• Paper / Proposal Title:
Physical and Social Decay: Examining the Effect of Environmental Factors on Heroin Use in Rural and Urban Areas

• Format:
Written paper / verbal presentation / screening / other

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• Abstract (300 words):
Rural and urban populations are often treated as polar opposites speaking culturally, compositionally, and ecologically. However, these two groups are highly susceptible to substance abuse, opioids and heroin in particular. The author explains the common linkages between these two groups that led to the initial urban heroin explosion in the 1970’s and the current rural heroin epidemic. Heroin use in the 1970's can be traced back to the combined effects of deindustrialization and a withdrawal of funding from urban areas. The physical decay of urban areas provided increased opportunities to use heroin while the lack of jobs provided motivations for selling drugs. This started a cycle of further disinvestment and “otherization” of urban minorities that intensified the effects of physical and social decay. A similar process is currently underway in small, rural communities today, particularly in the Rust Belt and New England. The rural environment has always been ideal for criminal enterprise but until recently rural locations were associated with idyllic family-values, not drug epidemics. Small rural towns are especially vulnerable to
global economic shifts. The mechanization of agriculture and the global economy have taken a toll on rural communities, leading to increases in poverty for an already disadvantaged group. As with urban locations, poverty and joblessness create population flights and physical decay. These problems have been compounded by cuts to key social services and the overall challenge of open design in rural areas. The author identifies a need for reinvestment socially and physically in rural areas to combat the current opioid crisis. The common causes of both rural and urban drug use can form a bond that not only increases a willingness to aid communities in need, but can spark a change in how we view the relationship between the built environment, the social landscape, and crime.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Paul D.C. Bones is an assistant professor of sociology at Texas Woman’s University in Denton, TX. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Oklahoma in 2016. Paul is interested in the ecology of crime, criminal victimization of the physically disabled, hate crimes, and deviance. His published works have appeared in *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* and *Deviant Behavior*. 