

# Study finds more kids, teens may be taking multiple psychiatric meds

February 19 2024, by Ernie Mundell

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A study of mental health care in Maryland finds an increasing number of

children and teens covered by Medicaid are taking multiple psychiatric meds.

This trend towards "[polypharmacy](#)" might be happening elsewhere, prior research suggests.

In the new study, Maryland kids ages 17 or younger experienced "a 4% increased odds of psychotropic polypharmacy per year from 2015 to 2020," reported a team led by Yueh-Yi Chiang. She's a graduate student at the University of Maryland School of Pharmacy.

Chiang's group tracked prescription data for nearly 127,000 Medicaid enrollees under the age of 18 between 2015 and 2020. Those receiving multiple psychiatric drugs during that time rose from 4.2% in 2015 to 4.6% five years later.

"Individuals who were disabled or in [foster care](#) were significantly more likely than individuals with [low income](#) to receive three or more psychotropic classes overlapping for 90 days or more," Chiang's group noted.

Polypharmacy among kids in foster care rose from 10.8% in 2015 to 11.3% in 2020, the study found.

The reasons behind the steady increase in polypharmacy aren't clear, although "factors such as complex medical conditions, early-life trauma and fragmented care may have contributed to these findings," the team said.

Chiang's group believes the findings "emphasize the importance of monitoring the use of psychotropic combinations, particularly among vulnerable populations, such as youths enrolled in Medicaid who have a disability or are in foster care."

The study was [published](#) Feb. 16 in the journal *JAMA Network Open*.

As reported in the *New York Times*, numerous prior studies have suggested that similar trends are going on nationwide. For example, one paper found that in 2015, 40.7% of people in the United States between the ages of two and 24 who were getting an ADHD medication were also taking a second psychiatric drug.

**More information:** Yueh-Yi Chiang et al, Psychotropic Polypharmacy Among Youths Enrolled in Medicaid, *JAMA Network Open* (2024). [DOI: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2023.56404](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2023.56404)

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Citation: Study finds more kids, teens may be taking multiple psychiatric meds (2024, February 19) retrieved 12 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2024-02-kids-teens-multiple-psychiatric-meds.html>

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