

## EXAMINING THE DIFFERENT CONTEXTS OF EXTRAMEDICAL PHARMACEUTICAL OPIOID USE: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF PARAMEDIC RECORDS

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**Introduction:** Escalating opioid prescribing rates have been associated with increases in morbidity and mortality. There has been limited research examining the context that extramedical pharmaceutical opioid use and harms occur in real-world settings. Ambulance service records offer a unique dataset to understand use and harms among the general population.

**Design and Methods:** We examined paramedic records from tapentadol-related attendances (n = 82) and oxycodone-related attendances (n = 82, the latter were selected to represent the overall group of oxycodone-related attendances). We used framework analysis to identify several different contexts in which the extramedical use of tapentadol or oxycodone occurs.

**Results:** Demographic characteristics of the two groups were similar (45% female, 44% were 35-54 years old). Six different contexts of use were identified; in order of frequency: suicide, psychological distress, physical pain, opioid use disorder, unintentional nonadherence and other contexts (e.g. use outside a health context). The contexts of extramedical use were strikingly similar across both opioids.

**Discussions and Conclusions:** This analysis highlights the variation and complexity associated with the extramedical use of pharmaceutical opioids, as it occurs in the general population. The majority of cases involved patients in complex situations characterised by psychological distress, and shaped by physical pain conditions and social stressors. In over half of cases, this distress precipitated the use of pharmaceutical opioids in intentional acts of self-harm. These overlapping needs relating to physical pain and mental health warrant further attention in research, policy and treatment.

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