RESEARCH OVERVIEW: NONMEDICAL USE OF PRESCRIPTION DRUGS AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS

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Most Commonly Misused Prescription Drugs Among College Students

- **Stimulants**
  - For ADHD

- **Central Nervous System Depressants**
  - For anxiety and sleep disorders

- **Opioids**
  - For pain
College Student Use

- Between 4.1-10.8% of college students reporting using Rx drugs nonmedically in the past year (McCabe et al, 2005; Arria et al, 2008; Teter et al 2006).

- Students who used nonmedical stimulants were more likely to be heavy drinkers (Garnier et al, 2009).

- Students who took an opioid for reasons other than for pain relief (getting high or experimenting) had a much greater risk of experiencing three or more drug-use related problems (McCabe et al, 2007).

- Students who take prescription drugs for nonmedical reasons are at least five times more likely to develop a drug abuse problem than those who don’t (McCabe, 2008).
Characteristics Associated with Nonmedical Use of Rx drugs

- Excessive drinking and other drug use
- Low perception of harmfulness of using Rx drugs nonmedically
- Lower GPA
- Psychiatric distress or depressed mood
- Skipping class
- Fraternity/Sorority affiliation

Sources: Garnier-Dykstra et al, 2012; McCabe et al, 2005; Herman-Stahl et al, 2007; Arria et al, 2008; Arria et al, 2011
Reasons for College Student Nonmedical Use of Prescription Drugs

- Improve grades
- Maintaining focus/late-night study sessions/all-nighters
- Lose weight
- Feel good/get high
- Coping with stress
- Parties and social scenes

Sources: McCabe, et al. 2007; White, et al. 2006
Nonmedical Use of Prescription Drugs

- Prescription stimulants (such as Ritalin® or Adderall®) are:
  - Used by individuals who do not have a prescription
  - Used in a way that was not prescribed per physician’s instructions

- Some students mistakenly believe that using these drugs will:
  - Help them concentrate
  - Enhance academic performance
Most Common Sources

- **Legitimate Prescriptions**
  - 5.3% of college students are prescribed ADHA medications.

- **Diversion**
  - *Defined*: sharing, using, trading, or selling Rx medication.
  - In one study, 61.7% of students with ADHD reported diverting their medication.
  - Most students obtain drugs from a friend who has a prescription.

Source: Garnier, et al, 2010
Issues

☐ Potential hybridization (the case of ecstasy)
☐ New prescription drugs
☐ Ongoing monitoring
☐ The public health problem