

Research finds prescription drug misuse among college students most common during weekdays

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College students who misuse prescription drugs do so more often during the week and when they are alone at home, according to a recent study

published in the journal *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*.

The [longitudinal study](#), "College-based social and situational predictors of real-time prescription drug misuse in daily life," surveyed college students at a large university in the midwestern United States. The participants were asked about their prescription drug use and whether they used the medications in any way the doctor did not intend, such as changing the allowed dosage and frequency of when the medication was taken, or using someone else's prescription medication.

The findings shed new light on how and when college students misuse [prescriptions](#). SMU (Southern Methodist University) associate professor Chrystyna D. Kouros, director of the Family Health & Development Lab in SMU's Department of Psychology, said the study she co-authored revealed potential differences in the way college students misuse [prescription drugs](#) when compared to studies of how college students use other substances.

"Whereas other studies have shown that [alcohol use](#), and to some extent marijuana use, is most likely to occur in [social situations](#) with peers and on the weekends, we found that the context of prescription drug misuse appears to be different," Kouros said. "In our study, college students were more likely to endorse misusing [prescription medication](#) in moments when they were alone and at home. They were also more likely to misuse prescription medications during the week versus the weekend, and earlier in the day instead of the evening," Kouros added.

For the purposes of the study, the researchers focused on four classes of prescription drugs: Pain relievers, stimulants, sedatives and tranquilizers. Researchers used ecological momentary assessment (EMA) to query the participating 297 students to record their behavior in daily life. EMA requires repeated sampling of subjects' current behaviors and experiences in real time, in the participants' natural environments.

Students used an iPod Touch that prompted them four times a day to answer a brief survey. Students could also initiate a report if they were about to misuse a prescription.

The study suggests there might be different motivating factors underlying misuse of prescription drugs compared to other substances, Kouros said.

"Current college-based prevention and intervention programs, thus, may need to be tailored or revised to also capture prescription drug misuse," she added.

The study was funded by a grant from the National Institutes of Health. The principal investigator was Lauren M. Papp, associate dean for research and the Vaughan Bascom Professor in Women, Family and Community at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Papp is also director of the UW Couples Lab at Wisconsin-Madison.

"It is our hope these findings about prescription drug [misuse](#) among [college students](#) help better inform colleges and universities in their important outreach and support efforts for students who might be struggling with problematic prescription behaviors," Papp said.

Other co-authors are Brian C. Kelly, professor of sociology at Purdue University; and, Shari Blumenstock, a postdoctoral fellow at Indiana University's Kinsey Institute.

More information: Chrystyna D. Kouros et al, College-based social and situational predictors of real-time prescription drug misuse in daily life, *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2021.108969](#)

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