



Prescription Stimulant Medication Misuse, Abuse and Diversion: A Survey of College Students' Behaviors, Attitudes, and Perceptions

Dr. Jason Kilmer, an Associate Professor of Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences and Assistant Director of Health & Wellness for Alcohol and Other Drug Education in the Division of Student Life at the University of Washington, led research to better identify student behaviors, attitudes and perceptions toward prescription stimulant medication misuse, abuse and diversion. This research, which will inform future CPAMM-sponsored prevention programs, was conducted by the University of Washington on behalf of NASPA – Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education for The Coalition to Prevent ADHD Medication Misuse (CPAMM).

The preliminary analysis of the research data revealed that for students, perception is not reality when it comes to misuse of prescription stimulant medication.

- Most college students (83%) report not having used ADHD prescription stimulant medication non-medically in the past 12 months. However, students estimated that nearly 30% of their peers were misusing when the actual rate of misuse was 17%.
- This research included 217 students with ADHD diagnoses and valid prescriptions for stimulant medications. Of that population, 63% reported that they take medication/treatment as prescribed by a medical professional. This statistic supports that more than half of all students with ADHD surveyed are not using prescription stimulant medication in a way other than prescribed, further evidence of a gap in perception when it comes to stimulant misuse on college campuses.

Students recognize the risks in misuse of prescription stimulants.

- In particular, students reported believing that regular use of prescription stimulants outside of how they are prescribed or without a prescription can result in harm to a person's psychological, emotional, or cognitive health. Students believe that people who *regularly* use prescription stimulant medication outside of how it was prescribed or without a prescription are at great risk of harming themselves physically (42%) and even more psychologically-emotionally (55%).

Students' motives for misuse are primarily for academic reasons.

- Students who reported using prescription stimulant medication without a prescription or in a way other than prescribed by a medical professional identified a variety of reasons for doing so. The most common reported motives were related to academics:
 - To concentrate better while studying (54%)
 - To be able to study longer (53%)
 - To feel less restless while studying (35%)
 - Because it helps increase alertness (29%)
 - To concentrate better in class (19%)

- To keep better track of assignments (14%)
- To feel less restless in class (11%)

There is little or no academic benefit associated with non-medical use of prescription stimulants.

- A separate study from the University of Maryland, led by Amelia Arria, Ph.D., Director, Center on Young Adult Health and Development, School of Public Health and Principal Investigator on the College Life Study, further examined the non-medical use of prescription stimulant medication and its impact on student grade point averages (GPAs). The research tracked the GPAs of 898 college students longitudinally between academic year two and academic year three to determine whether or not non-medical use of prescription stimulants had an impact on academic performance.
- The University of Washington research confirmed the primary reasons for using prescription stimulant medications either without a prescription or in a way not prescribed are related to academics; however, separate research from the University of Maryland found that students who abstained from non-medical use of prescription stimulants had significant improvement in GPA, while students who engaged in non-medical use showed no increases in their GPAs and gained no advantage over both groups of their peers tracked in the study – those who abstained from non-medical use and those who desisted non-medical use between academic year two and three.

Students with ADHD and a valid prescription feel pressured to share.

- More than half (60%) of the 192 students surveyed with a valid prescription for stimulants have been approached by their peers to divert their medication. Of those students who have been approached, 65% felt pressure to divert their medication even though they did not want to.
- 63% of students with a valid prescription for stimulants always take it as prescribed.
- Of the students with a current prescription who were approached by someone in the past year to share their medication, 71% said they want their friends to get help and see a doctor for evaluation and possible treatment.

Students who reported non-medical use of prescription stimulants also reported higher rates of marijuana use and heavy episodic drinking.

- The University of Washington research also suggests that non-medical use of prescription stimulants could be associated with use of marijuana and heavy episodic drinking. Specifically, among students with past year non-medical use of prescription stimulants, 86% also reported past year marijuana use, 66% within the past 30 days.
- Among students who reported non-medical use of stimulants in the past year, most (88% of females, 86% males) also reported heavy episodic drinking (*defined as 4+ drinks for women and 5+ drinks for men at least once in the past 30 days*) in the past 30 days. In students who had no past year non-medical use of prescription stimulants, the prevalence of heavy episodic drinking was nearly half that rate at 47% for women and 47% for men.
- As CPAMM works to prevent the non-medical use of prescription stimulant medication, the research may help inform programming that helps address the ways in which other behaviors, such as marijuana use and heavy episodic drinking, are associated with the issue of non-medical use of prescription stimulants.

About the Coalition to Prevent ADHD Medication Misuse (CPAMM)

The Coalition to Prevent ADHD Medication Misuse (CPAMM) strives to be a trusted source of information on the issue of ADHD prescription medication misuse, abuse and diversion – with a primary focus on college students. CPAMM will also use its knowledge to make a difference and prevent the nonmedical use of these medications. Shire is the sole funder of CPAMM. Other partner organizations do not provide financial contributions to CPAMM. On a case-by-case basis, partners may be compensated to execute research and programming proposals for expenses incurred, as approved by the Coalition. All partners, including Shire, voluntarily contribute to the Coalition through their areas of expertise. For more information, visit www.CPAMM.org.

ABOUT CSHRB RESEARCH METHOD

During the 2015-2016 academic year, the research team at the University of Washington's Center for the Study of Health & Risk Behaviors (CSHRB) conducted research on behalf of NASPA for CPAMM documenting the nonmedical use of prescription stimulant medication, as well as potential medical misuse, diversion, and attitudes. A sample of 2,989 undergraduates between the ages of 18-25 (average age = 20.34 years) was collected. 7.3% of students in the sample had a current or past diagnosis of ADHD.