

The circumstances under which the DPX-related deaths occurred are a matter of special interest. Particularly relevant are considerations such as whether other drugs or alcohol were also involved, whether an overdose of DPX was taken, and to what extent the deaths were intentional. Although it is impossible to determine precisely the answers to such questions, some generalizations can be made from available data.

1. DPX is a common cause of drug-associated death. These cases involve both suicide and accidents, but a majority of the deaths appear to be intentional. Thus, a tabulation of the 72 DPX-related deaths reported in 1971-1975 by the San Francisco Coroner's Office indicates that 58 percent of them were suicides (this compares with 10 codeine-related deaths, of which 50 percent were suicides). Analysis of data available from different sources, as shown in Table 5, supports the hypothesis that a substantial proportion of DPX deaths are the result of use by those in younger age groups, for suicidal purposes or associated with abuse. Thus, 8-22 percent of the deaths are in the 10-19 age group, which accounts for only 7 percent of the prescriptions; 48-58 percent of the deaths are in the 20-39 age group with approximately 30 percent of the DPX prescriptions. Regardless of age considerations, however, it is apparent that DPX is one of the prescription drugs most frequently associated with suicide and accidental deaths, ranking behind only the barbiturates as a group in total number and behind only barbiturates, other sedative-hypnotics and antidepressants in deaths per million prescriptions dispensed (Table 4).

TABLE 5.—PROPOXYPHENE: REPORTED PRESCRIBING, EMERGENCY ROOM VISITS, AND ASSOCIATED DEATHS, BY AGE

Category	Percentages by age groups						
	0 to 9	10 to 19	20 to 29	30 to 39	40 to 49	50 to 59	60 and over
Reported prescribing of propoxyphene ¹	1	7	² 30		³ 26		35
Emergency room visits for suicide ges- tures ⁴		37	40	11	6	4	1
(Total equals 505.)							
DAWN emergency room data ⁵		24	40	19	10	⁶ 6	
(Total equals 16, 113.)							
Deaths:							
FDA: Probable suicides reported ⁷ (total equals 173, 50 percent male, 50 percent female)		22	37	20	14	8	
FDA: Probable accidental deaths ⁷ (total equals 48, 40 percent male, 60 percent female)	13	13	34	17	6	2	
Finkle data: Propoxyphene-associ- ated deaths ⁸ (total equals 1,022, 45 percent male, 55 percent fe- male)	2	12	27	21	20	11	8
DAWN medical examiner data ⁵ (total equals 1,964)		8	35	23	17	⁶ 17	

¹ National Disease and Therapeutic Index, IMS America.
² This figure is for the age group 20 to 39.
³ This figure is for the age group 40 to 59.
⁴ FDA National Clearinghouse for Poison Control Centers.
⁵ Drug Enforcement Administration, Drug Abuse Warning Network, January 1975 to August 1978.
⁶ This figure is for the age group 50 and over.
⁷ FDA spontaneous adverse reaction reporting program. (In 15 percent of the reports age was not reported.)
⁸ Reference 17.

2. A majority of the DPX-related deaths appear to have occurred when DPX was taken in conjunction with alcohol or other drugs. Thus, information from various sources, shown in table 6, indicates that in about 12-28 percent of the deaths, DPX alone was involved; in the others alcohol and/or other drugs were also present.