College Students and the Misuse, Abuse and Diversion of ADHD Prescription Stimulant Medications

Executive Summary
Research conducted by Harris Poll, 2014
Content Outline

- Research objectives
- Research methods and analytic approach
- Key takeaways
- Detailed findings
Research Objectives

- Measure college students’ awareness of ADHD prescription medication and its misuse
- Gauge college students’ perceptions of ADHD prescription medication misuse
- Assess college students’ potential motivations for misusing ADHD prescription medication
- Evaluate how different segments of the college student population vary in their views on ADHD prescription medication misuse
- Results of this research are intended for public release and to inform the actions of CPAMM and our supporters

  - For the purpose of this survey, misuse refers to any time the medicine is used in a way that is different from the doctor’s instructions and could include people who do not have a prescription for the medication but obtain it and use it, and people who have a prescription but do not use it as directed by their health care provider.
Research Method

- Online survey conducted May 15 – June 11, 2014
- Survey length = approx. 20 minutes
- n=2,056 U.S. college students, including 164 diagnosed with ADHD
  - 18-24 years old, enrolled and seeking a degree at a 4-year college or university and attending at least some in-person classes between January – June 2014
  - Sample included full-time (91%) and part-time (9%) students, living in a range of housing situations (e.g., on-campus, off-campus, with parents, etc.)
- Data weighted where necessary by age, gender, race/ethnicity, region and propensity to be online to bring them in line with their actual proportions in the population
- Statistical significance testing was conducted at the 95% level of confidence
Key Takeaways

- A majority of college students are familiar with ADHD prescription stimulant misuse and agree that it is unethical to take ADHD prescription stimulants that were not prescribed
  - However, approximately 4 in 10 agree that using ADHD prescription stimulants without a prescription is no more harmful than an energy drink or strong cup of coffee

- College students believe it’s easy for non-ADHD students to obtain ADHD prescription stimulants
  - Most cite friends with prescriptions as a likely source, and almost half believe college students who misuse get them from a health care professional by pretending to have ADHD

- College students are busy and feel stressed – and ADHD prescription stimulant misuse is seen by many as a way to keep up

Source: 2014 online survey of college students conducted by Harris Poll on behalf of CPAMM
Key Takeaways

- Nearly three in ten college students can be considered to be at-risk for misuse – either because they say they are likely to misuse ADHD prescription stimulants or because they reported having misused any prescription medication in the past year.

- A majority of college students believe that preventing misuse is not a priority at their school and that administration and professors are not aware of misuse on campus.

- College students diagnosed with ADHD are less likely to view others their age using ADHD prescription stimulants not their own as harmful and more likely to say it is acceptable for a college student with ADHD to share or even sell ADHD prescription stimulants.
  - Nearly half of ADHD college students with a prescription feel pressure to share or sell their ADHD prescription stimulant medication.

Source: 2014 online survey of college students conducted by Harris Poll on behalf of CPAMM
College Student Awareness and Attitudes about Misuse
Most college students are familiar with ADHD and believe it is a serious medical condition; two-thirds are familiar with ADHD prescription stimulant misuse.

Familiarity with ADHD and Prescription Stimulant Misuse

Heard of and Familiar (NET): 88%

- Familiarity with ADHD: 2% (Never heard of), 11% (Heard of, but not familiar), 42% (Somewhat familiar), 29% (Very familiar), 17% (Extremely familiar)

Heard of and Familiar (NET): 67%

- Familiarity with ADHD prescription stimulant misuse: 14% (Never heard of), 20% (Heard of, but not familiar), 32% (Somewhat familiar), 19% (Very familiar), 15% (Extremely familiar)

72% agree ADHD is a serious medical condition.

Percentages may not add up to 100% due to weighting, computer rounding, and/or the acceptance of multiple responses.

Source: 2014 online survey of college students conducted by Harris Poll on behalf of CPAMM
Most college students consider misuse to be unethical and a “big deal”

**Attitudes about Misuse**

- It is a big deal if someone who doesn’t have ADHD uses prescription stimulants* 80%
- It is unethical to take ADHD prescription stimulants that were not prescribed to you 75%
- Misusing ADHD prescription stimulants in order to do schoolwork is a form of cheating 59%

*Results shown indicate percentage of respondents who disagreed with the statement “It is not a big deal if someone who doesn’t have ADHD uses prescription stimulants.”
Source: 2014 online survey of college students conducted by Harris Poll on behalf of CPAMM
About three-quarters of survey respondents view ADHD prescription stimulant misuse as harmful to college students.

### Perceived Harmfulness of Substances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Substance</th>
<th>Extremely/Very Harmful (NET)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crystal meth</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steroids (non-medical reasons)</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prescription painkillers (not their own)</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cigarettes</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADHD prescription stimulants (not their own)</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marijuana</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A large amount of caffeine</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Percentages may not add up to 100% due to weighting, computer rounding, and/or the acceptance of multiple responses.**

Source: 2014 online survey of college students conducted by Harris Poll on behalf of CPAMM
While nearly 9 in 10 college students know that ADHD prescription stimulants are not safe for everyone, 4 in 10 also say that misusing is no more harmful than an energy drink or a strong cup of coffee.

Using ADHD prescription stimulants that are not prescribed to you is no more harmful than an energy drink or a strong cup of coffee:

- Strongly/Somewhat Agree: 58%
- Somewhat/Strongly Disagree: 28%
- Strongly/Somewhat Disagree: 30%
- Somewhat/Strongly Agree: 42%

Prescription stimulants used to treat ADHD are safe for anyone to use:

- Strongly disagree: 88%
- Somewhat disagree: 56%
- Somewhat agree: 33%
- Strongly agree: 9%

Percentages may not add up to 100% due to weighting, computer rounding, and/or the acceptance of multiple responses. Source: 2014 online survey of college students conducted by Harris Poll on behalf of CPAMM.
College Student Perceptions of Misusers
College students believe misuse is somewhat common and that ADHD prescription stimulants are easy to obtain without a prescription.

How Many College Students Do You Think Have Ever Used ADHD Prescription Stimulants Not Prescribed to them?

- 58%: At least some (NET): 75%
- 20%: None
- 4%: A few
- 17%: Some
- 5%: Most
- *: All

71% of college students think it is very or somewhat easy for college students who do not have a prescription for ADHD stimulants to obtain them. Only 3% say it would be very difficult.

The asterisk (*) represents <0.5% of students who think all students have ever used ADHD prescription stimulants not prescribed to them. Percentages may not add up to 100% due to weighting, computer rounding, and/or the acceptance of multiple responses. Source: 2014 online survey of college students conducted by Harris Poll on behalf of CPAMM.
Friends with a prescription are perceived as the top source for college students who misuse ADHD prescription stimulants. The survey conducted by Harris Poll on behalf of CPAMM in 2014 shows the following responses:

- **Friends who have a prescription:** 87%
- **From someone who illegally sells drugs:** 67%
- **Pretend to have ADHD to get a prescription from a HCP:** 48%
- **Theft:** 32%
- **Other:** 8%
- **Not sure:** 6%

*Multiple responses accepted.*

Source: 2014 online survey of college students conducted by Harris Poll on behalf of CPAMM
College students who misuse ADHD prescription stimulants are seen as stressed and poor decision makers.

Feelings about Misusers
Top 8 Characteristics*

- Stressed: 58%
- Poor decision makers: 56%
- Misinformed: 43%
- Unethical: 39%
- Risk-takers: 33%
- Cheaters: 27%
- Lazy: 26%
- Competitive: 25%

*Multiple responses accepted.

Source: 2014 online survey of college students conducted by Harris Poll on behalf of CPAMM
College students think ADHD stimulant medication is most commonly misused for academic purposes.

**Perceived Reasons for Misuse***

- Stay awake to study or do schoolwork: 80%
- Improve their concentration: 72%
- Stay awake to be able to work at their paid job: 52%
- Stay awake to go to parties, clubs, etc.: 41%
- Stay awake for some other reason: 39%
- Have fun: 33%
- Lose weight: 20%
- Other: 5%
- Not sure: 6%

*Multiple responses accepted.

Source: 2014 online survey of college students conducted by Harris Poll on behalf of CPAMM
And many college students feel pressured to succeed – at any cost

Attitudes About the Pressure of Academics and Stress

I would do anything to get an A 64%

I struggle to keep up with my schoolwork 39%

I will do whatever it takes to succeed academically, even if I have to break the rules 29%

Source: 2014 online survey of college students conducted by Harris Poll on behalf of CPAMM
A quarter of college students say they are at least somewhat likely to misuse ADHD prescription stimulants

Likelihood to Use ADHD Prescription Stimulants in a Way That is Different from a Doctor’s Instructions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Likelihood</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extremely likely</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very likely</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat likely</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all likely</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least somewhat likely (NET): 26%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Decline to answer: 1%*

Percentages may not add up to 100% due to weighting, computer rounding, and/or the acceptance of multiple responses.

Source: 2014 online survey of college students conducted by Harris Poll on behalf of CPAMM
Nearly 3 in 10 college students can be considered at-risk for misuse

College Students At-Risk for Misuse

**Past Misusers** are college students who say they have used any prescription medications not prescribed to them in the past school year.

**At-risk group**

**Unlikely Misusers** are college students who say they have not misused prescription medications and say they are not at all likely to misuse ADHD prescription stimulants.

**Potential Misusers** are college students who say they have not misused prescription medications, but say they are at least somewhat likely to misuse ADHD prescription stimulants.

Source: 2014 online survey of college students conducted by Harris Poll on behalf of CPAMM
College Engagement with the Issue
Many college students see their schools as unaware of student misuse and not making prevention a priority

Beliefs About ADHD Prescription Stimulant Misuse at College

- Preventing misuse is not a priority among the administration and professors at my school: 63%
- My school does not make it clear that they do not approve of misuse*: 58%
- The administration and professors at my school are not aware of the misuse on campus**: 57%
- Misuse is a problem at my school: 40%

*Results shown indicate percentage of respondents who disagreed with the statements “My school makes it clear that they do not approve of misuse.” and **“The administration and professors at my school are aware of the misuse on campus.”

Source: 2014 online survey of college students conducted by Harris Poll on behalf of CPAMM
Spotlight on Members of Greek Organizations* and Athletes**

*Greek organizations are defined as fraternities and sororities. **Athletes are defined as members of varsity, junior varsity, intramural and/or club teams.
College students that are members of Greek organizations* and athletes** are more likely than their counterparts to say they will misuse ADHD prescription stimulants.

At least somewhat likely (NET):

- Members of Greek Organizations*: 40%
  - Extremely likely: 6%
  - Very likely: 11%
  - Somewhat likely: 23%
- Yes (n=318), No (n=1,738)

- Athletes**: 36%
  - Extremely likely: 5%
  - Very likely: 11%
  - Somewhat likely: 21%
- Yes (n=582), No (n=1,474)

Percentages may not add up to 100% due to weighting, computer rounding, and/or the acceptance of multiple responses.

*Greek organizations are defined as fraternities and sororities. 15% of students are members of Greek organizations.

**Athletes are defined as members of varsity, junior varsity, intramural and/or club teams. 28% of students are athletes.

Source: 2014 online survey of college students conducted by Harris Poll on behalf of CPAMM
College students that are members of Greek organizations* and athletes** also view misuse as more acceptable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Total College Students (n=2,056)</th>
<th>Members of Greek Organizations* (n=318)</th>
<th>Athletes** (n=582)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Using ADHD prescription stimulants can help students get better grades even if they don't have ADHD</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are certain situations when it is OK to take ADHD prescription stimulants that were not prescribed to you</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is not a big deal if someone who doesn't have ADHD uses prescription stimulants</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is acceptable for a college student with ADHD to share their prescription stimulants with a friend*</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Greek organizations are defined as fraternities and sororities.
**Athletes are defined as members of varsity, junior varsity, intramural and/or club teams.
Source: 2014 online survey of college students conducted by Harris Poll on behalf of CPAMM
Spotlight on College Students Diagnosed with ADHD
Among college students diagnosed with ADHD, nearly 6 in 10 have a prescription for an ADHD stimulant medication, and almost half feel at least a little pressure to share or sell the medication.

- **Ever Diagnosed with ADHD?**
  - Yes, 8%
  - No, 92%

- **Currently Has a Prescription for an ADHD Stimulant?**
  - Yes, 57%
  - No, 40%
  - Decline to answer, 3%

- **Pressure Felt to Share/Sell Their Prescription Stimulants**
  - A lot: 11%
  - A little: 35%
  - None: 54%

*Small base (n<100)*

Source: 2014 online survey of college students conducted by Harris Poll on behalf of CPAMM
Over one-quarter of college students diagnosed with ADHD believe it is acceptable to share their prescription with a friend and/or sell it to make money.

**Acceptability of Sharing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% Very/Somewhat Acceptable</th>
<th>Diagnosed with ADHD</th>
<th>Not Diagnosed with ADHD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A college student with ADHD shares their ADHD prescription stimulants with a friend</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A college student with ADHD sells their ADHD prescription stimulants to make money</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

45% of college students with ADHD agree that there are certain situations when it is OK to take ADHD prescription stimulants that were not prescribed (almost twice as often as the 23% of college students without ADHD).

Source: 2014 online survey of college students conducted by Harris Poll on behalf of CPAMM
Only half of survey respondents with ADHD view misuse of prescription stimulants as harmful to college students.

Harmfulness of Substances
% Extremely/Very Harmful

- **Use Crystal Meth**: 96% Diagnosed, 97% Not Diagnosed
- **Use Steroids (non-medical reasons)**: 87% Diagnosed, 90% Not Diagnosed
- **Use prescription painkillers (not their own)**: 80% Diagnosed, 84% Not Diagnosed
- **Smoke cigarettes**: 79% Diagnosed, 84% Not Diagnosed
- **Use ADHD prescription stimulants (not their own)**: 53% Diagnosed, 75% Not Diagnosed
- **Drink Alcohol**: 35% Diagnosed, 39% Not Diagnosed
- **Use Marijuana**: 30% Diagnosed, 40% Not Diagnosed
- **Drink a large amount of caffeine**: 29% Diagnosed, 34% Not Diagnosed

Source: 2014 online survey of college students conducted by Harris Poll on behalf of CPAMM