

Discussion: Hard Drugs on the Job: The Workplace Consequences of the Fentanyl Epidemic

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Outline

- 1 Opening
- 2 Main Contributions
- 3 Key Questions & Measurement Risks
- 4 Strengthening

Opening & Why This Paper Matters

- **One-sentence take:** Rising Fentanyl contamination in local drug markets leads increasing accidents in blue-collar workplace.
- **Why it matters:** The topic builds a novel bridge between public health and labor economics, showing how the opioid crisis spills into the workplace.

Core Contributions

- **New analytical angle (C1):** Moves beyond mortality or labor supply — focuses on **workplace safety** as the key outcome channel.
- **Supply-side perspective (C2):** Emphasizes market contamination (lacing) and involuntary exposure rather than individual demand for drugs.

Identification Strategy (C3)

Shift-share-adjacent IV:

$$IV_{ct} = \underbrace{\text{Pre-period Heroin Share}_c}_{\text{historical intensity}} \times \underbrace{\Delta \text{Fentanyl Exposure}_{s,t}}_{\text{state-level growth}}$$

Core Contributions

- **Significant result (C4):**

- $+1\sigma$ exposure $\Rightarrow \approx 36\%$ yearly increase in accidents per 1,000 workers.

- **Policy angle (C5):**

- **Provide Fentanyl test kits** \Rightarrow prevent contaminated supply;
- **Market deterrence:** contamination proof induces reputation loss for dealers.

Q1. Are Fatal Overdoses Necessarily ‘Involuntary’?

- Interpretation: many Fentanyl deaths as **involuntary exposure** due to lacing.
- **Question:** What fraction is contamination use vs intentional Fentanyl use (or accidental exposure during handling or processing)?
- **Helpful evidence to cite:**
 - Data or Surveys.

Q2. Exposure Proxy = Share of Fentanyl Fatal ODs

- Proxy: $\text{Exposure}_{ct} = \frac{\text{Fentanyl OD}_{ct}}{\text{All OD}_{ct}}$ (county-year).
- Risks:
 - **Underestimation (attenuation):** misses non-fatal exposure / unreported ODs.

Q3. Blue-Collar Focus & White-Collar

- The paper **excludes white-collar sectors** (e.g., finance, administration) on the ground that **Fentanyl-related deaths and workplace injuries are nearly absent**.
- While making sense, this may **need empirical support or citation**:
 - Show descriptive rates of overdose deaths or injury by occupation group; or
 - Cite national survey evidence confirming negligible opioid mortality in white-collar jobs.

Heterogeneity to Illuminate the Mechanism

- Where is the link strongest?
 - **Industry type** (machinery intensity: construction vs manufacturing vs services);
 - **Shift/night work** (fatigue; supervision);
 - **Worker composition** (age/gender/tenure);
 - **Safety infrastructure** (unionization; training intensity).
- **Value-add:** Reveals mechanism & policy targets; guides where test kits / safety protocols yield largest returns.

Policy Counterfactual: Make the Kit Argument Concrete

- The policy recommendation is compelling: Fentanyl test kits as harm-reduction tools.

To make it more persuasive, the author could add a simple quantitative counterfactual:
If test-kit adoption reduces exposure by 0.1 s.d., how many workplace accidents could be prevented annually?

- Translating the policy into potential accident reduction enhances both clarity and credibility.

Thank you!