

The NSDUH Report

April 7, 2009

Nonmedical Use of Adderall® among Full-Time College Students

In Brief

- Full-time college students aged 18 to 22 were twice as likely as their counterparts who were not full-time college students to have used Adderall® nonmedically in the past year (6.4 vs. 3.0 percent)
- Full-time college students who were nonmedical users of Adderall® were almost 3 times as likely as those who had not used Adderall® nonmedically to have used marijuana in the past year (79.9 vs. 27.2 percent), 8 times more likely to have used cocaine in that period (28.9 vs. 3.6 percent), 8 times more likely to have been nonmedical users of prescription tranquilizers (24.5 vs. 3.0 percent), and 5 times more likely to have been nonmedical users of prescription pain relievers (44.9 vs. 8.7 percent)
- Nearly 90 percent of full-time college students who used Adderall® nonmedically in the past year were past month binge alcohol users, and more than half were heavy alcohol users

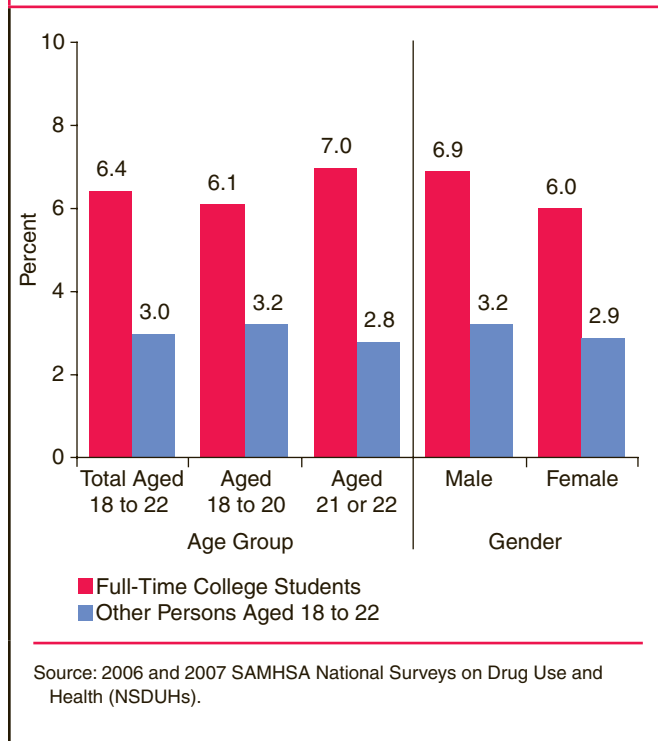
Nonmedical use of Adderall® is of special interest to policymakers because, as an amphetamine, Adderall® is among the group of legally approved drugs classified as having the highest potential for dependence or abuse.¹ A prior study of nonmedical use of stimulants such as Adderall® by college students reported considerably higher rates of frequent binge alcohol use, marijuana use, and cocaine use among students who used stimulants nonmedically in the past year compared with their counterparts who had not.² Use of both cocaine and stimulants is problematic because each increases the risk for heart attack or stroke.^{3,4}

This issue of *The NSDUH Report* examines the rates of nonmedical use of Adderall® in the past year among full-time college students aged 18 to 22 and comparably aged persons who were not full-time college students.^{5,6} All findings presented in this report are annual averages based on combined 2006 and 2007 data.

Nonmedical Use of Adderall®, by College Enrollment Status

Full-time college students aged 18 to 22 were twice as likely as their counterparts who were

Figure 1. Nonmedical Use of Adderall® in the Past Year among Full-Time College Students and Other Persons Aged 18 to 22, by Age Group and Gender: 2006 and 2007



not full-time college students to have used Adderall® nonmedically in the past year (6.4 vs. 3.0 percent) (Figure 1). This pattern was found for both males and females and for persons aged 18 to 20 as well as for those 21 or 22 years old.

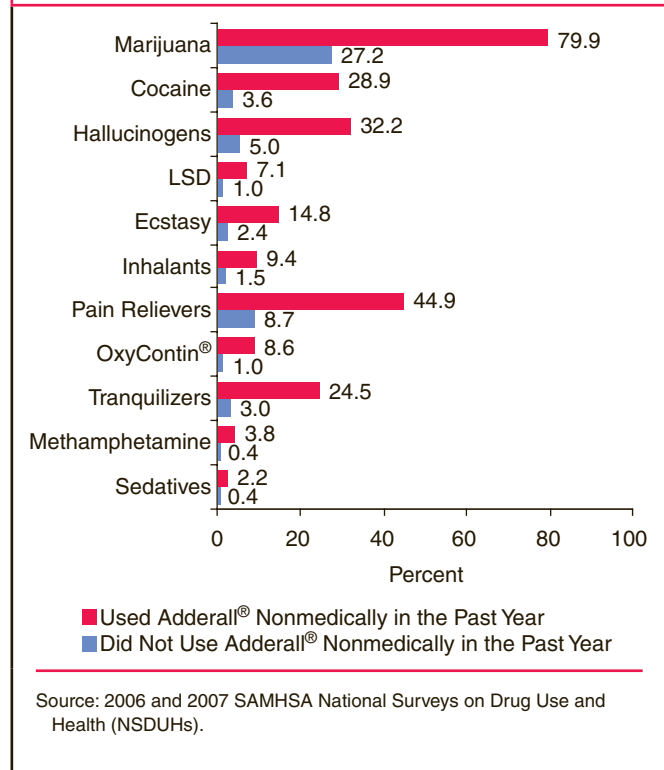
Other Drug Use

Among full-time college students, those who had used Adderall® nonmedically in the past year were more likely than those who had not used Adderall® nonmedically to have used illicit drugs or to have used other prescription drugs nonmedically in the past year. Full-time college students who were nonmedical users of Adderall® were almost 3 times as likely as those who had not used Adderall® nonmedically to have used marijuana in the past year (79.9 vs. 27.2 percent), 8 times more likely to have used cocaine in that period (28.9 vs. 3.6 percent), 8 times more likely to have been nonmedical users of prescription tranquilizers (24.5 vs. 3.0 percent), and 5 times more likely to have been nonmedical users of prescription pain relievers (44.9 vs. 8.7 percent) (Figure 2).

Alcohol Use

Among full-time college students aged 18 to 22, those who used Adderall® nonmedically in the past year were more than 1.5 times as likely as their counterparts to have used alcohol in the past month (95.4 vs. 63.0 percent), more than twice as

Figure 2. Other Drug Use in the Past Year among Full-Time College Students Aged 18 to 22, by Past Year Nonmedical Use of Adderall®: 2006 and 2007



likely to have been binge alcohol users (89.5 vs. 41.4 percent), and more than 3 times as likely to have been heavy alcohol users (55.2 vs. 15.6 percent) (Figure 3). Similar patterns were observed for underage full-time college students (i.e., those aged 18 to 20) who used Adderall® nonmedically in the past year and for nonmedical Adderall® users of legal drinking age compared with their counterparts who had not used it nonmedically (data not shown).

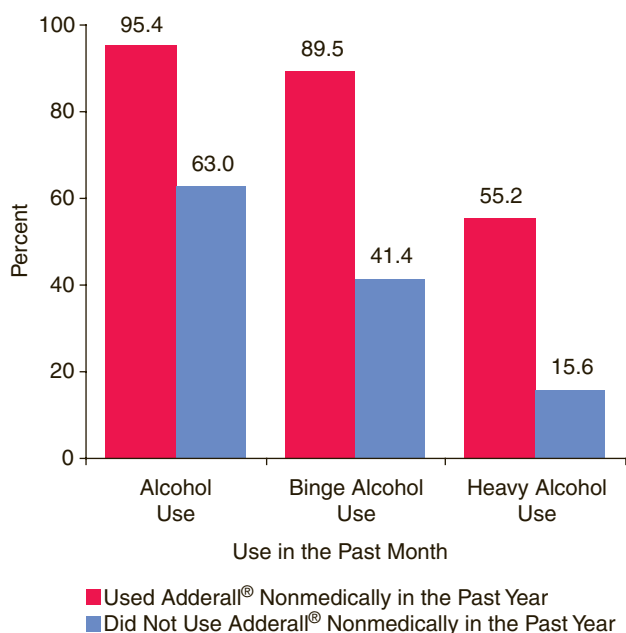
Demographic Differences

Among full-time college students aged 18 to 22, nonmedical use of Adderall® in the past year was more likely among whites (8.6 percent) than blacks (1.0 percent), Asians (2.1 percent), Hispanics (2.2 percent), or persons of two or more races (2.7 percent) (Table 1). Nonmedical use of Adderall® among full-time college students was highest among students whose annual family incomes were less than \$20,000 (8.9 percent), followed by those with annual family incomes of \$75,000 or more (6.0 percent). Rates were lower for students with annual family incomes of \$20,000 to \$49,999 (3.0 percent) or \$50,000 to \$74,999 (4.0 percent).

Discussion

The higher rate of nonmedical use of Adderall® among full-time college students than among others in the same

Figure 3. Alcohol Use in the Past Month among Full-Time College Students Aged 18 to 22, by Past Year Nonmedical Use of Adderall®: 2006 and 2007



Source: 2006 and 2007 SAMHSA National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUHs).

age range is a public health concern because of this drug’s potential for dependence or abuse. Educators, counselors, and others who work with students also need to be aware that polydrug use was prevalent among full-time college students who used Adderall® nonmedically in the past year. As noted previously, both cocaine and stimulants such as Adderall® increase a person’s risk for heart attack or stroke. Students who use Adderall® nonmedically also may need to take central nervous system depressants such as pain relievers or tranquilizers—which carry their own risks of dependence or abuse—to counteract the stimulant effects of Adderall®. Finally, high rates of binge and heavy alcohol use among full-time college students who used Adderall® nonmedically in the past year are a cause for concern because of the well-documented associations between excessive drinking among college students and the adverse consequences for students’ physical and mental health, safety, and environment.⁷

End Notes

- ¹ Prescription drug classifications (or schedules) based on the Controlled Substances Act (CSA) can be found online at <http://www.usdoj.gov/dea/pubs/scheduling.html>. For definitions of drug schedules under the CSA, see <http://www.usdoj.gov/dea/pubs/csa/812.htm#>
- ² McCabe, S. E., Knight, J. R., Teter, C. J., & Wechsler, H. (2005). Non-medical use of prescription stimulants among US college students: Prevalence and correlates from a national survey. *Addiction*, 100, 96-106.

Table 1. Nonmedical Use of Adderall® in the Past Year among Full-Time College Students Aged 18 to 22, by Selected Demographic Characteristics: 2006 and 2007

Demographic Characteristic	%
Race/Ethnicity*	
White	8.6
Black or African American	1.0
Asian	2.1
Two or More Races	2.7
Hispanic or Latino	2.2
Annual Family Income	
Less than \$20,000	8.9
\$20,000 to \$49,999	3.0
\$50,000 to \$74,999	4.0
\$75,000 or More	6.0

Source: 2006 and 2007 SAMHSA National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUHs).

- ³ National Institute on Drug Abuse. (2008, August). *NIDA InfoFacts: Cocaine*. Retrieved March 4, 2009, from <http://www.drugabuse.gov/Infofacts/cocaine.html>
- ⁴ National Institute on Drug Abuse. (2008, June). *NIDA InfoFacts: Stimulant ADHD medications – Methylphenidate and amphetamines*. Retrieved March 4, 2009, from <http://www.drugabuse.gov/Infofacts/ADHD.html>
- ⁵ Nonmedical use is defined as the use of prescription-type drugs not prescribed for the respondent by a physician or used only for the experience or feeling they caused. For this analysis, respondents with missing data for their lifetime or past year nonmedical use of Adderall® were treated as though they were nonusers.
- ⁶ Respondents were classified as full-time college students if they reported that they were in their first through fourth year (or higher) at a college or university and that they were enrolled full time. Respondents who were on break were considered enrolled if they intended to return to college or university when the break ended. Respondents aged 18 to 22 who were not full-time college students included those who were enrolled part time in college, enrolled in secondary school, or not enrolled. Respondents with unknown enrollment status were excluded from this analysis.
- ⁷ College Drinking – Changing the Culture, National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. (2007, July 11 [last reviewed]). *A snapshot of annual high-risk college drinking consequences*. Retrieved March 4, 2009, from <http://www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov/facts/snapshot.aspx>

Table and Figure Notes

* Data are not shown for American Indians or Alaska Natives and for Native Hawaiians or Other Pacific Islanders because these estimates were of low precision.

Suggested Citation

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Research findings from the SAMHSA 2006 and 2007 National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUHs)

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The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) is an annual survey sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The 2006 and 2007 data used in this report are based on information obtained from 28,027 persons aged 18 to 22. The survey collects data by administering questionnaires to a representative sample of the population through face-to-face interviews at their place of residence.

The NSDUH Report is prepared by the Office of Applied Studies (OAS), SAMHSA, and by RTI International in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina. (RTI International is a trade name of Research Triangle Institute.)

Information on the most recent NSDUH is available in the following publication:

Office of Applied Studies. (2008). *Results from the 2007 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National findings* (DHHS Publication No. SMA 08-4343, NSDUH Series H-34). Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Also available online: <http://oas.samhsa.gov>.



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