

Majority of teens think prescription stimulant use is a problem among peers, study finds

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(Medical Xpress)—Two-thirds of young people surveyed said the use of prescription stimulants is a moderate-to-large problem among youth, according to a new University of Florida study. Nearly 15 percent said they had used a prescription stimulant, the study shows, and almost 12 percent reported diverting medications by giving their stimulants to a peer or taking someone else's pills.

The National Monitoring of Adolescent Prescription Stimulants Study involved surveys of more than 11,000 youth ages 10 to 18 from urban, rural and suburban areas in and around 10 U.S. cities. It is the first national study to monitor prescription stimulant use in both preteens and teens, including non-medical use, with significant details for each topic. The study findings appear in the September issue of the journal *Current Opinion in Psychiatry*.

Other studies have documented teens and college students using prescription stimulants non-medically as "study drugs" to enhance concentration. Stimulants such as Ritalin, Adderall and Concerta are typically prescribed to help patients with [attention deficit hyperactivity disorder](#) stay focused and to control [behavior problems](#). But when the drugs are taken incorrectly or without a prescription, they can increase blood pressure, heart rate and body temperature and decrease sleep and appetite, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse. At high doses, they can lead to [cardiovascular problems](#).

For the UF study, led by Linda B. Cottler, chair of the department of epidemiology in the College of Public Health and Health Professions and the College of Medicine, researchers surveyed 11,048 preteens and teens in Boston, Cincinnati, Denver, Houston, Los Angeles, New York City, Philadelphia, St. Louis, Seattle and Tampa, Fla. Interviewers recruited participants at venues where [young people](#) congregate, such as [shopping malls](#), [movie theaters](#), sports and recreation centers, arcades and skate parks. The study was carried out during four time periods, starting in 2008 and ending in 2011.

Participants completed written questionnaires and were shown photos of brand name prescription stimulants to help them identify which medications they have used. Non-medical use was assessed by asking participants if they have ever taken more stimulants than their doctor had prescribed, used someone else's stimulants, or taken stimulants "to get high," "out of curiosity" or "just because."

Nearly 15 percent of participants said they had used a prescription stimulant in their lifetime, with rates highest among 16- to 18-year-olds. Seven percent of all participants said they had taken a stimulant within the past 30 days with more than half of that—almost 4 percent—being non-medical use. About 12 percent reported diverting stimulants either by giving them to a peer or taking someone else's prescription stimulants. Sixteen- to 18-year-olds in rural areas reported the highest rate of diversion at 17 percent.

"I was surprised at how consistent the findings were from city to city and time point to time point," said Cottler, the College of Public Health and Health Professions' associate dean for research and planning. "I was also surprised at how much diversion is being reported."

Cottler and study co-authors Catherine Striley, an assistant professor of epidemiology, and Sonam Lasopa, an epidemiology doctoral student,

also found that 63 percent of the study participants believe that prescription stimulant use is a moderate-to-large problem among youth.

One way to address the problem of prescription stimulant misuse is to control access, Cottler said.

"Health care providers should be cautious about prescribing stimulant medications to young people for non-significant issues," she said.

"Parents should talk to their kids and let them know that medications should not be shared for any reason."

Provided by University of Florida

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