

Deaths of Friends or Family on Opioids

Context and Urgency

Between November 9th and December 7th, 2016, RIWI Corp. conducted a 60-country study on the topic of opioid deaths as part of its continuous all-country data collection offering, the RIWI Global Omnibus.

Roughly 11 percent of all people surveyed in 60 countries (out of a sample size of almost 48,000 individuals) say they know a friend (even if a distant friend) or family member who has died of an opioid overdose in the past year. In Canada, the figure is 15 percent. In the United States, where more than 55,000 people died of drug overdoses in 2015, it is 19 percent. The main culprit for the rise in the death rate is no longer heroin but fentanyl, a synthetic drug up to 50 times as powerful as heroin. Fentanyl has brought the world face to face with a new global public health emergency.

The challenge is more complex than fentanyl. The epidemic is adaptive; there are ever-new combinations of drugs now in kitchen production. Many drugs are synergistic: benzodiazepines and opioids can be deadly when combined. In an ironic curse, many of the drugs used to treat opioid addiction are being abused and combined with traditional opiates, leading to deadly consequences. Examples are methadone, a long acting opiate, and suboxone, a partial agonist of opiate receptors.

Death rates reported in the media are likely underestimates. Only a handful of scientific labs have the capacity to detect minute but lethal traces of fentanyl in street pills. And a sinister analog, carfentanil, is increasingly seeping into the black market. Those who die from fentanyl and its analogs include both casual users and habitual addicts, post-operative pain patients, frail elders suffering from chronic pain, and middle class teenagers (and their parents) looking for what they think will induce an intense high, not suspecting a lethal one.

The Challenge of Global Under-Reporting and the RIWI Solution

The RIWI Global Omnibus is a 60-country study that includes a minimum of 1,000 respondents from each country. (NB: In this report, the percentage of respondents reporting “don’t know” have been removed from the all-country respondent set). The Omnibus is a rapid, cost-effective, and international perspective on citizen opinions, particularly for sensitive topics such as drug use and addiction that are often subject to intense social desirability bias.

According to the DEA’s 2016 National Heroin Threat Assessment Summary, the true number of opioid-related deaths is likely under-reported, as coroners are not required to test for fentanyl and its analogs unless given a reason to do so. Opioid deaths of all kinds are often all categorized as morphine-related deaths, since other opioids metabolize into morphine in the body. The lack of a standardized system for reporting opioid-related deaths is an obstacle to building an adequate strategy to combat the epidemic of fentanyl abuse.



This underestimation of drug-related deaths is not only evident in the United States, but is also seen globally. The method for determining cause of death varies by country. Additionally, drug use often contributes to deaths officially recorded as stemming from other causes, such as a motor vehicle accident or suicide. Cases of underreporting have been seen in France and Italy, where official numbers differed from those recorded by medical institutions (UNODC World Drug Report, 2016).

Our hypothesis is that opinion data of this type can provide a clearer figure on the true prevalence of opioid-related deaths around the world. People who have personal knowledge of their friends' or family members' drug habits may be the key to unlocking closely guarded, deadly secrets.

About RIWI

RIWI is a global survey and citizen engagement technology firm that captures the broadest online random opinion data in every country. RIWI provides clients with access to otherwise unobtainable opinion data anonymously and confidentially from new audiences, fragile states, and in multiple regions and countries at the same time. RIWI can survey the same geographic population at various time points, thus assessing the effectiveness of intervening changes in public policy. Using RIWI data and RIWI's user-friendly, secure interactive dashboards, clients are able to sample public opinion of diverse populations around the world; important questions can be asked; changing opinions can be tracked; interventions can be evaluated; accurate predictions can be made. A sampling of RIWI's recent clients include governmental institutions, multilateral organizations, and NGOs such as The World Bank, the UN World Food Programme, Freedom House, the International Association of Prosecutors, The MasterCard Foundation, and Omidyar Network.

Established in 2009 as a pandemic surveillance awareness tool first used for government-funded research in Canada, RIWI's patented router technology, Random Domain Intercept Technology™ (RDIT), delivers anonymous opt-in surveys to random Web users who are surfing online by typing directly into the URL bar. When these users make data input errors by typing in websites that no longer exist, or by mistypes on non-trademarked websites that RIWI owns or controls for a given time, RIWI's technology invites these random users, filtered through a series of proprietary algorithms, to participate in a language-appropriate survey. Random Domain Intercept Technology allows for the rapid capture of broad, truly randomized and anonymous sentiment and high quality data. Data are then delivered to clients in constantly updated dashboards to enable user-friendly analysis, and in any file format (e.g., Excel, STATA, SPSS). Clients can access their always-updated data files and dashboards continuously.

RIWI, and its Random Domain Intercept Technology, is the winner of the IInX Innovation Exchange Competition (2013), a 'Top 50 Most Innovative' global data firm (2014, 2015, 2016), and the winner of the NGMR 'Disruptive Innovator of the Year' award (2014). RIWI's proprietary technology has been profiled in *Nature* and other scholarly journals, and RIWI is a product of research done originally at a unit affiliated with Massey College in the University of Toronto.

Findings

Table 1: Has a friend (even if a distant friend) or family member of yours died of a heroin or opioid drug overdose in the past year? (WEIGHTED)	Yes	No
France	6%	94%
Hungary	6%	94%
Kazakhstan	6%	94%
Tunisia	6%	94%
Belgium	7%	93%
Indonesia	7%	93%
Portugal	7%	93%
Slovakia	7%	93%
Morocco	8%	92%
Russia	8%	92%
Saudi Arabia	8%	92%
South Africa	8%	92%
Taiwan	8%	92%
Venezuela	8%	92%
Vietnam	8%	92%
Argentina	9%	91%
Austria	9%	91%
Chile	9%	91%
Colombia	9%	91%
Czech Republic	9%	91%
Egypt	9%	91%
Greece	9%	91%
Italy	9%	91%

Table 1: Has a friend (even if a distant friend) or family member of yours died of a heroin or opioid drug overdose in the past year? (WEIGHTED)	Yes	No
Jordan	9%	91%
Angola	10%	90%
Ethiopia	10%	90%
Iran	10%	90%
Kenya	10%	90%
Turkey	10%	90%
Algeria	11%	89%
Brazil	11%	89%
China	11%	89%
Korea, South	11%	89%
Peru	11%	89%
Romania	11%	89%
Serbia	11%	89%
Singapore	11%	89%
Mexico	12%	88%
Spain	12%	88%
Syria	12%	88%
Ukraine	12%	88%
Malaysia	13%	87%
Netherlands	13%	87%
Nigeria	13%	87%
Poland	13%	87%
Sudan	13%	87%
Sweden	13%	87%
Thailand	13%	87%
Hong Kong	14%	86%

Table 1: Has a friend (even if a distant friend) or family member of yours died of a heroin or opioid drug overdose in the past year? (WEIGHTED)	Yes	No
Canada	15%	85%
Germany	15%	85%
Iraq	15%	85%
Japan	15%	85%
Pakistan	15%	85%
Bangladesh	16%	84%
Philippines	16%	84%
United Kingdom	17%	83%
United States	19%	81%
Uganda	20%	80%
India	34%	66%
TOTAL GLOBAL RESPONDENTS = 47,777		
Average 'Yes' = 11%		

For more information on this study or to request a demonstration of RIWI's data collection or prediction research around the world, please contact: inquiry@riwi.com.