

One in ten teens using 'study drugs,' but parents aren't paying attention

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As high schoolers prepare for final exams, teens nationwide may be tempted to use a "study drug"—a prescription stimulant or amphetamine—to gain an academic edge. But a new University of Michigan poll shows only one in 100 parents of teens 13-17 years old believes that their teen has used a study drug.

Study drugs refer to stimulant medications typically prescribed for the treatment of [attention deficit hyperactivity disorder](#) (ADHD); commonly prescribed medicines in this category include Adderall, Concerta, Ritalin, and Vyvanse.

Among [parents](#) of [teens](#) who have not been prescribed a stimulant medication for ADHD, just 1% said they believe their teen has used a study [drug](#) to help study or improve grades, according to the latest University of Michigan Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health. However, recent national data from Monitoring the Future indicate that 10% of high school sophomores and 12% of [high school seniors](#) say they've used an [amphetamine](#) or stimulant medication not prescribed by their doctor.

Sometimes students without ADHD take someone else's medication, to try to stay awake and alert and try to improve their scores on exams or assignments. Taking study drugs has not been proven to improve students' grades, and it can be very dangerous to their health, says Matthew M. Davis, M.D., M.A.P.P., director of the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital [National Poll](#) on Children's Health.

"Taking these medications when they are not prescribed for you can lead to acute exhaustion, [abnormal heart rhythms](#) and even confusion and psychosis if the teens get addicted and go into withdrawal," says Davis.

"What we found in this poll is a clear mismatch between what parents believe and what their kids are reporting. But even though parents may not be recognizing these behaviors in their own kids, this poll also showed that one-half of the parents say they are very concerned about this abuse in their communities," Davis says.

White parents were most likely to say they are "very concerned" (54%), compared with black (38%) and Hispanic/Latino (37%) parents.

Despite this concern, only 27 percent of parents polled said they have talked to their teens about using study drugs. Black parents were more likely to have discussed this issue with their teens (41%), compared with white (27%) or Hispanic (17%) parents.

"If we are going to make a dent in this problem, and truly reduce the abuse of these drugs, we need parents, educators, health care professionals and all who interact with teens to be more proactive about discussing the issue," says Davis.

Over three-quarters of parents polled said they support school policies aimed at stopping abuse of study drugs in middle schools and high schools. Overall, 76% of parents said they believe schools should be required to discuss the dangers of ADHD medication abuse.

Another 79% support a policy to require students with a prescription for ADHD medications to keep their pills in a secure location such as the school nurse's office—a requirement that would prohibit students from carrying medicines of this nature that could potentially be shared with, or sold to, other students.

"We know teens may be sharing drugs or spreading the word that these medications can give their grades a boost. But the bottom line is that these prescription medications are drugs, and teens who use them without a prescription are taking a serious risk with their health," Davis says.

More information: mottnpch.org/reports-surveys/one-ten-teens-using-study-drugs-are-parents-paying-attention

Provided by University of Michigan Health System

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