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Of the estimated 2.1 million Americans currently in the grip of opioid addiction, many are women of childbearing age. The young-adult population has been hardest hit, proportionately, with nearly 400,000 adults ages 18 to 25 suffering from addiction to prescription painkillers (the vast majority) or heroin. Strict adherence to a birth-control regimen — or any regimen at all — is difficult for someone whose body and mind have been hijacked by drug dependence, which may help to explain why, according to the largest recent study, nearly 90 percent of pregnancies among women who abuse opioid medications are unintended.

The number of pregnant women using opioids grew significantly between 2004 and 2013, according to recent research published in JAMA Pediatrics, with the increase disproportionately high — more than 600 percent — in rural areas.

Another decade-long study found a fivefold increase in the number of newborns who experienced the opioid-withdrawal condition known as neonatal abstinence syndrome, or NAS: to eight per 1,000 hospital births from one and a half. Experts estimate that a baby with NAS is born in America every 15 minutes.

