



Written by [Ralph R. Reiland](#) on August 21, 2014

Drugs: Quick Fixes and Lasting Grief

By the dawn's early light, as they say, there's the too frequent news in the morning about those who didn't make it through the perilous night.

Drug overdose deaths, for example, in Allegheny County (a county containing Pittsburgh and surrounding suburbs and rural areas in southwestern Pennsylvania) are approaching 300 a year. Pretty soon, one-a-day, like the vitamins.



In addition, the morning news about the previous night's murders, the pointless killings in the predictable parts of the city and disproportionately linked to drugs, brings few surprises.

In "True Crime: Ferguson vs. Pittsburgh," August 18, Counterpoint, Law and order, Bill Steigerwald, former *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review* columnist, wrote that Ferguson, Mo., "roughly 65 percent black" and in the daily news with unremitting protests and looting following the shooting death of a black teenager by a white police officer, has a lower murder rate, rape rate, and robbery rate than Pittsburgh, "about 25 percent black."

Pittsburgh's "crime stats — particularly the 41 homicides in 2012 — were like most big cities heavily skewed by the black-male-on-black-male drug-gang wars on its streets," writes Steigerwald.

"In 2012, the last year city-data.com offers, Pittsburgh's murder rate per 100,000 was higher than Ferguson's," Steigerwald reports. "So was its rape rate and robbery rate."

On the issue of drug deaths, from legal drugs, Americans are increasingly being killed by pain pills.

As reported in "America's Scary Pain Pill Habit" in the September issue of *Consumer Reports*: "It starts with drugs such as OxyContin, Percocet, and Vicodin — prescription narcotics that can make days bearable if you are recovering from surgery or suffering from cancer. But they can be as addictive as heroin and are rife with deadly side effects."

Each day, states *Consumer Reports*, "46 people in the U.S. die from legal pain pills." That's 16,790 people a year — 14,462 more deaths in one year from pain pills than the 2,328 American service members who have died as part of the Afghan war and related operations in the 13 years since the U.S.-led invasion in 2001, based on the latest count from the Department of Defense on August 13.

Paralleling the increase in American deaths from pain pills, up more than 400 percent since 1999, prescriptions for OxyContin, Percocet, Vicodin, and other opioids in the U.S. have jumped 300 percent in the past decade, with Vicodin and other drugs containing the narcotic hydrocodone now the most commonly prescribed medications in America.

For each death due to these drugs, over 30 people — more than a half million a year — are admitted to America's emergency rooms due to opioid complications.

In other news about drug deaths, from legal drugs, Colorado legalized recreational marijuana in January, turning pot brownies and hemp gumdrops into regular bakery and candy store items.

It was supposed to be wholly fun — legs-in-the-air laughter with no cops or jail.



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But then Levy Thamba, 19, a student visiting Colorado from a college in Wyoming, a state where psychotropic cream puffs aren't yet legal, died after falling from his fourth floor balcony at a Hilton Hotel in Denver.

The coroner's report said Thamba's death was caused by "multiple injuries due to a fall," with "marijuana intoxication" listed as the major contributing factor.

Thamba consumed "marijuana cookies," said the autopsy report, and "soon thereafter exhibited hostile behavior (pulling items off the walls) and spoke erratically" as the "decedent's friends attempted to calm him down and were temporarily successful."

Successful "temporarily," but then "the decedent reportedly jumped out of bed, went outside the hotel room and jumped over the balcony railing" — legs-in-the-air, but no laughter.

Ralph R. Reiland is an associate professor of economics and the B. Kenneth Simon professor of free enterprise at Robert Morris University in Pittsburgh.



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