

## Which is more dangerous: a Pinto or an antidepressant pill?

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During the 1970s Americans were outraged at Ford Motor Company over the Pinto. It came to light that a known design flaw in the Pinto could cause the car to catch fire in a minor rear end accident, potentially burning to death its occupants.

In recent weeks we have been deluged with FDA and pharmaceutical reports about the risk of antidepressants. What drug companies have failed to make public, but had known for years, is that virtually all antidepressant drugs have had no real value in treating children or teens with depression. More shocking, there is an increased risk of suicide by the users of these drugs.

This came to light, when the FDA asked manufactures of seven antidepressants to study the effects of their drugs on children and teenagers (New York Times 09/21/04). The FDA discovered in the compiled findings that children and teens given antidepressants were twice as likely to become suicidal as those who were given placebos.

To clarify, the FDA estimated that for every 100 children who take the drugs, two to three of them may become suicidal, and those numbers could be low.

Let's do some math here so we can all understand what this means, it took me a while to figure it out.

There are roughly 11 million antidepressant prescriptions written for children each year. No one seems to know the exact number of children who take them. Estimates by Dr. John Abramson, clinical instructor at Harvard Medical School and author of "Overdosed America, The Broken Promise of American Medicine" indicates the number is most likely between 1.5 million to 3 million children.

Let's for conversation sake settle on 2 million, for the moment -- two children out of 100 users, based on 2 million children who take the drug means that some 40,000 children using these antidepressants will exhibit suicidal behavior. If the number is 3 per 100, those affected soars to 60,000.

How many of these children would actually complete suicide? We don't know. But if only one percent of these children and teens who become suicidal complete the act, that would be between 400 and 600 children who would be lost, children who would not have become suicidal if they had been taking a placebo.

A terrifying side note is the impact to adults. Studies of adults taking antidepressants versus those taking placebos produced figures of 4.8 people per 1000 who actually committed suicide over those who took the placebos. Of course millions of adults take the drugs.

Getting back to the Ford Pinto, a company memo made public in (1978) over the cost comparisons for fixing a dangerous gas tank versus the potential deaths, launched one of the most talked about trials in American at the time. Ford Motor Company had made history as the first corporation to be charged with murder.

What appalled Americans was the company's simple mathematics. The memo said it would cost \$137 million to fix the problem with the Pinto. On the other hand, it would cause approximately 180 burn deaths and 180 serious burn injuries. The memo that analyzed the cost/benefits estimated that the manufacturer could face \$49.5 million in "social costs", death, injury and property costs. They decided the projected savings of \$87.5 million was worth the gamble.

Today drug companies are making *billions* of dollars from drugs that studies show fail to ameliorate the symptoms of depression in teenagers and children yet put tens of thousands of them at a known risk of becoming suicidal. We don't know how many commit suicide, but the evidence is very strong that it is far more than 180 people. That doesn't begin to connect the dots with school shootings where some of the children and teens were reported to have been on antidepressants. Nor does it connect any dots to the 249,000 people who were hospitalized or treated in emergency rooms for suicide attempts in 2002, which were the most recent figures I could find.

So let me see if I have got this right. Americans were outraged at Ford Motor Company. America, where is your outrage now?

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