Community Assessment of Montgomery County

Anisha Khadka Karki

DeWitt School of Nursing, Stephen F. Austin State University

NURS 5310: Health Promotion

Dr. Erin Bailey

October 8, 2023

Community Assessment of Montgomery County

Montgomery County, located north of Houston in Harris County, is a suburban community with highly rated schools and magnet hospitals. This paper embarks on a comprehensive community assessment of Montgomery County in Texas, explores the drug-related deaths in Montgomery County, and examines the demographics most affected by this crisis. Further, in this paper, I will apply the theories of health promotion to devise potential solutions and discuss the policy changes that could improve addressing the drug-related deaths in Montgomery County.

Community Assessment

Based on the United States Census Bureau of 2022 data, Montgomery County has a population of 607,391. The largest ethnic groups in Montgomery County are White alone, not Hispanic and Hispanic races, accounting for 60.7% and 27.1% of the population, respectively; smaller groups of African Americans, Asians, and American Indians are also present (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). Montgomery County, Texas, ranked 22nd out of 254 Texas counties in the 2022 Healthiest Communities rankings by U.S. News & World Report. It performed well across various areas, including education, economy, housing, infrastructure, public safety, and community vitality (U.S. News & World Report, n.d.). Residents of Montgomery County tend to enjoy longer and healthier lives compared to most other Texas counties. They also experience less income inequality and have better access to healthcare. Overall, the U.S. News & World Report's Healthiest Communities rankings indicate that Montgomery County, Texas, is a healthy place to live.

Problem Identification

Upon examining the Vital Statistics of Texas from 2012 to 2021 and comparing it to the 2021 Vital Statistics from my county, Montgomery County, I observed that the data on infectious

diseases remained consistent with the overall Texas data. However, according to the dataset available in Texas Health Data, there has been a disturbing surge in drug-related deaths in Montgomery County, especially deaths related to fentanyl and other drugs (Texas Department of State Health Services [DSHS] n.d.).

Comparing fentanyl-related deaths to all drug-related deaths (including opioids, cocaine, heroin, fentanyl, etc.), here is the data on drug-related deaths in Montgomery County (DSHS, n.d.).

Year	Fentanyl	Any Drug
2022	61	123
2021	63	125
2020	25	112
2017	12	96
2015	0	61
2011	0	42

While looking at only fentanyl-related deaths, no recorded deaths occurred between 2011 and 2015. However, cases involving fentanyl skyrocketed from 2017 onwards. In 2017, there were 12 cases. By 2021, the number more than doubled to 63, with a slight decrease to 61 cases in 2022 (DSHS, n.d.).

While looking at drug-related deaths, including opioids, cocaine, heroin, fentanyl, etc., deaths related to overall drugs have steadily increased. From 42 cases in 2011, the number rose to 61 in 2015 and 96 in 2017. The upward trend continued with 112 cases in 2020 and peaked at 125 cases in 2021 (DSHS, 2021). Similarly to Fentanyl cases, there was a slight decrease to 123 cases in 2022. This data indicates a concerning issue with drug-related deaths in Montgomery County, particularly with Fentanyl (DSHS, n.d.).

Social Disparities

Montgomery County is trending higher drug-related deaths than the Texas average. This paper aims to investigate drug-related deaths in Montgomery County, Texas, and analyze the demographics most affected by this crisis. I will examine how education, gender, marital status, and age group influence the likelihood of drug-related deaths. The goal is to reveal the underlying patterns and shed light on the issue of drug-related deaths in Montgomery County.

Education

In Montgomery County, drug-related deaths rose by approximately 388% among those with a high school education or less from 2011 to 2022. In contrast, the increase was around 81% among those with undergraduate education fatalities (DSHS, n.d.).

Gender

From 2011 to 2022 in Montgomery County, drug-related deaths among men surged by 312.5%, while female deaths saw a modest increase of 78.95%, highlighting a concerning rise in male fatalities (DSHS, n.d.).

Marital Status

In Montgomery County, single people were five times more likely to die from drugs than married people in 2022, a significant increase from 2015, when the ratio was less than two (DSHS, n.d.).

Age-Group

Drug-related deaths in Montgomery County disproportionately affect young people; they are consistently highest among individuals aged 18-44. This age group also has the highest rate of drug-related deaths in Texas statewide than other age groups from 2016 to 2021 (DSHS, n.d.).

Health Promotion Theory

Drug-related deaths disproportionately affect young, less educated, and single men in Montgomery County, as shown in the problem identification section. The Health Belief Model (HBM) model can be applied to combat drug-related deaths through public health campaigns that raise awareness about the harmful effects of drug overdose.

The Health Belief Model can be used in many ways, using public health campaigns to address the issue. By emphasizing the perceived susceptibility and perceived severity, public health campaigns can emphasize the harmful effects of drug use, such as addiction, resulting in death or serious injuries. Highlighting the perceived benefits, public health campaigns can educate individuals about the benefits of quitting drugs or joining drug rehabilitation centers. Addressing perceived barriers, public health campaigns can provide education and resources to help individuals support drug overdose victims. As cues to action, public health campaigns can educate individuals on the healthy benefits of a drug-free life and provide resources to find support centers. Lastly, by enhancing self-efficacy, public health campaigns can help boost an individual's self-efficacy by instilling confidence to quit drugs and live happy everyday lives. Therefore, public health campaigns can target young, less educated, and single men in Montgomery County, bringing awareness to drug overuse and addiction issues.

Health Promotion Policy

Drug-related deaths are rising in Montgomery County, Texas, and throughout the United States. Nevertheless, some states have successfully battled drug overuse issues. For instance, Nebraska has implemented the "Fighting Against Meth Everyday" (FAME) program, which focuses on community engagement and presentations through storytelling, comedy, and informational sessions to educate teens and adults about the risks of meth consumption. The program aims to educate communities about the dangers of meth while also providing drug-

safety programs. Nebraska also has several treatment centers that offer family and group counseling (The Recovery Village, 2023).

To address drug overuse issues, Montgomery County could consider implementing a program similar to the one Nebraska has put in place, launching public health campaigns to educate vulnerable individuals and communities about the dangers of drug use, as well as promoting the benefits of drug quitting programs and lifestyle changes that can improve their overall well-being. Making support and rehabilitation centers more accessible and boosting morale and confidence through the Health Belief Model (HBM) framework discussed above could also prove effective in helping individuals overcome addiction. Additionally, closely monitoring patients for prescription abuse to prevent drug-related fatalities caused by accidental and intentional overdose and making Naloxone, which can reverse opioid overdoses, more easily accessible could also be necessary.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Montgomery County, Texas, is grappling with a drug-related death crisis that disproportionately affects young, less educated, and single men. Health promotion theories, such as the Health Belief Model (HBM), could provide a framework for addressing this issue by implementing public health campaigns to educate about the dangers of drug use and the benefits of quitting. Policy changes, such as regulating the prescription of large narcotics and making Naloxone more accessible, as well as adopting a comprehensive approach similar to that of Nebraska, could also be instrumental in potentially reducing drug-related deaths and improving the overall well-being of its community.

References

Kahaleh, A. A., & Truong, H. (2021). Applications of the Health Belief Model and continuing professional development for emergency preparedness and response. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education, 85*(1), Article 83761. https://doi.org/10.5688/ajpe8376

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2018). *SAMHSA opioid overdose prevention kit*. HHS Publication No. (SMA) 18-4742. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/sma18-4742.pdf

Texas Department of State Health Services. (n.d.). *Texas health data - Drug-related deaths*. Texas Department of Health and Human Services. https://healthdata.dshs.texas.gov/dashboard/drugs-and-alcohol/drug-related-deaths

The Recovery Village. (2023, May 07). *States with the Fewest Drug Overdose Deaths*. https://www.therecoveryvillage.com/drug-addiction/states-fewest-drug-overdose-deaths/

U.S. Census Bureau. (2022). *QuickFacts: Montgomery County, Texas*. https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/montgomerycountytexas

U.S. News & World Report. (2022, June 23). *Healthiest Communities in Texas*. https://www.usnews.com/news/healthiest-communities/slideshows/healthiest-communities-in-texas

U.S. News & World Report. (2022, June 23). *How Healthy Is Montgomery County, Texas? | US News Healthiest Communities*. https://www.usnews.com/news/healthiest-communities/texas/montgomery-county