

Nonmedical gabapentinoid use and symptoms of dependence

Disclosure of Interest Statement

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Acknowledgement of Country

I acknowledge the Ngunnawal people as the Traditional Owners of the land that we meet on today, and to recognise their continuing connection to this region and the life of this beautiful city. I pay my respects to their elders past and present.

Sovereignty was never ceded.

This always was and always will be, Aboriginal land.

Nonmedical gabapentinoid use and symptoms of dependence

A qualitative systematic review of lived experiences

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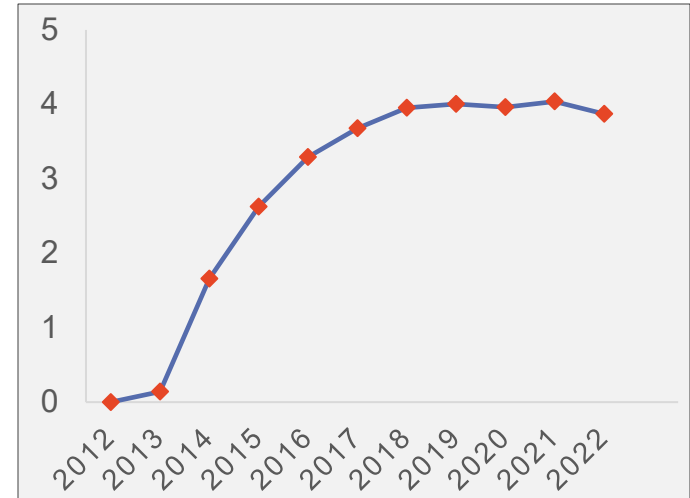


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Background

- Gabapentinoids (pregabalin and gabapentin) are among the most widely prescribed pain medications worldwide
- Indicated for neuropathic pain and seizures but frequently prescribed off-label
- Emerging evidence suggests a risk for nonmedical use and dependence

Pregabalin scripts dispensed annually

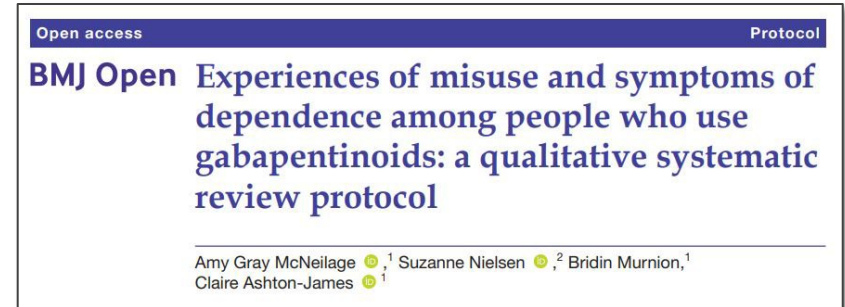
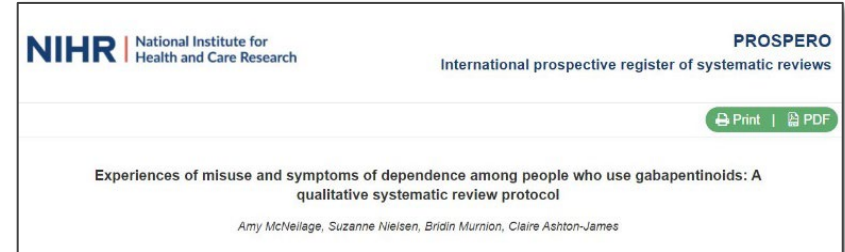


Source: PBS reports

Review question: What are the **lived experiences** of **nonmedical use** and **symptoms of dependence** among people who use gabapentinoids?

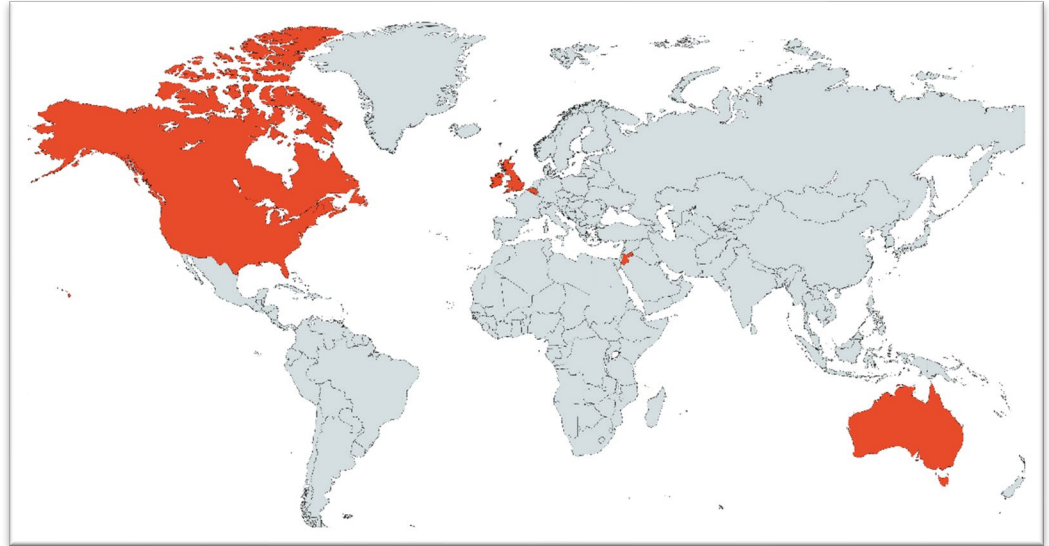
Methods

- Databases searched to Sept 2023:
MEDLINE, Scopus, Web of Science,
CINAHL, EMBASE, PsycINFO
- Methodological quality appraised using
CASP checklist
- Data analysed using **thematic synthesis**
- Confidence in the findings assessed
using the **GRADE-CERQual approach**



Included studies

- 4222 records screened
- 26 articles (**21 studies**) included
- 13 high, 4 medium, 4 low quality
- Predominantly in substance use treatment settings
- The US ($n = 7$), the UK ($n = 5$), online ($n = 4$), Australia ($n = 1$), Belgium ($n = 1$), Canada ($n = 1$), Ireland ($n = 1$), Jordan ($n = 1$)



Reasons for nonmedical use

Seeking a “high”

“It did kind of give me somewhat of a euphoric effect”

“I had the energy to talk non-stop”

“It just chills you out”

“It dissociates you from reality”

Poly-drug use

“Gabapentin just kind of increased the heroin high”

“Gabapentin gradually brings you down to normal after taking cocaine”

“That’s one of my last overdoses... I was naive to the fact that pregabalin is an enhancer”

Self-medication

“Pregabs are quite a big painkiller”

“I’m taking them to be a false me. I have issues that I haven’t dealt with”

“It just kinda soothes the detoxing”

“It helps with sleep”

Substitution

“It’s not a narcotic, so it was easier to get and more accessible”

“It doesn’t appear in the urine”

“If I couldn’t find heroin, I always had pregabalin on me... for emergencies, and they were cheap as well”

Symptoms of dependence

Rapid tolerance

"I take 3 today and tomorrow if I take 3 it won't do anything, so, you increase the dose"

"I take it every other day because if I took it daily nothing will happen"

"The next day it did not produce even 50% of the high feeling"

Feelings of addiction

"I lost everything... My whole thinking was devoted to the idea of getting money to buy it"

"You know what it reminds me of? Using gear back in the 90s"

"I wish I never knew about them"

Severe withdrawal syndrome

"An absolute nightmare"

"If I wasn't crying, I was throwing up. I had no energy at all... It was horrific. Going from the bathroom to the bed"

"Withdrawing from pregabalin is much worse than from a benzo"

Psychiatric symptoms

"I had suicidal thoughts which made me want to take it again"

"I was paranoid, I felt I had no worth"

"You're agitated, you're overstressed. You won't talk to people. Pregabalin is different that way, the psychosis is worse"

Implications

These findings can be used to develop more effective harm mitigation measures, which may include:

- Developing and testing strategies to guide prescribers in assessing risk of nonmedical use and dependence
- Developing feasible and acceptable ways to reduce the risk of overdose
- Establishing optimal deprescribing practices so that people who wish to discontinue gabapentinoids can do so safely



Paper just
published in
IJDP

