

Antipsychotic Use Among Adults with Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities:

Common and occurs frequently without psychiatric diagnosis

ODPRN

ONTARIO DRUG POLICY
RESEARCH NETWORK

Background

- Antipsychotics are a group of drugs that are used to treat psychiatric disorders.
- Evidence has also shown that antipsychotics can be associated with serious adverse effects with very limited evidence around the long-term effectiveness of these medications in the general population.
- There has been growing concern around the overuse of antipsychotic medications among adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), particularly because these individuals often have difficulties in providing informed consent to using medications and reporting of adverse effects due to impairments in communication, cognition and memory.

What were we investigating?

This study aimed to describe rates of antipsychotic use in a Canadian cohort of adults with IDD, and to explore the demographic and clinical profiles of these individuals, both with and without a documented psychiatric diagnosis.

Study Details

How was the study conducted?

- The Health Care Access Research and Developmental Disabilities Program (H-CARDD) in collaboration with the Ontario Drug Policy Research Network (ODPRN) conducted a population based cohort study among adults with IDD under the age of 65 as of April 2010 who were receiving provincial drugs benefits in Ontario. We followed these individuals forward for 6 years to determine if they received a prescription for an antipsychotic. We also identified a subgroup of adults with IDD living in group home settings.
- Psychiatric disorder was defined as any individual who had a major mental illness or other psychiatric diagnosis in the 2 years prior to the index date.
- Among those treated with an antipsychotic, we further examined demographic characteristics, past medication use, comorbidity, physician services, and health service utilization.

What did we find?

- Overall, among 51,881 adults with IDD eligible for our study, 39.2% (n=20,316) were prescribed an antipsychotic medication, which increased to 56.4% (n=4,073) among individuals residing in group homes.
- Annual prevalence estimates between 2010 and 2015 were similar, increasing slightly from 29.1% to 31.2% in the overall population and 48.6% to 51.3% in the group home residents.
- Just over two-thirds (71.1%; n=14,453) of antipsychotic users had a documented psychiatric disorder in the 2 years preceding the prescription date.
- Compared to those with a psychiatric diagnosis, antipsychotic users without a psychiatric diagnosis were less likely to have been prescribed antidepressants (53.3% vs 36.2%; respectively) or benzodiazepines (43.3% vs. 33.9%; respectively) in the year preceding the antipsychotic prescriptions more likely to have been prescribed lithium or an anti-epileptic drug (9.0% vs 13.6%; respectively).



Key Points

- Overall, nearly 40% of adults with IDD were dispensed an antipsychotic medication, rising to over half (56.4%) of adults living in group homes.
- Almost one-third (29%) of adults with IDD who were prescribed an antipsychotic did not have a recent psychiatric diagnosis, suggesting that these medications may be prescribed 'off label' to treat behavioral issues, a concern flagged in Canadian guidelines and other jurisdictions.
- Among adults with IDD who were prescribed an antipsychotic 1 in 5 had hypertension and 1 in 6 had diabetes. Questions remain about how well these medications are being monitored, particularly for those without a psychiatric diagnosis.

Recommendations

Policymakers

- Given the high rate of antipsychotic prescribing among adults with IDD in Ontario, policymakers should consider strategies and programs aimed at closely monitoring how these drugs are used.
- Policymakers should also consider strategies around the development of accessible resources and educational material about antipsychotics for patients to make informed decisions about their use and appropriate monitoring of side effects.

Clinicians

- Clinicians should carefully consider the use of these drugs in this population, and closely monitor patients if prescribed.
- It is also important for physicians to include other types of interventions as part of a patient's treatment plan before prescribing these medications.

Patients and Caregivers

- It is important to understand why you (or someone who you care for) are prescribed an antipsychotic medication and to tell the doctor about any side effects.
- If you (or someone you care for) are worried about the antipsychotic being taken, please talk to the person prescribing these medicines and ask for them to be reviewed.

For More Information

Lunsky Y et al. Antipsychotic use with and without comorbid psychiatric diagnosis among adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 2017.

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