



Xylazine Awareness and Suspected Presence in the Illicit Drug Supply Among People who use Stimulants in an Overdose Hotspot, 2023

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Research Question

Are people who use stimulants (PWUS) in Brockton Massachusetts, an overdose hotspot community in the USA, aware of xylazine in the drug supply?

Background

- Xylazine, a veterinary sedative, has been found in the United States (US) illicit fentanyl supply.
- Fentanyl has contaminated the stimulant supply, and xylazine is in the fentanyl → PWUS may be exposed to xylazine when intending to use stimulants.
- Human xylazine use is linked to severe skin wounds, complex withdrawal, and sedation that alters how fentanyl overdose presents and is responded to.
- It is important to know whether PWUS are aware of xylazine in the drug supply to inform harm reduction messaging.

Study Design

- **Setting:** Brockton, Massachusetts, US - a stimulant and opioid-involved overdose hotspot with xylazine in approx. 15% of the fentanyl supply during data collection
- **Eligibility:** People ≥ 18 years old with past-30-day use of any illicit stimulant
- **Procedures:** 59 participants completed a survey about past-30-day and lifetime substance use history and xylazine awareness
- **Analysis:** Chi-square (χ^2) assessed global differences by xylazine awareness for categorical dependent variables ($p < 0.05$).

Results

- Avg 45 years old (SD=11), mostly male (68%)
- 36% (n=21) were *unaware of xylazine*.
- 33% of participants who used stimulants and opioids and 39% of participants who only used stimulants were *unaware of xylazine*.
- A greater percentage of Native American, non-Hispanic (100%), Hispanic (58%), and Black, non-Hispanic (50%) participants were *unaware of xylazine* than White, non-Hispanic participants (17%) ($p < 0.05$).
- A greater percentage of participants with some or less than a high school education were *unaware of xylazine* (63%), than those with a high school/GED education level (38%), and some college or more (11%) ($p < 0.05$).
- Seven participants (12%) believed they unintentionally bought or used drugs that contained xylazine and suspected exposure because of:
 - Skin wounds (n=4)
 - Sedation (n=1)
 - Naloxone wasn't enough to respond to overdose (n=1)
 - Six purchased fentanyl, one was unsure what was purchased

Conclusion

- There was fair to good awareness of xylazine in the drug supply that significantly differed by race and educational level.
- PWUS should not be overlooked in harm reduction messaging about emergent drug adulterants like xylazine, as this population is potentially at risk of xylazine exposure.
- Xylazine harm reduction messaging should be tailored to PWUS at an accessible reading level (middle school) and intentionally disseminated within communities of color.

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