

# Psychotropic drugs are no solution

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A mental disorder can be treated with drugs rapidly. However, the effects of such a therapy are controversial.

Many patients suffering from mental illness are treated with psychotropic drugs rather than psychotherapy. The results may be disastrous for them, claim psychologists from Bochum.

The currently available drugs cannot permanently alleviate the symptoms of mental disorders. This is the conclusion drawn by psychologists Prof Dr Jürgen Margraf and Prof Dr Silvia Schneider from Ruhr-Universität Bochum in a commentary published in the journal *EMBO Molecular Medicine*.

## **Effect of drugs are only short-lived**

Margraf and Schneider have compiled ample evidence suggesting that anti-depressant, anti-anxiety and anti-ADHD drugs have only a short-term effect; if patients discontinue treatment, their symptoms return. The authors suspect that medication for the treatment of schizophrenia would yield similar results.

Long-term application of the drugs might even have a negative effect, for example increased risk of a chronic illness or higher relapse quota.

## **Psychotherapies are not available for many patients**

According to the authors, psychotherapies such as cognitive behavioural therapy yield much better and more sustainable results in the long-term. "The main problem with psychotherapy is not its effectiveness or costs," says Silvia Schneider. "Rather, it is its insufficient availability." While [psychotropic drugs](#) can be applied straight away, patients often have to wait a long time for their first appointment with a therapist.

## **Biological concepts are insufficient**

In their article, the psychologists from Bochum also discuss the question why better therapies are still non-existent, despite 60 years of dedicated research. According to their opinion, one reason might be the ill-advised notion that mental disorders can be explained by biological concepts

alone.

"Today, it has become standard to tell the patients and the public that mental disorders are caused by an imbalance in the neurotransmitter system," elaborates Jürgen Margraf. However, it is not yet clear if that phenomenon is the cause or the effect of the diseases. Social factors should not be neglected. According to Schneider and Margraf, the rigid categories of "ill" and "healthy" are not helpful at all with regard to [mental disorders](#), which manifest in many different forms.

## **Fewer psychotropic drugs, more psychotherapy**

The authors postulate that it is necessary to link research into the biological, psychological and [social factors](#) and to broaden the narrow view of possible biological causes. Large pharmaceutical companies should reduce the marketing of psychotropic drugs. Moreover, [patients](#) should be given access to psychotherapeutic services more quickly.

**More information:** Jürgen Margraf et al. From neuroleptics to neuroscience and from Pavlov to psychotherapy: more than just the "emperor's new treatments" for mental illnesses?;, *EMBO Molecular Medicine* (2016). [DOI: 10.15252/emmm.201606650](https://doi.org/10.15252/emmm.201606650)

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