Prescription Opioid and Benzodiazepine Misuse Linked with Suicidal Thoughts

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Misuse of prescription opioids or benzodiazepines (such as Xanax) was associated with suicidal ideation in a study of US older adults.

In the International Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry study of 17,608 adults aged 50 years and older, past-year use (without misuse) of prescription opioids or benzodiazepines was not associated with past-year suicidal ideation. Misuse of prescription opioids or benzodiazepines (such as Xanax) was associated with suicidal ideation in a study of US older adults.

In the International Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry study of 17,608 adults aged 50 years and older, past-year use (without misuse) of prescription opioids or benzodiazepines was not associated with past-year suicidal ideation. In contrast, past-year opioid misuse was associated with an 84 percent increased odds of past-year suicidal ideation, and past-year benzodiazepine misuse was associated with a twofold increased odds, after controlling for various factors related to suicide in other work. While 2.2 percent of US older adults not engaged in either opioid or benzodiazepine misuse reported past-year suicidal ideation, the rate was 25.4 percent in those who misused both medication classes.

“Suicide is a major public health concern in older adults. Our study found a strong link between prescription opioid or benzodiazepine misuse and suicidal ideation, which is particularly concerning because these medications are commonly prescribed to older adults,” said lead author Dr. Ty Schepis, of Texas State University. “Prescribers and other health professionals are encouraged to screen for prescription opioid or benzodiazepine misuse in older adults who are prescribed these medications to prevent suicide.”

Additional Information

Link to Study: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/gps.4999

About Journal

The rapidly increasing world population of aged people has led to a growing need to focus attention on the problems of mental disorder in late life. The aim of the Journal is to communicate the results of original research in the causes, treatment and care of all forms of mental disorder which affect the elderly. The Journal is of interest to psychiatrists, psychologists, social scientists, nurses and others engaged in therapeutic professions, together with general neurobiological researchers.

The Journal provides an international perspective on the important issue of geriatric psychiatry, and contributions are published from countries throughout the world. Topics covered include epidemiology of mental disorders in old age, clinical aetiological research, post-mortem pathological and neurochemical studies, treatment trials and evaluation of geriatric psychiatry services.

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