

# Antidepressants Can Rewire Your Mind to the Point of Committing Violent Crimes

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## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › Mental health in America is declining, with only 31% of adults rating their mental health as "excellent" in 2022, down from 43% two decades prior. Antidepressant use is also widespread
- › Research links antidepressants to increased risk of violent behavior, particularly in young adults. Drug manufacturers created the "Zoloft defense" strategy to protect themselves against legal repercussions from these cases
- › Studies show antidepressants can cause emotional blunting and detachment. The FDA also requires black box warnings about side effects such as suicidal thoughts and aggressive behavior
- › Specific SSRIs like Paxil and Luvox significantly increase your risk of violent behavior. Prozac is the most dangerous, raising aggressive behavior rates by up to 10.9 times
- › Exercise has been shown to be 1.5 times more effective than antidepressants for mental health. Other recommended strategies include proper nutrition, vitamin D and the Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT)

**Mental health in America is slowly deteriorating. According to a report from TIME, only 31% of adults rated their mental health as "excellent" in 2022, which went down from 43% two decades prior. To help them cope, the first solution is typically to take an antidepressant. In fact, around 16% of adults have taken a psychiatric drug within the previous year, with antidepressants being the most used type.<sup>1</sup>**

Worse, even the youth has been captured by Big Pharma. Between January 2016 and December 2022, the monthly antidepressant dispensing rate among Americans aged 12 to 25 years old rose by 66.3%. Among females aged 12 to 17, the rate surged by 129.6%.<sup>2</sup>

Despite their intended purpose to help those struggling with mental health problems, research has revealed a severe side effect of antidepressants – an increased risk of homicidal behavior. This pressing issue was discussed in the webinar "Antidepressants and Homicide: Automatism Spectrum Disorders" by Dr. David Healy, one of the United Kingdom's top experts on selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs).<sup>3</sup>

## **Homicide – A Chilling Side Effect of Antidepressants**

Healy explored the case of 15-year-old Christopher Pittman,<sup>4</sup> a highly publicized case that happened in the early 2000s, where he was sentenced to 30 years in prison for killing his grandparents.<sup>5</sup> A month before the crime occurred, Christopher ran away from home and ended up in a children's mental health institute, where he was given Zoloft.

After he was picked up by his grandparents, Christopher began exhibiting severe behavioral changes. Two to three weeks later, while being under the influence of Zoloft, he shot his grandparents and burned down their house. When police officers took him in, he said he didn't have any memory of what happened.<sup>6</sup>

Was the teenager "chemically compelled" or was he aware of his actions?<sup>7</sup> Whatever your thoughts are on the matter, one thing is certain – antidepressants were a factor. This was also confirmed by a juror on the case.<sup>8</sup> However, we've yet to see the judicial system take chemical induction to violence into account.

Sadly, Christopher is far from an isolated case. Published research has shown that taking antidepressants produces a variety of psychological side effects, and one of them is homicidal ideation.

In a study<sup>9</sup> published in 2020, researchers noted that violent crime convictions were more prevalent among patients who took SSRIs than those who did not take these

drugs. The age ranges with the highest conviction rates while on SSRIs were those between 15 and 34.

Among those over the age of 35, the risk of committing a violent crime while on an SSRI was negligible. While the study didn't go into the cause of these events, they did point an important danger to using these drugs. According to the study authors:

*"While questions on causality remain, these results indicate that there may be an increased risk of violent crime during SSRI treatment in a small group of individuals. It may persist throughout medicated periods, across age groups, and after treatment discontinuation."*

## **Automatism in Antidepressants**

What could cause people who take antidepressants to commit violent crimes? While there's no definite answer, Healy theorizes that these drugs eventually cause automatism, "an act which is done by the muscles without any control by the mind."<sup>10</sup> In short, antidepressants may cause you to do things you're not aware of, similar to parasomnias (sleepwalking disorders) where people engage in activities such as eating garbage or driving while sleeping.

What's worse is that drug manufacturers have known about this issue from the start. Healy recounted that Nobel Prize winner Dr. Arvid Carlsson, known for synthesizing the first SSRI sold to the public<sup>11</sup> (zimeldine<sup>12</sup>), acknowledged that while it creates a positive effect for some, it has a negative effect on others.<sup>13</sup>

Originally, the drugs were meant to produce a "serenic effect," meaning a feeling or state of calmness, peace, and tranquility. However, the problem is that sometimes the opposite state is induced. In some cases, violence is the end result. As noted by Healy, SSRIs don't actually address the mental illness, but rather "work" by changing your personality.<sup>14</sup>

## **The Zoloft Defense**

Again, drug manufacturers knew from the start that antidepressants will cause violent behavior in certain individuals. But did you know that they've already prepared a legal defense for it?

After the first cases of violent behavior caused by antidepressants were reported in the news, Pfizer and GlaxoSmithKline created a strategy to get them off the hook from legal repercussions, called the "Zoloft defense." The first draft of this strategy appeared as early as 1993.<sup>15</sup> Brenda Baletti, Ph.D., writing for *The Defender*, summarizes this legal scheme:<sup>16</sup>

*"The manual's rebuttal hinges on the claims that violence is common in the U.S. and that the FDA has found the drug to be safe. It also advises lawyers to emphasize the lack of statistically significant evidence from double-blind placebo-controlled clinical trials causally linking Zoloft to aggressive behavior or to akathisia, which are strong subjective feelings of distress or discomfort that could also induce violent behavior."*

When will Big Pharma be held responsible for the damages it has caused to the victims of antidepressant-induced violent behavior? The answer is difficult to predict, but some courts have recognized the harm that antidepressants cause.

In one example, Healy recounted the story of Don Schell. One day in 1998, Schell went to see a doctor because of sleeping problems and was diagnosed with anxiety. He was prescribed the SSRI Paxil. Forty-eight hours later he shot his family and committed suicide.<sup>17</sup> The surviving relatives sued GlaxoSmithKline, the manufacturers, for causing the drastic change in Schell's behavior. Eventually, the courts sided with them, forcing the company to pay \$8 million in damages.<sup>18</sup>

While Healy laments the harm that antidepressants have caused, he doesn't dismiss the use of drugs entirely. Rather, he hopes that at some point, patients and doctors will work closer together instead of having a private company dictating what a doctor will do to a patient.<sup>19</sup>

He also hopes that the criminal courts will begin to recognize when antidepressants have caused serious problems for people, chemically inducing them to commit violent acts they never would have had their brain chemistry not been so radically altered.<sup>20</sup>

## **The Risks of Using Antidepressants Are Clear**

With all the negative press surrounding antidepressants, the government has been forced to act, but the best they can do is to update the packaging. Since mid-October 2004, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) requires manufacturers of SSRIs to include a black box warning notifying users that the drugs can cause suicidal thoughts, aggressiveness and other radical shifts in behavior:<sup>21</sup>

*"Anxiety, agitation, panic attacks, insomnia, irritability, hostility (aggressiveness), impulsivity, akathisia (psychomotor restlessness), hypomania, and mania have been reported in adult and pediatric patients being treated with antidepressants for major depressive disorder as well as for other indications, both psychiatric and nonpsychiatric."*

Even if you don't experience the radical behavior shifts mentioned above, taking SSRIs have another side effect on the other end of the spectrum – emotional blunting to both positive and negative stimuli. As noted in a study<sup>22</sup> published in *Neuropsychopharmacology*:

*"Patients' often report experiencing a 'blunting' effect. This blunting effect has also been demonstrated for rewarding and punishing stimuli. Specifically, participants receiving seven days of SSRIs had lower neural processing of both rewarding and aversive stimuli."*

*In light of our own results, it is possible that the clinical effectiveness of SSRIs for MDD (major depressive disorder) is due to this reduced negative affect. However, if indeed positive affect is also reduced, then this would lead to a more general blunting effect, as often reported by patients taking chronic SSRIs."*

*This is supported by the present study, in which lower reinforcement sensitivity would suggest decreased control over behavior by both rewarding and punishing stimuli."*

An older study<sup>23</sup> reaffirms the behavior-changing effects of antidepressants. Here, researchers reviewed 484 drugs in the FDA's database. They found that 31 of the samples accounted for 78.8% of all cases of violence, and 11 of those were antidepressants. Moreover, they noted that the following five SSRIs were associated with the highest risk for violence:<sup>24</sup>

- Fluoxetine (Prozac), which increased aggressive behavior 10.9 times
- Paroxetine (Paxil), which increased violent behavior 10.3 times
- Fluvoxamine (Luvox), which increased violent behavior 8.4 times
- Venlafaxine (Effexor), which increased violent behavior 8.3 times
- Desvenlafaxine (Pristiq), which increased violent behavior 7.9 times

## **Feeling Down? Exercise Is the Best Medicine**

Barring any serious injury or medical condition, I believe that exercise is one of the best ways to beat the blues. Not only is exercise free, but it can also be incorporated into your routine right away. Basically, there are no downsides to exercising, especially to your mental well-being. In fact, research has shown that it's even better than taking antidepressants.

In a review<sup>25</sup> published in the British Journal of Sports Medicine, researchers analyzed a total of 97 reviews encompassing 128,119 participants affected with various physical and mental conditions. Using a measurement tool to assess each study, they noted that exercise had a marked beneficial effect on mental health, concluding that it was 1.5 times more effective than antidepressants. As noted by lead author Ben Singh, Ph.D.:<sup>26</sup>

*"Physical activity is known to help improve mental health. Yet despite the evidence, it has not been widely adopted as a first-choice treatment ... Higher-*

*intensity exercise had greater improvements for depression and anxiety, while longer durations had smaller effects when compared to short and mid-duration bursts.*

*We also found that all types of physical activity and exercise were beneficial, including aerobic exercise such as walking, resistance training, Pilates, and yoga. Importantly, the research shows that it doesn't take much for exercise to make a positive change to your mental health."*

While the research pointed out the benefits of higher-intensity exercise for mental health benefits, moderate intensity exercises tend to produce better results overall. As noted by cardiologist Dr. James O'Keefe, vigorous-intensity exercise for long periods of time cancels out some of the health benefits.

In fact, his research made me reconsider my own exercise program. For more information about this profound discovery, read my article "[Nailing the Sweet Spots for Exercise Volume](#)."

## **Other Strategies to Help Manage Your Mental Health**

In addition to exercise as a first-line treatment for depression, here are several additional healthy lifestyle habits that can help you manage your symptoms better:

- **Eat a healthier diet** — Your diet plays a key part in promoting overall physical and mental health. Keeping inflammation in check is an important part of any effective treatment plan. First and foremost, I recommend adding more B vitamins (including B1, B2, B3, B6, B8 and B12) into your diet. Research has shown these nutrients play important roles in cognition and overall brain health.

For example, a B1 deficiency causes irritability, emotional disturbances, confusion, disturbed sleep and memory loss. Meanwhile, a B3 deficiency has been linked to depression, anxiety, paranoia and aggression.<sup>27</sup>

Another important food to add to your diet is probiotics, especially if you've been eating an unhealthy diet as of late. According to a study<sup>28</sup> published in *Frontiers in Cellular and Infection Microbiology*, "alterations in the gut bacteria can trigger changes in neurotransmitters, neuroinflammation and behaviors." Building on this, another study<sup>29</sup> noted that probiotics are just as effective as antidepressants to help manage major depressive disorder.

- **Vitamin D** — Are you getting enough sunshine? Research has shown that vitamin D, which is produced when sunlight hits your skin, has a profound effect on your mental health. In fact, deficiency has been associated with an increased risk of depression.<sup>30</sup>

How much vitamin D is enough? I recommend a range between 60 and 80 ng/mL, and the only way to find out if you're hitting this range is to get tested regularly. Now, before you expose yourself to sunlight, there are some precautions to take. If you've been on a high-linoleic acid (LA) diet, your risk of sunburn is increased.

If this is the case, avoid high-intensity sun exposure for six months while reducing your LA intake to 5 grams a day or less. Instead, go outside in the early morning or late afternoon, when the sun's rays aren't as intense. I also recommend taking 12 milligrams of astaxanthin. Other strategies include applying niacinamide cream and taking a low-dose aspirin, as these help protect your skin against harmful UV radiation.

- **Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT)** — EFT is a form of psychological acupressure that takes inspiration from the same energy meridians used in acupuncture. To do EFT, you're going to tap certain meridians while voicing positive affirmations to help get rid of negative thoughts and emotions.

For serious or complex issues, seek out a qualified health care professional that is trained in EFT<sup>31</sup> to guide you through the process. That said, for people experiencing the symptoms of depression, this is a technique you can learn to do effectively on your own. In the video below, EFT practitioner Julie Schiffman shows you how.



**If you are feeling desperate or have any thoughts of suicide, please call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, a toll-free number: 1-800-273-TALK (8255), or call 911, or simply go to your nearest hospital emergency department. You cannot make long-term plans for lifestyle changes when you are in the middle of a crisis.**

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