US Synthetic Drug Crisis

There is a troubling statistic, showing an increase in accidental death from synthetic drugs sold in the illicit market. Synthetic drugs like Fentanyl and Methamphetamine are responsible for most of these deaths, approaching 100,000 in 2002

Project Overview: There is currently an opioid crisis in the US, where 2.5 million people struggle with opioid use disorder. Approximately 100,000 died from accidental overdose in 2022, where synthetic narcotics were the leading cause of death.

There are three driving factors that are exacerbating this problem:

1. Drug cartel business model – According to the DEA, Mexican drug cartels have changed their business model. They are leaning away from manufacturing plant-based narcotics, such as cocaine and heroin to synthetic narcotics, such as Fentanyl and Methamphetamine. Synthetic narcotics are easier to manufacture, distribute and come with more profit. However, the drugs are increasingly more potent, making them much more dangerous and even deadly compared to the plant-based alternatives. The synthetic drugs are prevalent in the illicit drug supply unbeknownst to consumers and are masked as other drugs, creating huge risks for overdose. 70% of pills in the illicit drug supply contain some level of Fentanyl, testing from .2g to 9g in any given sample.
2. Lack of Treatment Protocols – Medication treatment for OUD is effective, helping prevent relapse 50% - 90% of the time. So why are 50% of users not responding to medication treatment? The reason is that medication is mostly prescribed arbitrarily, without using evidence based scientific research.
3. Treatment suffers from stigma - Since treatment relies on medication in the form of synthetic opioids. There is still a big problem with drug treatment stigma in the US, where Researchers found that in 2021, an estimated 2.5 million people aged 18 and older had opioid use disorder in the past year, yet only 36% of them received any substance use treatment, and only 22% received medications for opioid use disorder.