

Epidemiology of Drug Abuse

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Edited by

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Preface

The field of drug abuse epidemiology is emergent and its development has been influenced greatly by the stigma attached to the phenomenon of study. Affected populations are often “hidden” and studies of these groups warrant non-traditional epidemiological approaches. For this reason, several unique methods have been developed and tested for sampling, for estimating prevalence, and for studies of general and special populations. A review of available books that include drug abuse epidemiology has revealed a limited perspective that focuses on findings of special studies or on some of the sequelae of drug abuse such as HIV and AIDS. The intent for this book is to provide educators, researchers and the lay public a general overview of the current knowledge within the field of drug abuse epidemiology. It can serve as a supplement to other course offerings in epidemiology, public health, health education or drug abuse. But it also can serve as a general reference for those with an interest in learning more about the field of drug abuse epidemiology.

The structure of the book does not follow the usual format of other epidemiologic texts. The reasoning underlying the structure is the dual intent of the book both as a course text as well as a reference. It covers four major aspects of the field. The first relates to the natural history of drug abusing behaviors and includes a description of the phenomenon, current thinking about origins and pathways as well as etiology of drug use and abuse, the natural history of drug abuse, and the health, social and psychological consequences of drug use and abuse. The second section presents current methodologies used to assess drug abuse within various populations including the use of archival data, sampling methodologies, surveys of general and special populations, indirect methods to estimate prevalence, qualitative techniques applied to drug abuse epidemiology, and the ethics for epidemiologic research. The third section includes descriptive papers summarizing specific studies from the United States and elsewhere that demonstrate the application of these methodologies. The last section gives an overview of the implications of the epidemiology of drug abuse for the prevention and treatment interventions.

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