Andrew Yaspan

CAPP 30239 1 Data Visualization for Policy Analysis

Project Proposal

Analysis of the Environment, and Access to Mental Health and Substance Use Treatment for Strategic Subjects Watchlist Participants with Narcotics Arrests

The use of illicit substances in the United States has a long and complicated history in the United States.  At this point in time, we are at an important juncture as we face an emerging health crisis due to the over-prescribing by physicians, as well as illegal manufacturing and tracking of opioids and synthetic opioids leading to broken homes, poverty, and death.

Over the past century, the United States faced several similar such crises where many, but not exclusively, lower income areas of the country saw sharp rises in the use of crack-cocaine and methamphetamines (among other illicit substances).  United States policymakers, at the federal, state, and local levels, have predominantly adopted and enacted a “tough” approach to address the frightening trends.  “Tough” approaches generally include harsh sentences for drug sales, possession and even use of such drugs. This is accompanied by heavy police occupation and surveillance some of the hardest hit communities, largely minority and low income, with a host of other social issues.  These policies have contributed significantly to a massive increase of the jail and prison populations across the country bringing about a host of other problems.

Even while the law-enforcement approach to drug proliferation and use has been more prevalent, there have been health workers committed to treatment and trying to address “root causes” of drug use and personal or familial distress for decades.  And now there is a rising tide of criminal justice advocates, health workers, and government representatives who want to address the use of illicit drugs in a more compassionate and evidence-based way.  The front line of this different approach is comprised of medical, mental health, substance use, and even law enforcement workers.

Although the Chicago Police Department’s Strategic Subjects List has been a controversial source of information generally used for understanding how to target those likely to be involved in a violent incident, there is a field displaying the number of time a particular person on the list has been arrested for possession or sale of narcotics.  I think it could be very interesting to focus on these people learn about the area in which they were arrested based on ACS community survey, community health rankings, mental health and substance use facilities listings, police complaint, crime reporting data, and possibly even 311 data.  Perhaps analysis and visualizations could help uncover and highlight trends and possible associations between how and why particular people appear on the list based their access to mental health and substance use services and or due to the environmental circumstances of the areas in which they were arrested.

Note: I realize this can be an ambitious and logistically difficult project, so I also have an idea a more straightforward project pertaining to visualizing health insurance coverage and the Community Health Rankings at a FIPS geographical level. I am interested to read your feedback!