

University study highlights alarming rise in usage and costs of antidepressants

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The open-access study, published by the international DARU Journal of Pharmaceutical Sciences, is entitled 'Surging trends in prescriptions and costs of antidepressants in England amid COVID-19' and has investigated the trends in prescriptions and costs of various antidepressants in England during the COVID-19 pandemic. Credit: University of Huddersfield

Researchers at the University of Huddersfield have warned there is an urgent need for the country's mental health interventions to create strategies optimizing the use of antidepressants after conducting a study which has highlighted an alarming rise in relation to usage and costs.

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The researchers discovered that the total number of antidepressant prescriptions drugs dispensed during 2020 had increased by four million items since 2019 costing NHS England £139 million more than in the previous year.

This is attributed to the active pharmaceutical ingredient shortages witnessed during COVID-19 coupled with a significantly higher cost of generic drugs during the pandemic, with just one product alone—sertraline, an SSRI antidepressant drug—accounting for a majority of the additional costs.

While an increase in the number of prescriptions had been predicted because of the pandemic, said the University's Dr. Syed Shahzad Hasan, one of the co-authors of the study, it was the sharp rise in antidepressant prescription costs which was a potential cause for concern and highlighted the urgent need for mental [health](#) interventions in the country and strategies to optimize the use of antidepressants.

The study also observes a meta-analysis of 100,000 patients using antidepressants which concluded that the risk of suicide doubled in children and adolescents.

"These findings are particularly important in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic," said Dr. Hamid Merchant from the University. "Observational data suggest that [young adults](#), up to 25 years of age, were impacted by the [mental health issues](#) during the [pandemic](#), and hence, were more likely to use antidepressants."

Recommendations

The research recommends that further studies are needed to assess the age distribution of antidepressant [prescriptions](#) particularly focusing on adolescents and young adults who are at a higher risk of experiencing life-threatening adverse effects.

"It is, therefore, important to optimize the safe use of antidepressants, particularly in young adults," added Dr. Merchant. "Not only to help with mental health but also in preventing the associated side-effects that may further increase the morbidity and mortality associated with depression in younger adults."

More information: Shahad A. Rabeea et al, Surging trends in prescriptions and costs of antidepressants in England amid COVID-19, *DARU Journal of Pharmaceutical Sciences* (2021). [DOI: 10.1007/s40199-021-00390-z](#)

Provided by University of Huddersfield

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