

Benzodiazepine use and misuse among outpatients with alcohol use disorders

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Objective: Benzodiazepines (BZDs) are widely prescribed during addictology treatment, especially among people with alcohol use disorders (AUD). Unfortunately, evidence has emerged that BZD use in long-term therapy can cause negative effects: dependence, tolerance and withdrawal are well-known, but also others. Despite this public health concern, little is known about BZD misuse among people with AUD. The objective of this study was to estimate the prevalence of chronic BZD use, as prescribed and misuse, among adults with AUD, to characterize misuse, and to examine the characteristics associated with BZD misuse, especially anxiety level.

Method: A sample of outpatients treated for AUD at the addictology prevention center (CSAPA) of CHU Rouen, France from January to April 2021 (n=107) were identified. Measurements included past-year drug prescription, BZD use and misuse, substance use disorders, mental illness, demographic characteristics, and validated self-reported questionnaires: Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test, a French scale measuring BZD addiction ("Echelle Cognitive d'Attachement aux Benzodiazepines", ECAB), and the Hospital Anxiety and Depression scale.

Results: Our sample was 74.8% men; the mean age was 48.32 ± 10.98 years. 89.7% reported a history of alcohol dependence in the past year and 49.5% reported a current prolonged BZD prescription. The prevalences of misuse and dependence on BZD were respectively 21.5% and 11.2%. All patients who misused BZD used concurrently another substance (especially tobacco, cannabis). 30.8% of patients were anxious, 51.8% of women and 25.0% of men ($p=0.01$). Among those a third (35%) were dependent on BZDs. The prevalence of major depression was 14%.

Conclusions: Prolonged BZD prescription among people with AUD was common in this study, adding to the evidence of a high risk of misuse and dependence in this population. Screening BZD misuse is essential in this population.

Je, soussigné Alexandre Baguet, certifie que le travail présenté n'a aucun lien avec l'industrie pharmaceutique, du tabac, de l'alcool, de la cigarette électronique et avec les compagnies de jeux.