

Wisconsin Institute for Law and Liberty: For opioid abuse in Wisconsin, family structure matters

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Family structure, not poverty, is biggest indicator of opioid abuse

July 17, 2018 - Milwaukee, WI — It's been documented in great detail just how the opioid crisis has torn families apart and ravaged communities in Wisconsin. But to help paint a clearer picture of why this is happening, a new WILL study analyzes the relationship between family structure and opioid hospitalizations - in addition to poverty and children in foster care - in Wisconsin counties over a 7 year period. Among the findings is that counties with higher rates of single-parent families are more likely to have higher rates of opioid hospitalizations and children in foster care. In other words, family matters.

We are facing a massive opioid crisis and according to WILL's previous research, the epidemic is adding more children to the foster-care system. Between 2000 and 2016 the number of opioid overdose deaths increased an alarming seven fold and between 2012 and 2016 and the number of children in Wisconsin's foster-care system increased at twice the national rate.

A new WILL study, authored by Research Fellow Natalie Goodnow and Research Director Dr. Will Flanders, explores the relationship between opioid use and foster care at a deeper level by examining the role of family structure.

"My hope is that by identifying what factors make people more at risk for opioid

abuse we will be able to focus our policy efforts and really make a difference in the lives of families and children,” said Natalie Goodnow. “We’ve known for a while that family structure is important for a child’s wellbeing, but it is significant to find such a clear relationship between opioid use and family structure.”

Takeaways of the study include:

The primary indicator of opioid abuse in Wisconsin is family structure – not poverty. Counties with higher rates of single-parent families are more likely to have higher rates of opioid hospitalizations.

Poverty was found to have no statistically significant relationship with the rate of opioid abuse when we control for family structure. Counties with low income but traditional family structures can have lower rates of opioid abuse.

Family structure also matters for the number of children in foster care. Counties with higher rates of single mothers are more likely to have higher rates of children in foster care.

As we see throughout the country, counties in Wisconsin with higher rates of married families have lower rates of poverty.

WILL’s study is being released at a crucial time as Wisconsin and other states prepare to implement the Family First Prevention Services Act, which Congress passed in early 2018 to improve prevention efforts and slow the number of children entering foster care.