

General Practitioners' prescription of psychotropic drugs among youth in Belgium

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The prescription of psychotropic medication for children and young adults has been increasing in Belgium. Available data suggest a large proportion of these prescriptions are initiated by General Practitioners (GPs), although current guidelines targeting the first line (GPs and pharmacists) advise against the prescription of psychotropic drugs for children and young adults. So far, little is known about the rationale and medical indication of this prescription by GPs.

Methods

- Data collected by the **Belgian network of Sentinel General Practitioners (SGP)** between 2021 and 2022
- The questionnaire was created in **collaboration with BelPEP** (Belgian Psychotropic Experts Platform)
- Retrospective population-based study of **0 to 23 years old patients consulting their GPs for psychotropic medication or mental issues leading to a prescription of psychotropic medication**. SGPs registered one record per patient, unless there is a change in prescription/indication

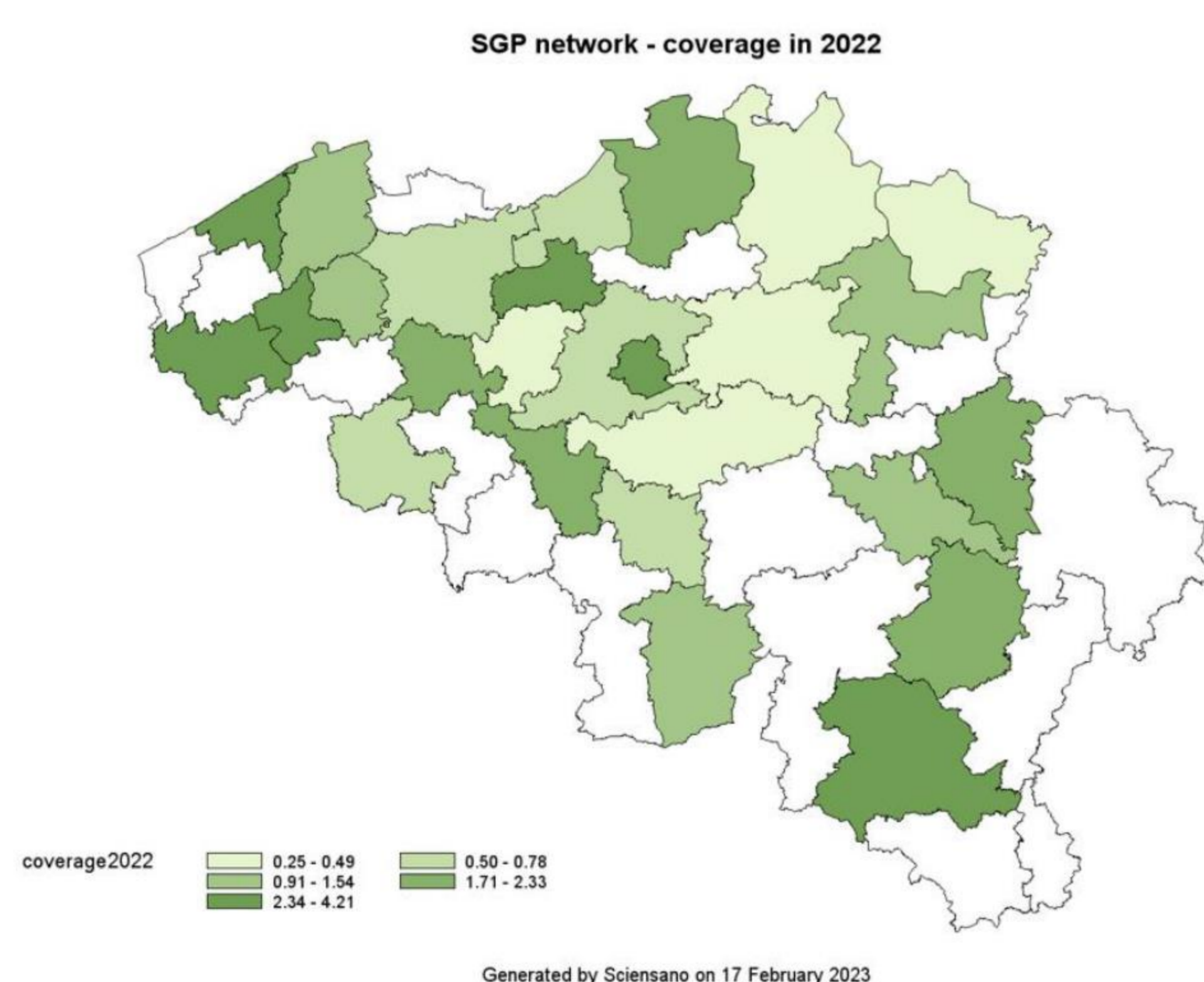


Figure 1: Sentinel GP network coverage

- On average, 74 practices corresponding to **100 SGPs** in the network
- During the study period, the network covered **0,86% of the Belgian population**

Results

- 86 cases were reported, corresponding to an incidence rate of 10 per 10000 person-years (inhabitants between 0 and 23)

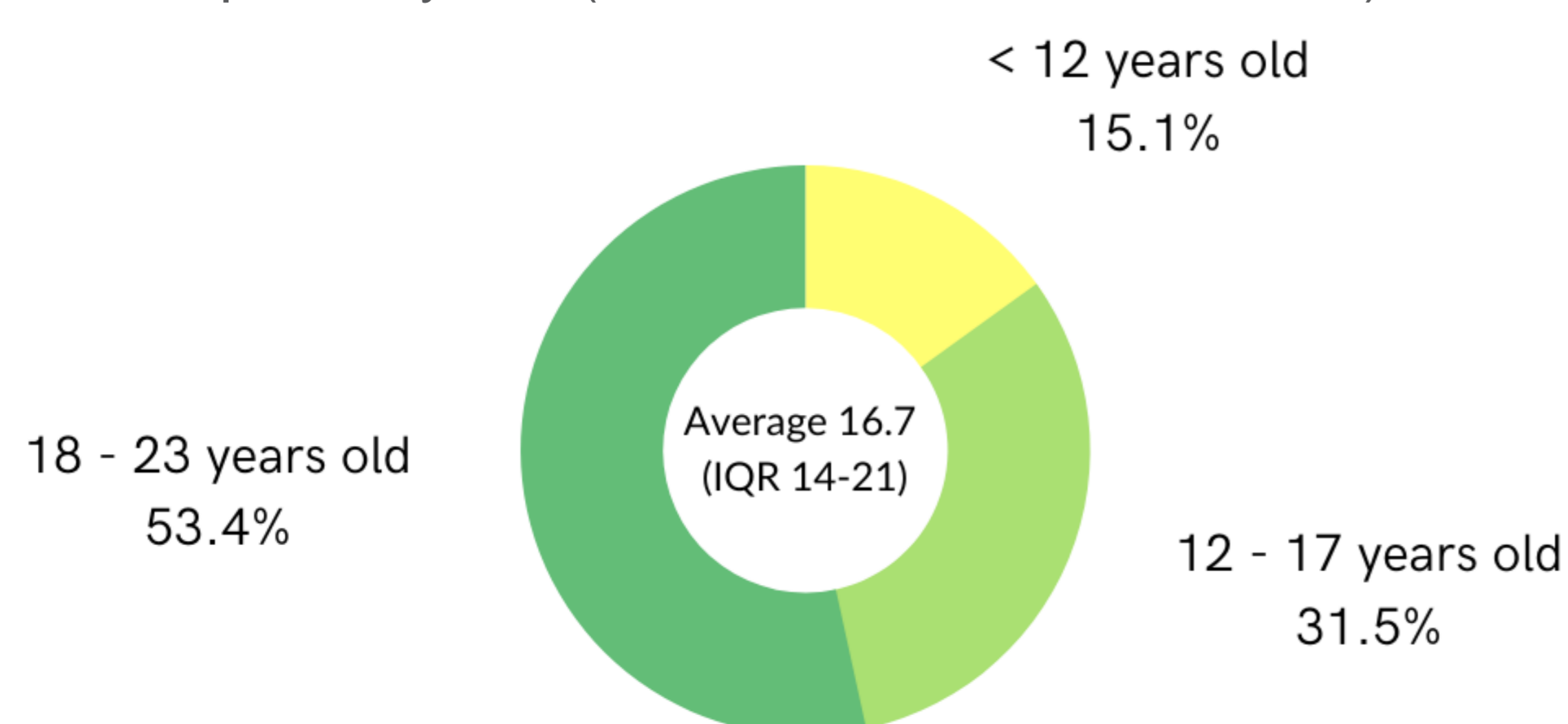


Figure 2: Age distribution of patients



Figure 3: Sex distribution of patients

- Antidepressants** were the main psychotropic prescribed treatment (47.7%), followed by psychostimulants (29.1%), and antipsychotics (23.3%)
- GPs initiated prescription for antidepressants in **73.2% of reported cases**, 62.5% for sedative-hypnotic drugs, 42.9% for anxiolytics, 25% for antipsychotics, and 8% for psychostimulants
- Non-medical treatment** (e.g. Psychologist) started or will be launched in 67.4% of reported cases

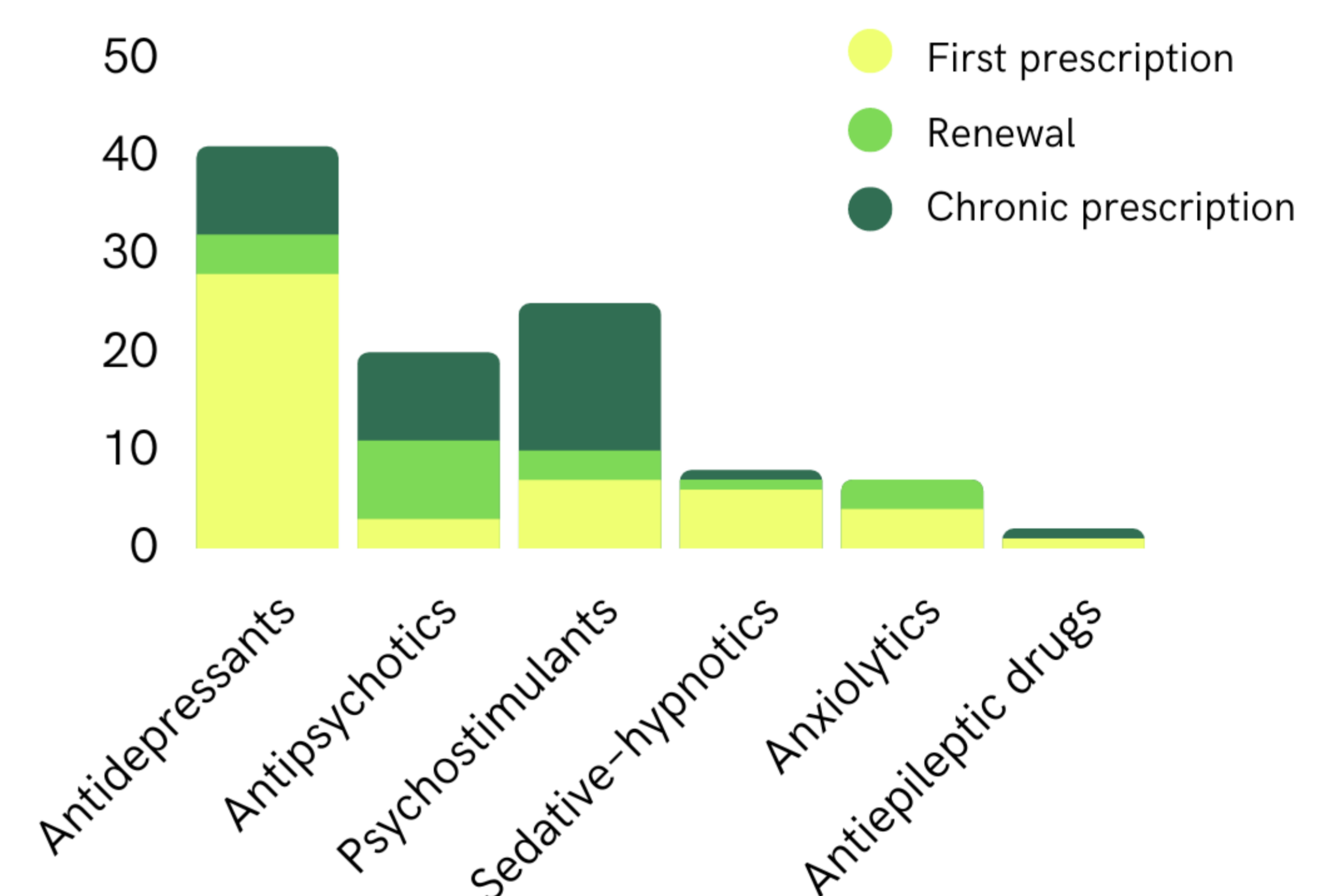


Figure 4: Type of prescription per treatment

- 24.4% of female and 15.3% of male patients** were hospitalised in the last 6 months due to mental health issues (Chi-Square, $p=0,6$)

Conclusion

During the study period, antidepressants were the main class of psychotropic drugs prescribed. In addition, mood disorders (e.g. depression, anxiety) were prominent indications for prescription. Although guidelines recommend that general practitioners avoid initiating psychotropic medication, they often reported being the initial prescribers.

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