

ALPRAZOLAM USE AND CRIMINAL ACTIVITY: A CASE-CROSSOVER STUDY

Authors: Hannah P. Lethbridge¹ Suzanne Nielsen², Raimondo Bruno¹,

¹*School of Medicine, University of Tasmania, Hobart, Australia,* ²*Monash Addiction Research Centre, Eastern Health Clinical School, Monash University, Melbourne Australia.*

Presenter's email: hannah.lethbridge@utas.edu.au

Introduction: Anecdotal suggestions indicate alprazolam use is associated with increased engagement in crime soon after use due to its disinhibitive effects. However little research has been conducted to examine this effect. The reasons for use and for offending, remain poorly understood due to the difficulty in isolating the role of alprazolam use in criminal activity among a substance using population, given the contributions of polysubstance consumption, withdrawal, and engagement in acquisitive crime. The current study aims to investigate the effect of alprazolam use upon the occurrence of criminal activity by controlling for extraneous factors.

Design and Methods: Participants were 83 offenders recruited from Victorian Drug Diversion Programs. A case-crossover design (i.e., participants act as their own control) was utilised, in which the substance use in the 12-24 hours prior to a crime event (the hazard period) was compared with substance use and criminal activity in the month prior to the crime event (control period). The crime event refers to the participants most recent conviction.

Key Findings: After controlling for demographic (sex, age), psychological distress, past month engagement in crime, intoxication and withdrawal ratings at the time of the crime event, and past month alprazolam use, acute alprazolam use was associated crime engagement (IRR 1.57, 95%CI 1.15-2.14).

Discussions and Conclusions: Alprazolam use amongst people who regularly consume drugs has been discouraged due to the increased risk of overdose when combined with other depressants. This study provides further evidence illustrating that alprazolam use in particular is associated with engagement in crime.

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