

Examining the relationship between opioid misuse and suicidality level



PRESENTER:
Phoebe Long

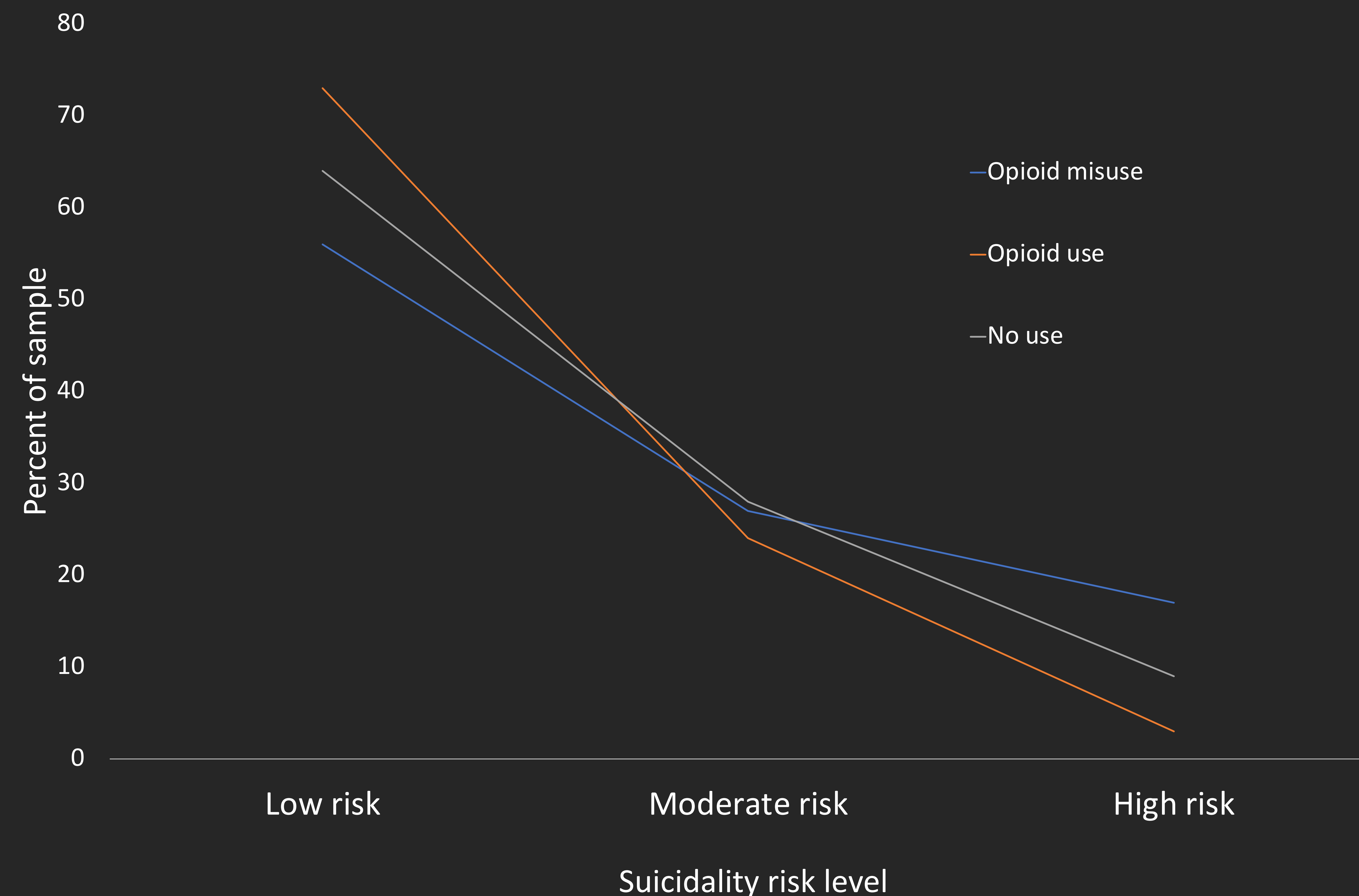
BACKGROUND

- People with chronic pain are more than twice as likely to complete suicide attempts compared to the general population.¹
- Little is known about the mechanisms through which suicidal ideation turns into action among this population. One explanation might be opioid misuse.
- People with chronic pain are often prescribed long-term opioid therapy to treat their pain, and are at particularly high risk of misusing opioids.²
- Among the general population, prescription opioid misuse has been found to be associated with suicidal ideation, planning, and attempts.³
- Opioid misuse may lower inhibition and increase impulsive behavior increasing the likelihood that patients act on their suicidal ideation.

METHODS

- 1,090 people with chronic pain, who reported feeling hopeless about their pain, were surveyed online and asked about suicide risk and opioid use.
- Opioid use was measured using a cutoff 8 using a modified version of the Current Opioid Misuse Measure (COMM).
- Suicidality risk level was divided into three categories: low risk (i.e., feel hopeless but no reported suicidal ideation within the past year), moderate risk (i.e., reported suicidal ideation but no attempts within the past year), and high risk (i.e., reported suicide attempt(s) within the past year).
- We hypothesized that there would be a positive significant relationship between opioid misuse and suicide risk, which was tested with a chi-square analysis.

Among an at-risk sample of patients with chronic pain, those using opioids and those not using opioids had similar levels of suicidal ideation, **but those misusing opioids were more likely to attempt suicide.**



RESULTS

- There was a significant association between suicidality risk level and opioid misuse, $\chi^2(2) = 62.39$, $p < .000$.
- More than half of the sample reported taking opioids (53%), and 79% of those taking opioids screened positive for opioid misuse.

DISCUSSION

- The data suggests that patients who misuse opioids were more likely to have attempted suicide within the past year than patients who use opioids (but do not misuse) or those who do not currently take opioids.
- Findings suggest that the relationship between opioid misuse and suicidality risk level is not linear: people in all groups had comparable rates of ideation, but patients who misuse opioids are most likely to act on this ideation.
- Clinical implications include asking people with chronic pain about their history of suicidal thoughts and behaviors and current opioid use behavior.

¹ Racine, M. (2018). Chronic pain and suicide risk: A comprehensive review. *Progress in Neuro-Psychopharmacology and Biological Psychiatry*, 87, 269-280.

² Turk, D. C., Swanson, K. S., & Gatchel, R. J. (2008). Predicting opioid misuse by chronic pain patients: a systematic review and literature synthesis. *The Clinical Journal of Pain*, 24(6), 497-508.

³ Ashrafioun, L., Bishop, T. M., Conner, K. R., & Pigeon, W. R. (2017). Frequency of prescription opioid misuse and suicidal ideation, planning, and attempts. *Journal of Psychiatric Research*, 92, 1-7.

Long, P., McAndrew, L., Kimber, J., Brunkow, A., Cannon, M., & Winograd, D.

