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Background

- Approximately 25% of the older adult population is currently receiving prescription psychotherapeutic drugs with high abuse potential. They are also the population with the highest rate of prescription drug use in the United States.
- The older adult population is particularly susceptible to the development of dependence to psychoactive drugs as a result of their changes in body composition and drug metabolism.
- Polysubstance use is the use of substances such as alcohol, tobacco, or illicit drugs in addition to prescribed medications.
- In the general population, polysubstance use is a predictor of misuse with psychotherapeutic drugs such as opioids and benzodiazepines
- Polysubstance use can be very detrimental to one's health, especially in the older population.
- Alcohol enhances the sedative effects of CNS agents such as benzodiazepines and opioids, creating potential for serious consequences such as falls, automobile accidents, and even death.
- Drug interactions among older adults most commonly involved alcohol or psychotherapeutic agents.
- However, little is known about polysubstance use among older adults.



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Purpose

- This study aimed to describe the prevalence of polysubstance use in older adults with prescription psychotherapeutic drugs.

Methods

- Design: Cross-sectional design
- Measures:
 - Demographic questionnaire
 - The Timeline Followback (TLFB)
 - A tool for assessing use of prescription drugs, alcohol, tobacco, and illicit substances by subjective report from participants
 - Can be used to assess the prevalence of addictive behaviors among participants
- Data analysis: Descriptive statistics using SPSS 17.0
- Setting:
 - Adult day care, a geriatric primary clinic, and the geriatric evaluation and management clinic at Buffalo VA medical center
 - Primary care clinic
 - Pain management clinic
 - Senior apartments and senior centers in Buffalo area

- Eligibility Criteria
 - Age: 50 or above
 - Mini Mental Status Exam (MMSE) scores equal to or greater than 24
 - Currently on at least one psychotherapeutic medication including opiates, anxiolytics, sedatives/hypnotics (treating chronic pain, sleep and anxiety)
 - Be able to communicate in English



Results

- Demographic characteristics are summarized in Table 1.
- Polysubstance Use:
 - Preliminary findings (n=96) indicated that 50% of older adult participants reported alcohol consumption.
 - 8 participants reporting binge drinking (consumption of 5 or more standard drinks on the same day in the past month).
 - 46% reported tobacco use.
 - 11% reported marijuana use.

Table 1 Demographic Characteristics (N=96)

		N	%
Gender	Female	34	35.4%
	Male	62	64.6%
Race	White	59	61.5%
	Black	24	25.0%
	Asian	1	1.0%
	Other	12	12.5%
Marital Status	Married	45	46.9%
	Divorced	21	21.9%
	Widowed	23	24.0%
	Separated	3	3.1%
	Never been married	3	3.1%
	Unmarried couple	1	1.0%
Living Arrangements	Living alone	36	37.5%
	Living with spouse	49	51.0%
	Living with other family members	11	11.5%
Job	Retired	78	81.3%
	Full-Time	7	7.3%
	Part-Time	5	5.2%
	Retired and working part-time	1	1.0%
	Taking care of a family member	2	2.1%
	Missing	3	3.1%
Volunteer	No	75	78.1%
	Yes, Part-time	15	15.6%
	Yes, Full-time	5	5.3%
	Missing	1	1.0%
Income	Less than 15,000	30	31.3%
	15,001-25,000	25	26.0%
	25,001-50,000	28	29.2%
	50,001-75,000	4	4.2%
	>75,000	4	4.2%
Missing	5	5.2%	
Education	Mean (±SD)	12.52 (±2.512)	
	Range	4-18	
Age	Mean (±SD)	69.96 (±12.004)	
	Range	50-75	

Conclusions

- The results of this study show that there is a high incidence of concomitant use of alcohol and tobacco in older adults with prescription psychotherapeutic drugs.
- The concurrent use of alcohol and psychoactive drugs is especially concerning because of the possible drug interactions.
- The misuse of tobacco and marijuana with opioids increases the risk of misuse of opioids. Providers need continuously perform risk assessments for misuse, and when problems arise, they need to treat the misuse of both substances.
- The findings suggest a need for providing education for older adults who are taking psychotherapeutic drugs in order to reduce the risk of polysubstance use.

Limitations

- Cross sectional design limits generalizability of the study findings.
- There may be an underreport of substance use and medication misuse because of social desirability.
- Futures studies should investigate the effects of emotional distress (e.g., depression and anxiety) on polysubstance use and misuse among older adults.
- Next step of this study will be to identify risk factors of polysubstance use among older adults.

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