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Better Earlier Care for Those With Bipolar Disorder Is Needed

More long-term studies could help improve quality of life and prevent relapses.

July 2, 2019 By Alicia Green

Almost 60 million people worldwide have bipolar disorder (BD), according to the World Health Organization. But an article published in The Lancet Psychiatry reports that many of these individuals don't receive appropriate care early on, which worsens their quality of life, reports Medical News Today.

The article was written by specialists from the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology and Neuroscience at King's College of London; Orygen, the National Centre of Excellence in Youth Mental Health in Parkville, Australia; the University of British Columbia in Vancouver; and the Florey Institute for Neuroscience and Mental Health at the University of Melbourne.

First, researchers examined data on the prevalence and health burden of bipolar disorder, how the condition progresses and is treated and the international guidelines recommended. Findings showed that people with BD exhibited a 50 times greater risk of self-harm and at least a 12 times increased risk of suicide when compared with those without the condition.

Scientists noted that half of people with BD develop symptoms before age 21 and that almost six years might pass after the onset of symptoms before a diagnosis was made. In addition, data revealed that people experiencing their first manic episode don't get the treatment they need. (During a manic episode people are in a chronically elevated or agitated state with symptoms such as increased energy, inability to focus and poor judgement.)

Furthermore, investigators indicated that a lack of research on appropriate interventions during first-time manic episodes has resulted in incomplete guidelines regarding the treatment of people with BD.

"Bipolar [disorder] can have serious effects on the health of a young person, their family and society in general," said Sameer Jauhar, PhD, the study's first author. "By identifying people who have had a first episode and offering them appropriate treatment at an early stage, we can help them get on with their lives and prevent relapses."

Jauhar called for more long-term studies to help guide future treatments so people with BD could

stay well long-term.

For additional information about BD, check out “Can a Risk Calculator Predict Bipolar Disorder in Kids?” and “Dietary Advice May Boost Benefits of Treatment for Bipolar Disorder.”

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