

A Recent Digest of Psychoactive Pharmaceuticals in the News

About seven months ago we started keeping a file of references to antidepressants among the media we consume. Here's what we came up with:

Newstarget.com, "Antidepressant Paxil Found to Double the Risk of Violent Behavior," By Mike Adams, 9/12/06: "Researchers from Cardiff University in Britain and the Cochrane Centre examined data on Paxil -- or its generic form, paroxetine -- from GlaxoSmithKline, legal cases and emails from nearly 1,400 patients who responded to a British TV program on antidepressants. The researchers found that 60 out of 9,219 people taking Paxil -- 0.65 percent -- experienced a 'hostility event,' compared to 20 out of 6,455 patients taking placebo, or 0.31 percent. ... The U.S. Food and Drug Administration concluded in 2004 that (these antidepressants) caused teen and adult users to run higher risks of suicide, and ordered its strongest 'black box' warning label on several (antidepressant) drugs ... Researchers David Healthy, David Menkes and Andrew Herxheimer concluded in the online journal <Public Library of Science-Medicine> that although the risk of violence in Paxil takers was rare, it was a risk worthy of further study ... 'The new issues highlighted by these cases [of violence] need urgent examination jointly by jurists and psychiatrists in all countries where antidepressants are used,' they wrote."

<New Scientist> magazine, "Antidepressants Linked to Adolescent Aggression," by Roxanne Khamsi, 10/15/06: "Prozac can make 'adolescent' hamsters more aggressive towards their cage-mates, despite the antidepressant drug producing the opposite effect in adult hamsters, making them calmer ... The new findings may help explain why certain antidepressants appear to cause irritability and other abnormal behaviors in teenagers ... As expected, the pubescent hamsters on a higher dose of drug appeared calmer, initiating about 65% fewer attacks than those on placebo. But surprisingly, those on the lower dose of antidepressant became even more aggressive, initiating 40% more fights than those on a placebo Some young people with depression receive lower doses of antidepressant drugs because of their relatively small weight and size. But ... the findings of the hamster study should prompt a closer look at the effects of this practice." ... Previous studies have also indicated a link between (this class of antidepressants) and violent behavior. Aggression was the most common reason children discontinued taking the drug Zoloft in two clinical trials conducted by pharmaceutical giant Pfizer ... One high-profile case is that of Christopher Pittman, who in 2001 at the age of 12 shot and killed his grandparents before setting their house on fire. Lawyers defending the boy argued the murders were influenced by the antidepressant Zoloft, but a jury disagreed and sentenced him to 30 years in prison in February 2005."

Newstarget.com, "Ritalin Stunts Growth of Preschoolers, 40% Develop Side Effects," by Ben Kage, 10/20/06: "According to a 70-week government study

published in the November edition of the <Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry>, ... Ritalin's side effects -- including stunted growth -- are more likely to affect preschoolers ... The scientists maintain that the drug benefits children with severe ADHD, and that the positive outcome of its use outweighs its drawbacks, but they also recommended close monitoring of preschoolers on the medication ... Preschoolers on the generic version of Ritalin ... showed slowed growth, increasing about a half-inch less in height and gaining 2 pounds less in weight than expected during the study. About 40 percent of children taking the drug developed side effects, and 11 percent of children dropped out of the study due to irritability, weight loss, insomnia, and other problems. Some children even reacted with severe behaviors including hanging from ceiling fans and playing with fire.... The side effects reported on Ritalin's label include stomachaches, headaches and hallucinations, but reports have suggested it also causes more severe reactions such as liver problems and even death. The FDA's advisory committee voted 8-7 in favor of putting a black box warning -- the FDA's most severe warning for side effects in drugs -- on the box of Ritalin, but the FDA has not yet taken any action on the recommendation, nor is it obligated to."

Huffingtonpost.com, "Virginia Tech Aftermath: Did Legal Drugs Play a Role in the Massacre?" by Arianna Huffington, 4/19/07: "Reports that Cho had been taking antidepressants once again turn the spotlight on the uneasy question of what role these powerful medications might have played in yet another campus massacre ... It's the same bloody-morning-after question I've been asking since 1998, when we learned 15-year old Oregon school shooter Kip Kinkel, who opened fire in his school cafeteria, had been on Prozac. Nearly ten years -- and numerous school-shooters-on-prescription-meds -- later, we're still waiting for answers ... Now let me make it perfectly clear that I am NOT saying that antidepressants are what caused Cho to go off the deep end and kill 32 people and then himself (indeed, school and law enforcement officials haven't yet disclosed what specific meds were found among his effects). And I'm NOT saying that there aren't thousands of people who benefit from such medication. What I AM saying is that it is absurd -- and incredibly irresponsible -- for our leaders, and our culture, not to be fully investigating the correlation between antidepressants and manic/suicidal behavior."

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