

# Benzodiazepine use in Chile: Impact of availability on use, abuse, and dependence

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This study tested the hypothesis whether over-the-counter benzodiazepine availability influenced patterns of benzodiazepine use, abuse, and dependence in Chile. If over-the-counter availability represents a major risk factor leading to benzodiazepine substance use disorders, rates of abuse, and dependence would be significantly higher among over-the-counter benzodiazepine users than among prescription drug users. The study was a household survey of a stratified sample (N = 1,500) of the Santiago (Chile) population performed by trained interviewers. Data were collected by structured questionnaires on demographic characteristics, drug use, psychoactive substance use disorders, and other psychosocial variables. Past-year prevalence of benzodiazepine use was 31.4%, daily use of benzodiazepines for  $\geq$ 12 months, 5.9%, and subjects who met DSM-III-R criteria for dependence, 3.3%. Seventy-four percent of subjects obtained the benzodiazepine over-the-counter (always 45%; sometimes 29%). No subje