

Non-medical Use of Prescription and Non- prescription Medications

Center for the Study of Student Life

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INTRODUCTION

The Survey on the Non-medical Use of Prescription and Non-prescription Medications was designed to assess The Ohio State University's student misuse and abuse of prescription and non-prescription medications. Questions covered pain, sedative, and stimulant medications and related to frequency of use, reasons for use, and consequences of use. The survey was conducted in autumn 2011 on the Ohio State Columbus campus with a sample of 5,000 students; 975 students responded, yielding a response rate of 20%.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **11.4%** of students reported having used prescription stimulants for non-medical purposes
- Student perceptions of non-medical prescription drug use were much higher than actual use
- **67.5%** of students who used prescription stimulants non-medically first used them in college
- **32.4%** of pain medication use, **21.0%** of sedative use, and **10.0%** of stimulant use was “to get high”

DEMOGRAPHICS

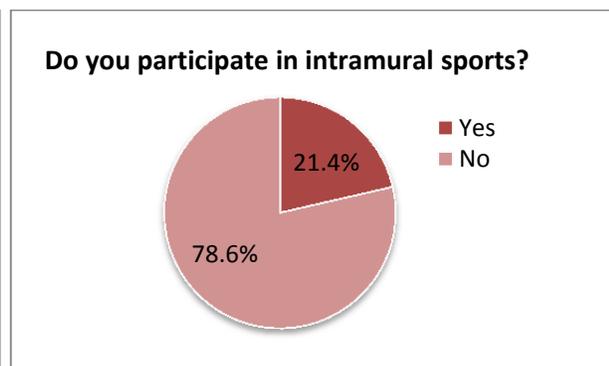
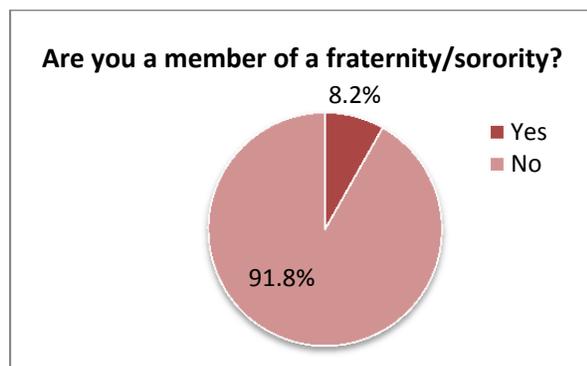
The majority of respondents (70.3%) were undergraduate students, followed by graduate (22.7%), and professional (6.2%) students. Most respondents (60.8%) were at least 21 years of age, with nearly 35% of these aged

23 or older. Grade point average (GPA) varied, with the highest percentage of respondents reporting a GPA within the range of 3.51-3.99.

Gender	%
Male	38.6%
Female	60.6%

Class Rank	%
First year	18.7%
Second year	16.2%
Third year	16.7%
Fourth year	17.4%
Fifth year undergraduate or more	6.9%
Graduate (masters)	10.2%
Graduate (doctoral)	8.8%
Professional	3.7%
Other	1.3%

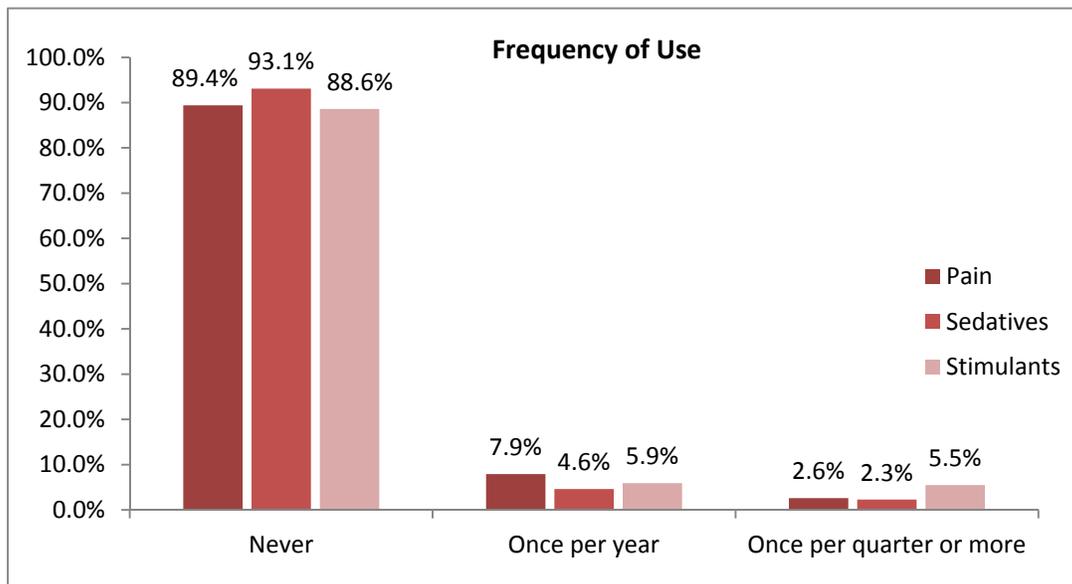
Ethnicity	%
African American/Black	4.4%
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.9%
Asian American/Pacific Islander	13.2%
Hispanic/Latino(a)	1.8%
White/Caucasian	75.7%
Multiracial	2.8%
Other	1.4%



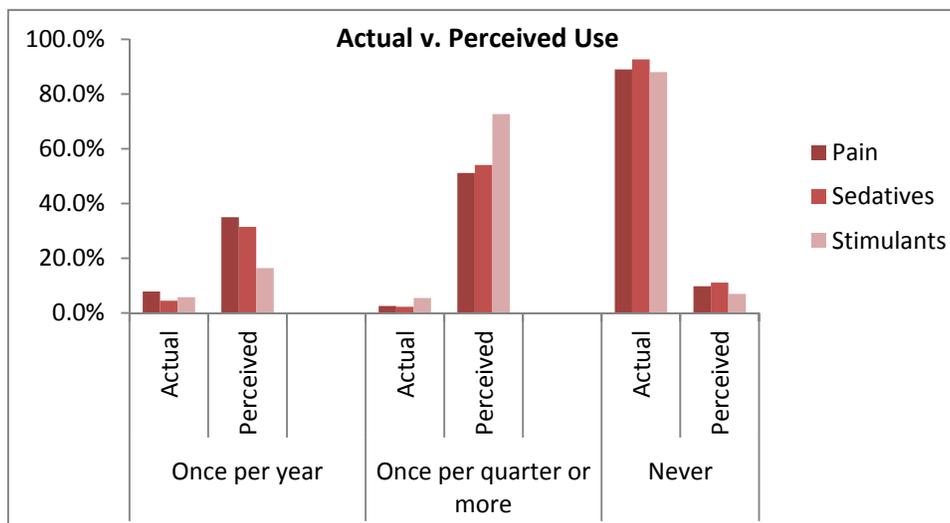
FINDINGS

PERCEIVED V. ACTUAL USE

Students were asked how often they took each of three types of prescription medications that were not prescribed to them (pain medication, sedatives, and stimulants). The most commonly used were stimulants (11.4%), followed closely by pain medications (10.5%). Stimulants were used significantly more often among intramural participants in comparison to non-participants; 8.5% of intramural participants reported using stimulants at least once per quarter, compared to 4.8% of non-participants. Stimulants were also used more often by undergraduate students (7.1% at least once per quarter), as compared to graduate students (2.2% at least once per quarter).



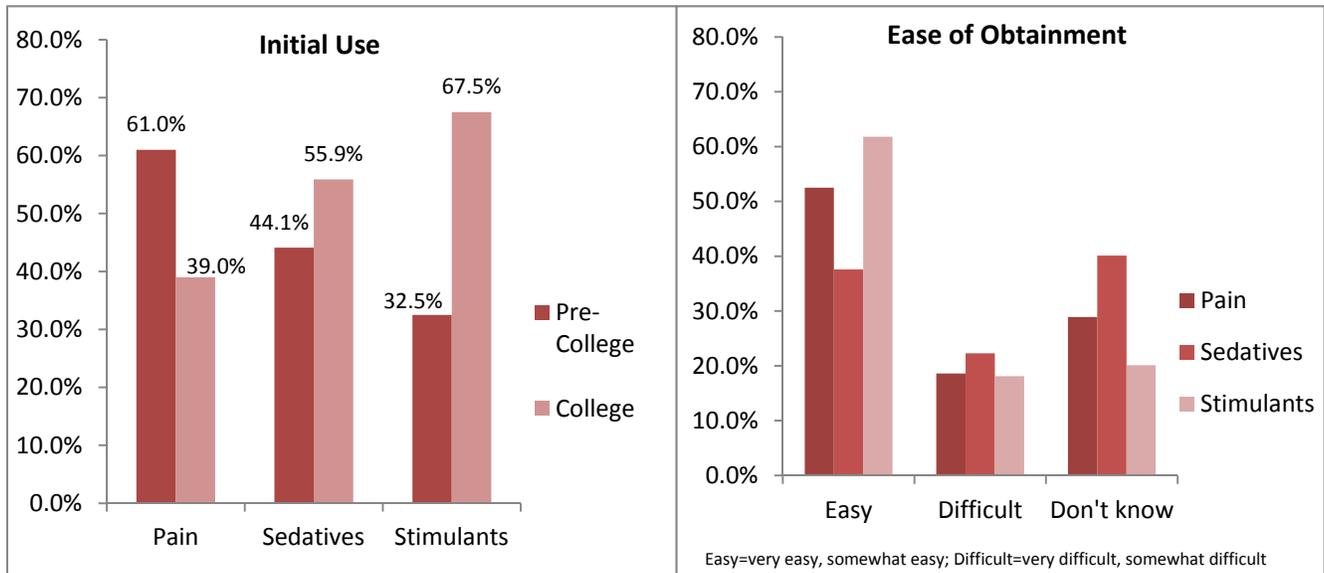
Students were asked to estimate how often they felt other Ohio State students generally used each of the three types of medications that were not prescribed to them. The charts below compare actual and perceived rates of use. Fraternity/sorority members were more likely to perceive others as using pain and stimulant medications at least once per quarter than non-members, as were undergraduates, as compared to graduates and professionals.



INITIAL USE AND OBTAINMENT

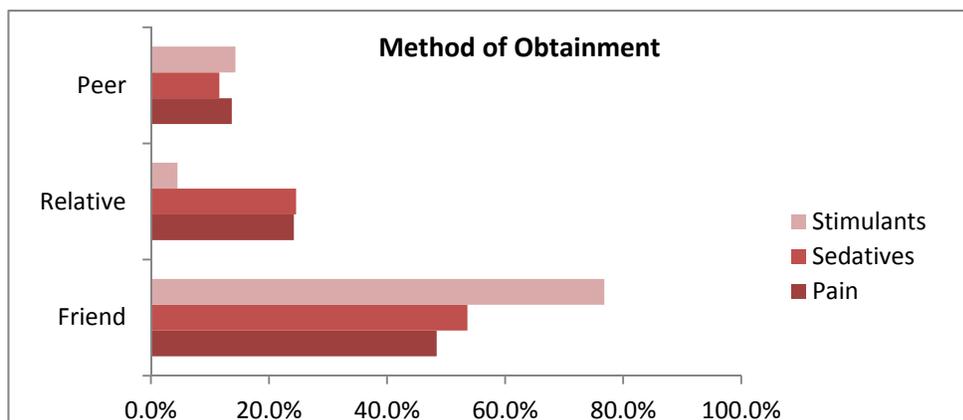
In this section, all respondents were only those who reported having taken any of the three types of prescription medications that were not prescribed for them.

The majority of those who had taken prescription sedatives or stimulants first used them in college. The majority of those who reported having taken prescription pain medications first started taking them before college, primarily during their high school years. Undergraduate students were more likely to report initial use of pain medications pre-college; white students were significantly more likely to have first used prescription stimulants in college.



When asked how easy it is to obtain each of the three types of prescription medications, respondents indicated that all three types of prescription drugs are easy to obtain, although a number of respondents reported that they did not know. Females were more likely to report that it is very/somewhat easy to obtain prescription pain medications.

Respondents were asked to report how they obtained the medications that they used. For the purposes of this brief, only the top three reported methods of obtainment are discussed. For all three classifications, students reported obtaining their prescription medications primarily from a friend, a peer who is not a friend, or a relative. The chart below illustrates this finding, according to the method of obtainment.

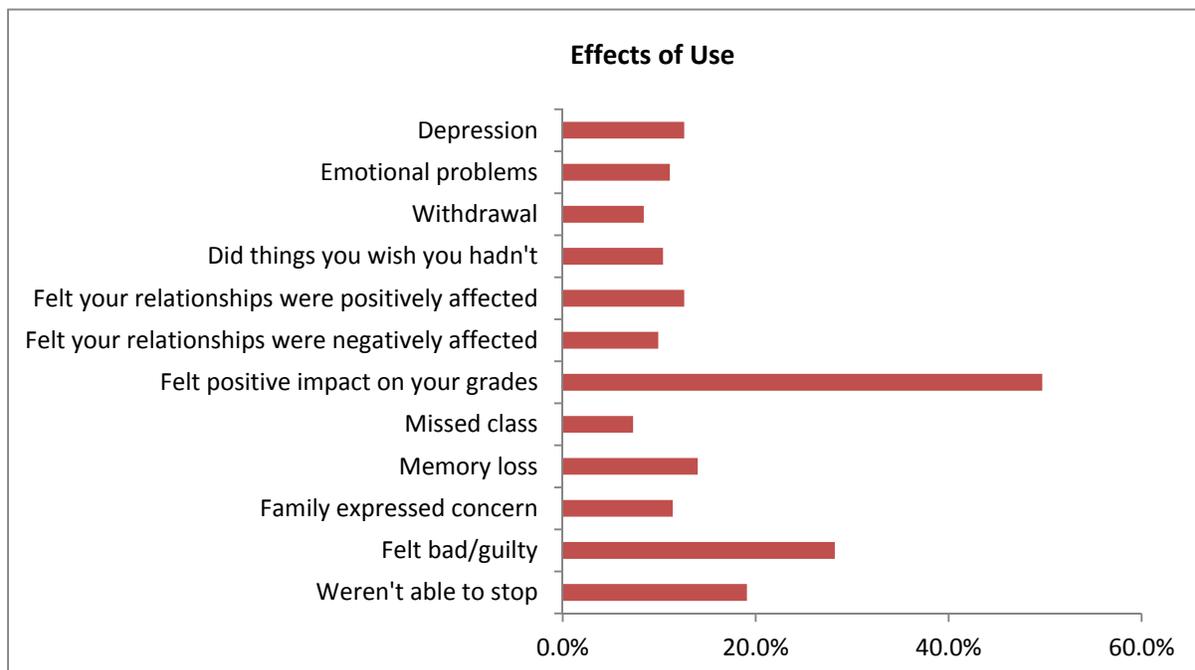


REASONS AND EFFECTS OF USE

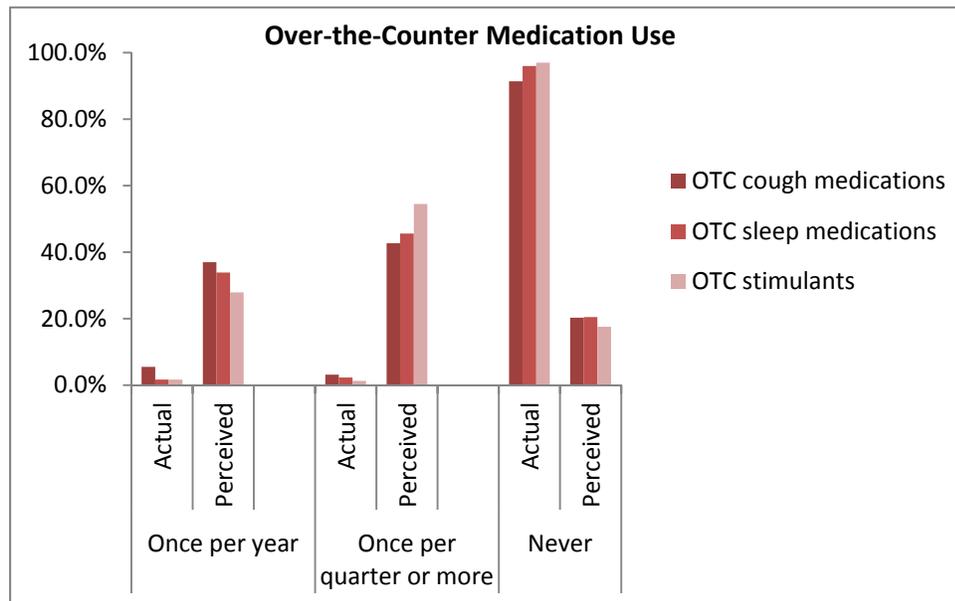
Students were asked to indicate the reasons for their non-medical use of prescription medications. Responses varied according to the type of medication (pain medication, sedative, or stimulant), although, the response “to get high” was among the top three reasons given for each medication. While the use of stimulants as study aids was not an answer option in this survey, a large number of text responses in the “other” category pertained to stimulant use as a study aid. The table below displays the top three reasons for each of the three medications, including only those who reported having used prescription medications non-medically.

Pain		Sedatives		Stimulants	
To relieve pain	66.9%	To get sleep	49.5%	To see what it was like	21.4%
To get high	32.4%	To relieve anxiety	34.3%	To relieve anxiety	15.0%
To see what it was like	26.5%	To get high	21.0%	To get high	10.0%

When asked to report the effects of their non-medical use of prescription drugs, a large percentage of students felt that the prescription medications had a positive impact on their grades. White students were significantly more likely to report that they felt this way as compared with non-white students. Males were more likely to report that their use of prescription medications had a negative impact on their grades. Males were also more likely than females to report a positive impact on their relationships as a result of using the medications. Many students reported feeling bad or guilty about their use of such drugs; nearly 20% reported feeling as though they were not able to stop using the drugs. These and other effects can be seen in the graph below.



OVER-THE-COUNTER MEDICATIONS



The survey also addressed the non-medical use of over-the-counter (OTC) medications. Students were asked to report their use of cough medications, sleep medications, and OTC stimulants. Students were asked to report their frequency of non-medical use, as well as how often they thought other Ohio State students used

these types of drugs non-medically. The majority of students had never used OTC medications, and similar to the perceptions of prescription drug use, students overestimated the extent to which other Ohio State students used OTC medications.

CONCLUSION

Students consistently overestimated the extent to which other Ohio State students used prescription medications for non-medical purposes. In reality, the percentage of students who used each of the three types of prescription medications for non-medical purposes hovered near 10%. It is important to note that the majority reported that their initial use of sedatives and/or stimulants began in college.

Stimulants were the medications most likely to have been used for non-medically indicated purpose, and were the most likely to be used as often as once per quarter, possibly (as reported by many students) as study aids. More research would help to clarify this issue. All three types of prescription medications were reported as easy to obtain; many students obtained the drugs from friends or relatives. Students reported various reasons for taking particular types of drugs, though each of the three classifications included a high percentage of students reporting that they took the medication to get "high." Methods of obtainment and effects of use may both be important to consider for prevention efforts.

Students also overestimated student use of over-the-counter medications; it may be helpful to consider such statistics for future health and wellness campaigns and messaging.