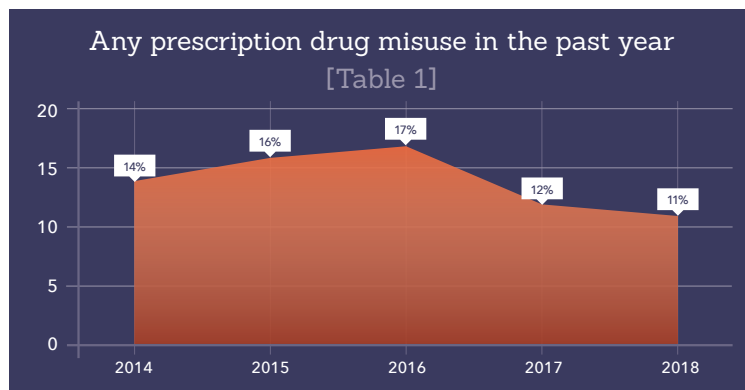


Prescription Drug Misuse among Missouri College Students

Partners in Prevention (PIP) is Missouri's higher education substance abuse consortium dedicated to creating healthy and safe college campuses. The coalition is comprised of 21 public and private colleges and universities in the state that work to decrease high-risk behaviors among college students by implementing strategic plans for prevention utilizing evidence-based strategies. To measure progress and obtain data, PIP conducts the Missouri Assessment of College Health Behaviors (MACHB) Survey. The MACHB is an annual, online survey implemented each spring to assess the impact that alcohol, drugs (illegal and prescription), tobacco, interpersonal violence, and mental health issues have on student health and wellness. Students are asked to report if they have misused prescription drugs in the past year, defined as using a prescription drug without a doctor's prescription.

Background

The rate of students who report any prescription drug misuse in the past year reached PIP's lowest recorded rate in 2018. However, on some campuses the rate of prescription drug misuse has risen or remained stagnant, and rates on individual campuses range from 4% to 20%.



According to the 2018 MACHB, 69% of students who have misused any type of prescription drug report that they used 1-6 times per year. Stimulants are the most commonly misused prescription drug among Missouri college students, though there are a few campuses where pain medications are misused at a higher rate than stimulants.

Among students who report any prescription drug misuse in the past year, 25% are freshmen, 19% are

sophomores, 24% are juniors, 20% are seniors, and 8.7% have 5 or more years in school (another 2.3% were N/A or PNR).

Which of the following prescription drugs have you used without a doctor's prescription? [Table 2]	
Stimulants (e.g. Dexedrine, Adderall, Ritalin, Concerta)	6.4%
Pain Medications (e.g., Vicodin, OxyCotin, Tylenol 3 with Codeine, Demerol, Morphine)	4.2%
Sleeping Medications (e.g., Ambien, Halcion, Restoril)	1.5%
Benzodiazepines/sedatives (e.g. Xanax, Klonopin, Valium)	2.6%
Other	0.5%

Most Missouri college students report that they were either given their prescription drugs (58%) or that they purchase them from other people (44%) and a small percentage of students report stealing them (3.7%)*. Students also report that they most frequently obtain prescription drugs from friends (69%), family (26%), and floor/roommates (12%)*. Almost 3/4 (71%) of students who misuse prescription drugs report that they think it is fairly

92% of students who do not misuse prescription drugs self-report a GPA of 3.0 or higher compared to **76%** of students who report misusing prescription drugs.

or very easy to obtain prescription drugs without a doctor's prescription, an increase from 53% in 2015. Though fewer students report misusing prescription drugs, students who misuse believe that it is easy for students to access prescription drugs without a prescription at higher rates than in previous years. Among all Missouri college students, 82% believe that misusing prescription drugs and using illegal drugs are equally dangerous.

*Select all that apply

Prescription Drug Misuse and Other Behaviors

Fifty-three percent (53%) of students who report prescription drug misuse report binge-drinking (consuming 5+ drinks in a two hour period) at least once in the past two weeks. Comparatively, 20% of students who have not misused prescription drugs report binge-drinking at least once in the past 2 weeks. Approximately 36% of students who have misused prescription drugs in the past year report mixing alcohol with prescription drugs, which can have serious side effects ranging from nausea, drowsiness, and dizziness, to changes in blood pressure, organ damage, and increased risk of overdose.¹ Thirty percent of students who have misused prescription drugs also report driving after use. While not all medications impair driving, many common prescription drugs can cause reactions that may affect an individual's ability to drive.²

Stress and Prescription Drug Misuse

This brief examines stress levels and sources of stress among students who misuse prescription drugs compared to students who do not use. Students who misuse prescription drugs report higher levels of unmanageable stress and higher rates of it impacting their life than students who do not misuse

prescription drugs (shown in table 3). Students who misused prescription drugs also reported more stress from physical health concerns (36%) and mental health concerns (34%) than non-users (29% and 21% respectively). Students who misused prescription drugs were also more likely to use negative coping skills to relieve stress than non-users, such as using alcohol (47% vs 21%), using tobacco (14% vs 3.6%) and using marijuana (40% vs 7.1%).

	Any use	No use
Stress is unbearable/overwhelming	39%	30%
Stress has impacted academic life considerably/a great deal	36%	25%
Stress has impacted personal life considerably/a great deal	44%	34%

Conclusion

It is encouraging that the rate of prescription drug misuse has declined over the past few years, but it is important to keep monitoring this trend. While rates of use are going down, students who misuse perceive that it is easy to access prescription drugs without a prescription. It also appears that students who misuse prescription drugs may exhibit other high-risk behaviors such as binge-drinking or other drug use. MACHB data also indicates that higher levels of stress are experienced by students who misuse prescription drugs than their peers who do not use.

Contact Partners in Prevention at (573) 884-7551.

Report prepared 7/23/18 by Margo Leitschuh, communications coordinator. Data prepared by Dan Reilly, research coordinator, Dong Ding, graduate research assistant, Erica Braham, graduate research assistant, and Alex Swanson, graduate research assistant.

References

1.Harmful Interactions: Mixing Alcohol with Medicines. (2014). National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism.

2.Driving When You Are Taking Medications. (2013). U.S. Federal Drug Administration.

Published December 3, 2018