

## **Re-thinking 'outbreak' in 'long-view': The case of opioid overdose**

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### **Background:**

Early warning efforts to detect and anticipate outbreaks promise preparedness and rapid response. In this paper, we offer a sociological analysis of 'outbreak'. Focusing on the case of opioid overdose, we look at drug outbreaks in 'long-view'. This shows how social conditions create the possibilities for outbreak and how outbreaks evolve as 'slow emergencies'. We draw attention to some of the harms of rapid and reflex responses which the logic of 'outbreak' invites.

### **Methods:**

Extending recent work (IJDP 2023: 104065), we engage critically with science narratives on early warning and outbreak, and on epidemics of opioid overdose in North America.

### **Analysis:**

We trace 'outbreak' as a rupturing event which enables rapid reflex responses of precautionary control, based largely on short-term and proximal epidemiological indicators. We look specifically at the promise and pitfalls of prediction as a form of early warning in relation to opioid overdose. Engaging with sociological and epidemiological work on opioid overdose, we show how the short-termism and rapid reflex response of outbreak fails to see the slow violent pasts of epidemics. Seeing outbreaks in 'long-view' and as 'slow emergencies' shows the endemicity of 'epidemics', situating opioid overdose in long-term processes of structural violence intersecting with a half-century 'war on drugs'.

### **Conclusion:**

Outbreaks evolve in relation to their slow violent pasts. To ignore this perpetuates harm. We need to move beyond proximal and short-term predictions tailored to rapid reflex responses. We need to think beyond 'outbreak' and beyond 'epidemic'. We need to think in 'long-view'.

### **Declarations of interest:**

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