of the opioid epidemic in the United States and focuses on the causes of the higher rate of overdose deaths among African Americans during the third wave of the epidemic. The opioid epidemic has claimed nearly one million victims since its onset in the late 1990s. In the public sphere, it is often associated with the white part of the population, which was hit the hardest in the early years of the epidemic due to the over-prescription of opioid painkillers. As the epidemic evolved from prescription drugs to illicit drugs such as heroin and fentanyl, its negative impact has spread to the rest of the US population, disproportionately affecting minority African American communities. During the third wave, opioid overdose death rates among African Americans increased disproportionately. This thesis examines the reasons for the higher rate of overdose deaths among African Americans. The thesis argues that African Americans are dying of overdose more because of the criminalization of drug addiction and the unavailability of drug addiction treatment. Based on available studies and academic articles, there is evidence that African Americans are criminalized for drug offenses and crimes more than the rest of the population, and drug addiction treatment is less accessible to this population due to racial disparities caused by socioeconomic factors, which are important elements in preventing fatal overdoses.