

# Research highlights the increasing problem of prescription drug abuse among youth

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Young people are increasingly turning to prescription drugs to get high. Research out of the University of Cincinnati sheds new light on what could increase or lower that risk.

The research by Keith King, a University of Cincinnati professor of health promotion; Rebecca Vidourek, a UC assistant professor of health promotion; and Ashley Merianos, a graduate assistant in [health promotion](#), is published in the current issue of the *Journal of Primary Prevention*.

The study focused on more than 54,000 7th- through 12th - grade students in schools across Greater Cincinnati, including the Tristate regions of Ohio, Kentucky and Indiana.

The data was collected by the Coalition for a Drug Free Greater Cincinnati as part of the 2009-2010 Pride Survey on adolescent drug use in America.

A total of 13.7 percent of the students reported using prescription drugs – without a doctor's prescription – in their lifetime. Males were more likely to abuse prescription drugs, as well as [high school students](#), versus junior high school students. Among ethnicities studied, [Hispanic students](#) indicated they were more likely to use nonmedical prescription drugs compared with white and African-American students.

The study also found that pro-social behaviors, including strong

connections with parents (and their advising on the dangers of drug use), reduced the students' odds of abusing prescription drugs, along with positive connections to teachers and their schools. Connections with peers who disapproved of substance abuse also decreased student chances of abusing prescription medications. "Students at every grade level who reported high levels of parent and peer disapproval of use were at decreased odds for lifetime nonmedical prescription drug use," according to the study.

On the other hand, the authors found that relationships with drug-using peers increase the risk of youth substance abuse. Peer use of alcohol, tobacco and marijuana were associated with increased use of nonmedical prescription drugs for all students.

"While much research has examined factors associated with overall substance use among youth, relatively few studies have specifically investigated risk factors, protective factors and sex/grade differences for youth involvement in nonmedical prescription use," write the authors.

"Identifying specific risk and protective factors for males, females, junior high and high school [students](#) would help to clarify prevention needs and enhance prevention programming."

The study cites national research that indicates kids are turning to prescription drugs to get high under the mistaken notion that they're safer than illicit drugs, yet national research has shown that even short-term use of non-prescribed, [prescription medications](#) can cause cardiovascular and respiratory distress, seizures and death.

The authors suggest future research should explore young people's use of specific nonmedical [prescription drugs](#).

## **Demographics of the Study**

The study was close to evenly divided between male (49.4 percent) and female participants; 75 percent reported they were Caucasian; 14.4 percent African-American; 1.8 percent Hispanic/Latino; 2.4 percent Asian/Pacific Islander; 0.4 percent Native American; 4.1 percent multiracial and 1.5 percent selected "other" for ethnicity. Respondents were close to evenly distributed across 7th- through 12th-grades.

Approximately two-thirds (62.4 percent) of participants reported living with both parents; 16.2 percent reported living with their mother only; 2.9 percent reported living with their father only.

Provided by University of Cincinnati

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