

Painkiller study helps tackle national headache of legal drugs addiction

8 January 2014, by Sean Kirby



MPs have raised concerns about the levels of painkiller addiction in the UK.

(Medical Xpress)—With MPs now calling for health services to urgently tackle painkiller addiction, a University of Derby study has identified potential triggers which put users at risk of becoming dependent on legal drugs.

More than a million people in the UK are believed to be addicted to over-the-counter or prescription painkillers and tranquilisers - substantially more than those addicted to illegal drugs - according to a Home Affairs Select Committee report published last month (December). Politicians want GPs to better record cases, which can even see patients visiting multiple doctors to feed their [addiction](#).

Now a study by the University of Derby - published in the latest online edition of the journal *Pain Medicine* - has put forward three key influences which increase the risk of someone becoming a painkiller addict.

A team led by Professor James Elander, Head of the Centre for Psychological Research at the University, quizzed 112 people, who had suffered

from pain and used painkillers in the previous month, on various aspects of their taking over-the-counter and [prescription painkillers](#).

The survey, conducted by anonymous online survey over three months, quizzed respondents on the frequency and intensity of the pain they took drugs for, the amount of painkillers they'd consumed in the previous month and [psychological factors](#) such as how their pain affected them emotionally, and whether they had previously had a [substance abuse](#) problem.

The study concluded those most at risk of developing painkiller dependence:

- were more frequent users of painkillers;
- had a prior history of substance abuse, often unconnected to pain relief;
- were psychologically less able to cope with and less accepting of pain, and had trouble interpreting their own feelings.

It is hoped the study's findings could guide further research among the wider population and groups at high risk of pain addiction, with a view to assessing the scale of the problem and tackling it in the way the Government has now called for.

Professor Elander said: "Painkiller addiction is an important issue which affects large numbers of people with painful chronic conditions.

"There has been little research into the psychological factors that can lead someone to become painkiller dependent; such as how they think about, and emotionally respond to and deal with, the real pain they feel.

"Understanding these factors could improve treatment for the individual, and reduce the costs and time spent on medical services.

"In addition to our new survey the University of

Derby also has two PhD students researching different aspects of painkiller addiction, including whether there are cultural variations. In 2012 we also hosted a multi-disciplinary seminar on the subject of [painkiller](#) addiction."

Provided by University of Derby

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