

Opioid misuse sending more older adults to emergency departments, study finds

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Emergency department (ED) visits by people age 65 and older who were identified with opioid misuse and dependence more than tripled between 2006 and 2014, according to new research published by researchers at Towson University. The study also discovered that opioid misuse was associated with an increased number of chronic conditions, greater injury risk, and higher rates of alcohol dependence and mental health diagnoses.

These outcomes are reported in the article "[Increasing Rates of Opioid Misuse Among Older Adults Visiting Emergency Departments](#)" appearing in the journal *Innovation in Aging* from The Gerontological Society of America.

"The steep increase in opioid misuse observed among older adult ED visits underscores the critical need for additional research to better understand the national scope and impact of opioid misuse on older [adults](#), as well as to better inform policy responses to meet the needs of this particular age group," the authors stated.

The lead author is Mary W. Carter, Ph.D., an associate professor in the Department of Health Sciences at Towson University. Co-authors include Bo Kyum Yang, Ph.D., RN; Marsha Davenport, MD, MPH; and Allison Kabel, Ph.D.

The findings come from multiple years of nationally representative, cross-sectional data from the Nationwide Emergency Department

Sample. This included roughly 953 participating hospitals with EDs, sampled across 34 states and the District of Columbia. Sample inclusion was restricted to ED visits by adults aged 65 years or older. ICD-9-CM (International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision, Clinical Modification) diagnoses and e-codes were screened to identify ED visits related to opioid poisoning and dependence. An analysis indicated that the population visit rates by older adults identified as having at least one diagnostic code indicating opioid misuse increased 217 percent from 2006 to 2014.

"Findings demonstrate the breadth and scope of [opioid misuse](#) and dependence among older adults visiting emergency departments—and indicate that targeted programs aimed at screening, intervention, and treatment specifically geared toward [older adults](#) are warranted," the authors wrote. "Results from this study also highlight the complexity of treating [opioid](#) dependence in this population, which reflect in part, high rates of coexisting mental health and other substance abuse disorders."

Provided by The Gerontological Society of America

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