

Survey on Misuse and Abuse of Prescription Stimulants Among College Students and Other Young Adults KEY FINDINGS: Released November 13, 2014

A new, nationally representative survey released today by the [Partnership for Drug-Free Kids](#) confirms that the abuse of prescription stimulants is becoming normalized among current college students and other young adults. The online study found that young adults often misuse and abuse prescription (Rx) stimulants as a way to manage the daily demands of academics, work and social pressures. The survey is being released today at a panel discussion at New York University, hosted by the Partnership for Drug-Free Kids and titled *Under Pressure: College Students and the Abuse of Rx Stimulants*.

Prevalence of Rx Stimulant Abuse Among Young Adults

The new research found that 1 in 5 college students (20 percent) report abusing prescription stimulants at least once in their lifetime, compared to 1 in 7 non-students (15 percent). Older students are also more prone to engage in these behaviors: the data found that among current students, sophomores, juniors, seniors and graduate students are significantly more likely to abuse Rx stimulants than college freshmen.

Overscheduled, Overstressed and Overworked: Young People Turn to Rx Stimulants to Manage Stress

The new study confirms that young adults generally misuse and abuse prescription stimulants for functional reasons:

- Half of all young adults surveyed (50 percent) report abusing Rx stimulants to study or improve academic performance
- More than 4 in 10 (41 percent) say they misuse or abuse them to stay awake
- Almost one-fourth (24 percent) misuse or abuse Rx stimulants to improve work performance at a job

Among current college students specifically:

- More than 4 in 10 (44 percent) say they abuse Rx stimulants in order to study and improve academic performance, while 31 percent say they abuse in order to stay awake
- More than 1 in 5 (21 percent) report abusing Rx stimulants in order to improve work performance at their jobs
- More than a quarter of students (27 percent) who report abuse of Rx stimulants also hold full-time jobs, in addition to attending school (compared to 12 percent of those who do not abuse Rx stimulants)

The research also shows that college students perceive tangible rewards *after* they abuse Rx stimulants.

- Nearly two-thirds of college students (64 percent) who report abusing Rx stimulants indicate that doing so helped them obtain a higher grade, improve work performance or gain a competitive edge.
- Current college students who do report abuse of prescription stimulants are also more likely to feel pressure to abuse prescription stimulants to improve academic performance, compared to those who do not abuse (50 percent vs. 19 percent). They are also less likely to think that their parents would be upset if she or he were to abuse prescription medicines to increase academic performance (62 percent vs. 79 percent).
- Compared to those who do not abuse prescription stimulants, current college students and other young adults who do report abuse tend to have more social and active lifestyles. These young adults are influencers who are at the center of their social circles and are more likely to see themselves as leaders (60 percent vs. 51 percent); enjoy being the center of attention (43 percent vs. 28 percent); and consider themselves to be the “social hub” among their friends (38 percent vs. 22 percent).

- Young adults who report abuse of Rx stimulants (40 percent) also tend to struggle more often to balance their social and work lives than those who don't abuse (27 percent). This trend is more prevalent when comparing students who abuse Rx stimulants (50 percent) versus those students who do not (33 percent).

Ease of Access: Many Young Adults Exaggerate Symptoms to Facilitate Abuse of Rx Stimulants

The accessibility and social acceptance of the behavior of Rx stimulant abuse is making it easier for young adults to misuse these medications. The research also shows that those who engage in the behavior are mostly obtaining the Rx medicine from their friends (and not from dealers).

- More than half of young adults (56 percent) indicate that it is easy to obtain Rx stimulants that were not prescribed to them and a majority of them (58 percent) say they have friends who abuse Rx stimulants.
- Of those who said they abuse Rx stimulants, 57 percent report that the last time they abused, they received the medication from a friend, while 10 percent report obtaining it from a family member and 6 percent from a "dealer."
- Almost all young adults (96 percent) who abuse Rx stimulants report that they believe their friends abuse prescription stimulants as well.
- More than a quarter of young adults (28 percent) who have been legally prescribed Rx stimulants share their medicine with friends. A large portion of these young adults (52 percent) also report being pressured by their friends into sharing or selling their Rx stimulants.
- Among those individuals who are legally prescribed Rx stimulants, more than 1 in 4 young adults (28 percent) report exaggerating symptoms to obtain a larger dosage of their medication from their physicians.

Young Adults: Abuse of Rx Stimulants Less Risky than Rx Pain Relievers, Cigarettes or Binge Drinking

Overall, young adults view the abuse of Rx stimulants as less risky than the abuse of prescription pain relievers, smoking cigarettes or binge drinking. Those who do not abuse Rx stimulants are also more likely to associate risks in doing so.

- When compared to their counterparts who abuse Rx stimulants, this group of non-abusing young people is more likely to believe that the abuse of prescription stimulants can endanger one's health (80 percent), lead to addiction (79 percent) or cause an overdose (77 percent).
- On the other hand, most of those who do abuse Rx stimulants (73 percent) agree that the side effect "not being able to sleep" is a risk associated with abusing prescribed stimulants.

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