Suicide deaths among youth following antidepressant boxed warnings

October 7 2020

Credit: CC0 Public Domain

A public health advisory issued by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in 2003, followed by drug label warnings, indicated that children and adolescents taking antidepressants were at increased risk of developing suicidal thoughts and behaviors. Research has shown that these warnings reduced the diagnosis and treatment of

depression among young people. Now, a new study suggests that the warnings may also have contributed to an increase in suicide deaths among youth.

The authors of the study, which is published in *Psychiatric Research and Clinical Practice*, estimate that there may have been 5,958 excess suicides nationally by 2010 among 43 million adolescents and 21 million young adults.

"Our findings suggest the boxed warnings may have contributed to the very thing the FDA was trying to prevent. More than two-thirds of depressed teens do not receive any depression care whatsoever, an issue now further exacerbated by COVID-19. We strongly recommend the FDA reexamine the use of these warnings," said principal investigator Stephen Soumerai, ScD, of Harvard Medical School and the Harvard Pilgrim Health Care Institute.

More information: *Psychiatric Research and Clinical Practice*, DOI: 10.1176/appi.prcp.20200012

Provided by Wiley