

## The Effect of the Organization of Mental Health Care on General Practitioners' Prescription Behavior of Psychotropics for Adolescents in Belgium

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**Abstract :** Although adolescence is a stressful period with an increased risk for mental illnesses such as anxiety and depression, little in-depth knowledge is available on the determinants of the use of psychotropic drugs (BZD/SSRIs) and the effects. A qualitative research with adolescents in Flanders was performed. Based on in-depth interviews, the interviewees indicate feelings of ambiguity towards their medication use because on the one hand the medication helps to manage their mental vulnerability and disrupted lives, but on the other hand they experience a loss of control of their self and their environment. Undesired side-effects and stigma led to a negative pharmaceutical self. The interviewed youngsters also express dissatisfaction about the prescription behavior with regard to psychotropic drugs of their general practitioner (GP). They wished to have received more information about alternative non-pharmaceutical treatment options. Notwithstanding these comments, the majority of the interviewees maintained trust in their GP to act in their best interest. This paper will relate the prescription behavior in primary care to the organization of mental health care to better understand the "pharmaceuticalization" and medicalization of mental health problems in Belgium. Belgium implemented fundamental mental health care reforms to collaborate, to integrate care and to optimize continuity of care. Children and adolescents still are confronted with long waiting lists to access (non-medicalized) mental health services. This access to mental health care partly explains general practitioners' prescription behavior of psychotropics. Moreover, multidisciplinary practices have not pervaded primary health care yet. Medicalization and pharmaceuticalization of mental health vulnerabilities of youth are both a structural and cultural problem.

**Keywords :** adolescents, antidepressants, benzodiazepines, mental health system, psychotropic drugs

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