

# Expanded Methadone Take-Home Use Lowered Methadone-Related Deaths in Black and Hispanic Men



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## Introduction

- In March 2020, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) permitted states to relax restrictions on take-home methadone doses for treatment adherent patients to minimize COVID-19 exposures.
- In this study, we assess whether the methadone take-home policy change was associated with drug overdose deaths among different racial, ethnic, and gender groups.

## Methods

### Data

- US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Wide-Ranging Online Data for Epidemiologic Research (CDC WONDER) 2018–2021 final and 2022 (January–June) provisional mortality data.
- We extracted monthly drug overdose deaths that involved methadone for six demographic groups: Non-Hispanic Black men and women, Hispanic Black men and women, and non-Hispanic White men and women

### Design

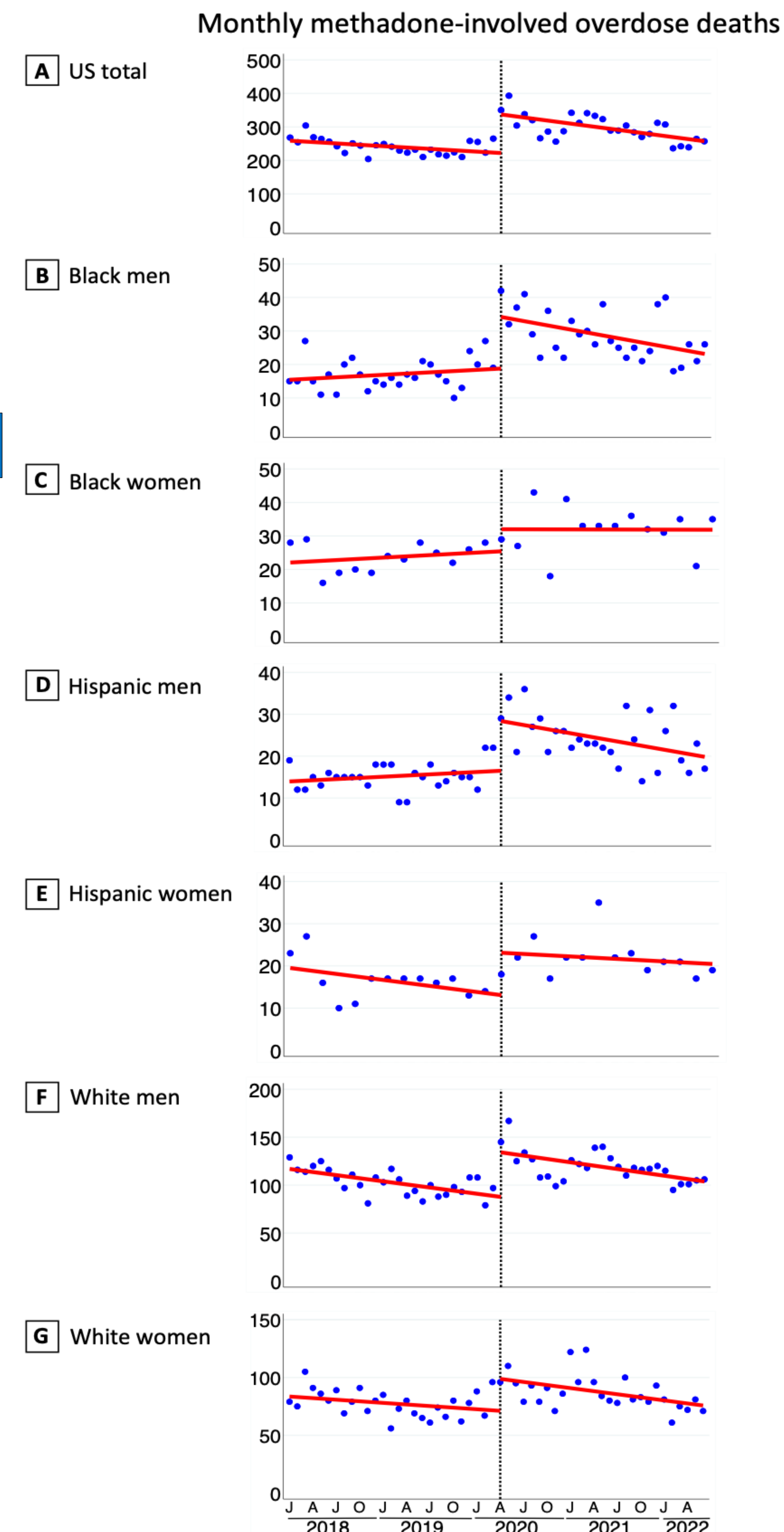
- Interrupted time series analysis (January 2018 to June 2022)

### Hypotheses

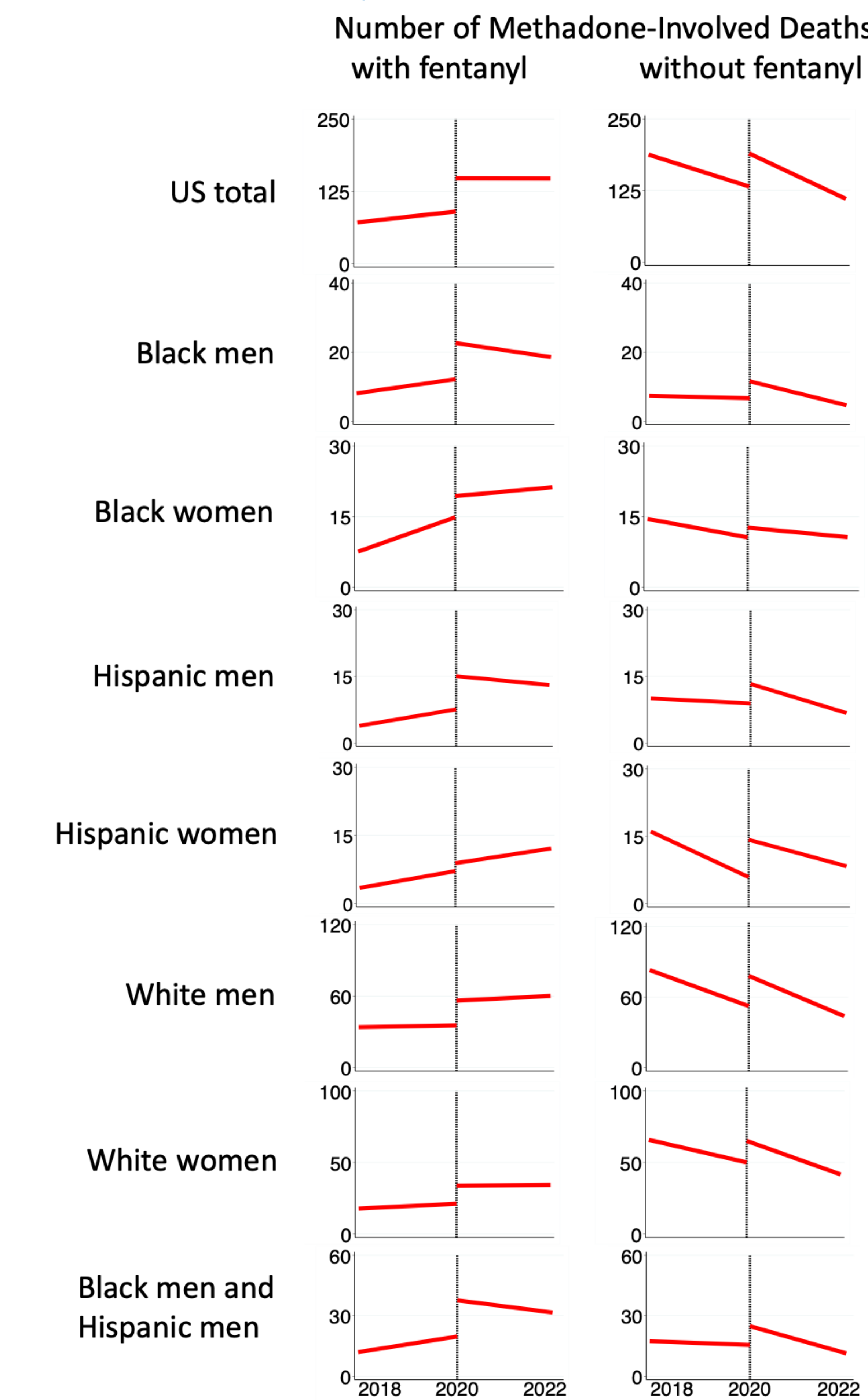
- Based on the 2022 ITSA study by Jones et al., we hypothesized that the policy change would not be associated with changes in slope (null hypothesis).

## Results

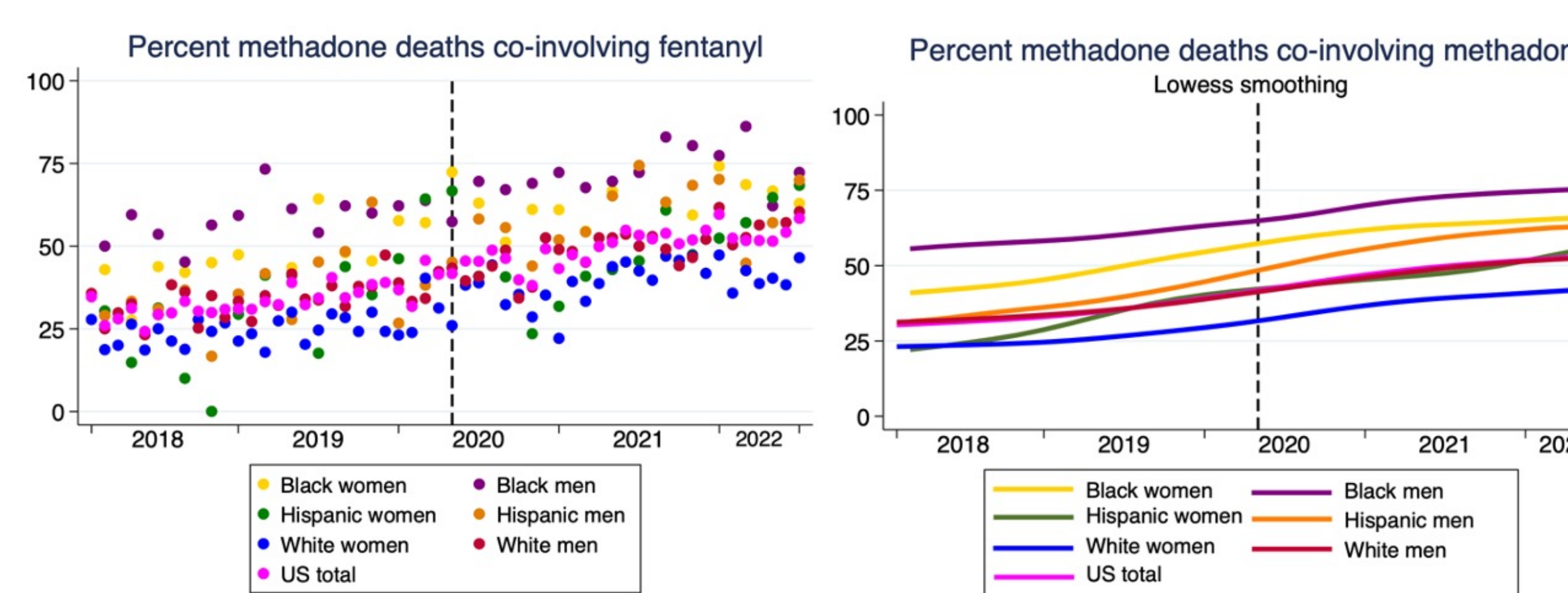
### Main Results: Monthly methadone-involved overdose deaths pre- and post-policy change



### Stratification by co-involvement of fentanyl



### Percent of methadone-involved deaths that also involved fentanyl



## Conclusion

- In March 2020, all six demographic groups experienced a sharp increase in the number of methadone-involved deaths, very likely due to the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- For Black and Hispanic men, methadone-involved overdose deaths sharply decreased after the policy change but had no effect on Black, Hispanic, or White women, or White men.
- The decline in methadone-involved drug deaths post-intervention does not appear to have been a function of fewer people on methadone
- Fentanyl raised the number of both pre- and post-policy change methadone-involved deaths across all groups, but does not appreciably strengthen, mitigate, or make conditional the associations (or lack of associations) between the policy change and methadone-involved overdose deaths
- Limitations: lack of external comparison (control variable or secular trend variable), COVID-19 related concurrent trends, inability to distinguish methadone-involved overdoses due to methadone received through OTPS v. pharmacy dispensed prescriptions for pain

**Easing of the restrictions on take-home methadone doses for treatment adherent patients to minimize COVID-19 exposures may have reduced overdose deaths among Black and Hispanic men.**

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- Conflict of Interest Disclosures**
- None reported

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