



South Carolina Institute of
Medicine & Public Health

Focus on Health: The Ripple Effect Report

The following is a summary of the report: Brundage, Suzanne C. & Carol Levine. 2019. "The Ripple Effect: The Impact of the Opioid Epidemic on Children and Families: Recommendations for an Action Agenda Based on a Multidisciplinary Meeting."

https://uhfnyc.org/media/filer_public/17/2c/172ca968-43aa-45f9-a290-50018e85a9d8/uhf-opioids-20190315.pdf. Accessed March 25, 2019.

Society is paying little attention to the "ripple effects" of the opioid epidemic, especially for the children. Substance use disorder (SUD), including opioid use disorder, has had a direct impact on adults in their prime parenting years, ages 25-44 . Additionally, nearly 50% of all overdose deaths occur for adults in this population.

The goal of this expert group meeting was to discuss how to help children thrive while stabilizing and supporting their families. The report outlines how the ripple effect impacts several vulnerable populations.

- Treatment facilities that address the special integrated health and social service needs of mothers are especially rare. Pregnant women who use substances may avoid getting treatment for their addiction out of fear of losing custody of the baby and other children as well. Further implications may include the baby being affected by neonatal abstinence syndrome.
- Nearly 4 million children under age 5 lived in a household with at least one parent with SUD between 2009 and 2014. All children of parents who suffer from SUD are at greater risk of experiencing traumatic events (e.g., witnessing an overdose, witnessing an arrest) which affect a child's psychosocial health negatively and may lower academic achievement. Children and teenagers are also at risk of having to take on caregiving responsibilities for adults with SUD or younger siblings. They rarely receive assistance such as respite care services.
- The ratio of children who receive informal kinship care compared to entering the foster care system is 19:1. Informal kinship caregivers (e.g., grandparents, aunts, uncles) are raising children in place of parents without access to financial support, counseling or other benefits that formal foster care caregivers would receive. Informal caregivers may not seek help due to grief, guilt and fear of stigma.

Four broad areas of actionable recommendations for stakeholders focused on stopping the substance abuse ripple effect.

1. Reduce stigma and misunderstanding of opioid use and treatment
2. Make investing in a response to ripple effects a priority
3. Ensure that government and private agencies work as a team
 - “Government officials should reach out to community leaders and representatives of the affected populations...” (p. 20)
 - States and local communications should access federal funding sources for family caregiving programs
4. Identify children at risk as early as possible
 - Empower first responders to identify at-risk children
 - Trauma-sensitive training and services in schools

IMPH continues to monitor national SUD trends and recommendations to inform our work. As a convener of important health issues impacting residents around our state, IMPH will continue to engage and convene stakeholders to identify the most significant challenges in the treatment and prevention of substance abuse. IMPH seeks to provide actionable, evidence-based and cost-effective strategies to provide better care and access to treatment and prevention services for residents of South Carolina.