

KEY FINDINGS

- 9.1% of students reported they had ever used pain medication for non-medical reasons.
- About 50.6% of students who misuse reported that they typically obtain pain medications from a friend.
- 66.9% of students who misuse indicated that they generally use pain medication for non-medical reasons less than once a year

AN OVERVIEW OF PAIN MEDICATION MISUSE

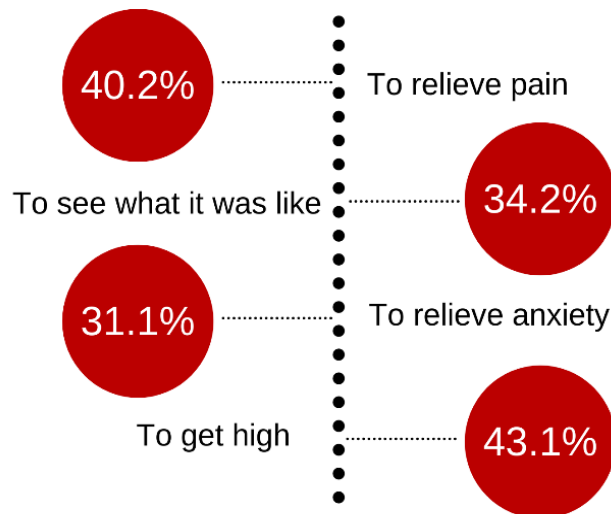
This report uses data from the 2018 administration of the College Prescription Drug Study (CPDS) to examine non-medical prescription drug use among college students. The CPDS surveyed students at 26 public and private, two- and four-year U.S. colleges and universities; 19,539 students completed the survey. Of those who completed the survey, 1,773 students (9.1%) reported that they had ever used a pain medication (e.g., OxyContin, Vicodin, Percodan) for non-medical reasons. This report summarizes students' reasons for and consequences of pain medication misuse, access to pain medications, perceptions of use and misuse by class rank and residence.

FINDINGS**Reasons for and consequences of misuse**

Students reported a variety of reasons for non-medical use of pain medications, including to relieve pain, to sleep and to relieve anxiety.

The graphic below illustrates the top four reasons that students indicated for using pain medications for non-medical reasons, which included to relieve pain, to see what it was like, to relieve anxiety, and to get high.

When asked about the consequences of their non-medical use of pain medications, 21.7% of respondents reported having been depressed as a result of their non-medical pain medication usage. About 19% of misusers reported having experienced memory loss as a result of their use. Also, 10.0% of respondents reported that they had experienced not being able to stop using these types of medications when they wanted to.

Why have you used pain medications for non-medical reasons?

Ease of access

It is important to recognize and assess how students gain access to pain medications for non-medical use. In doing so, researchers and medical practitioners can better understand the patterns of pain medication misuse. Of those who reported misusing pain medications, 38.4% reported that it is somewhat easy or very easy for them to obtain pain medications without a prescription. Over half of students (50.6%) who reported misusing pain medications said that they typically obtain pain medications from a friend.

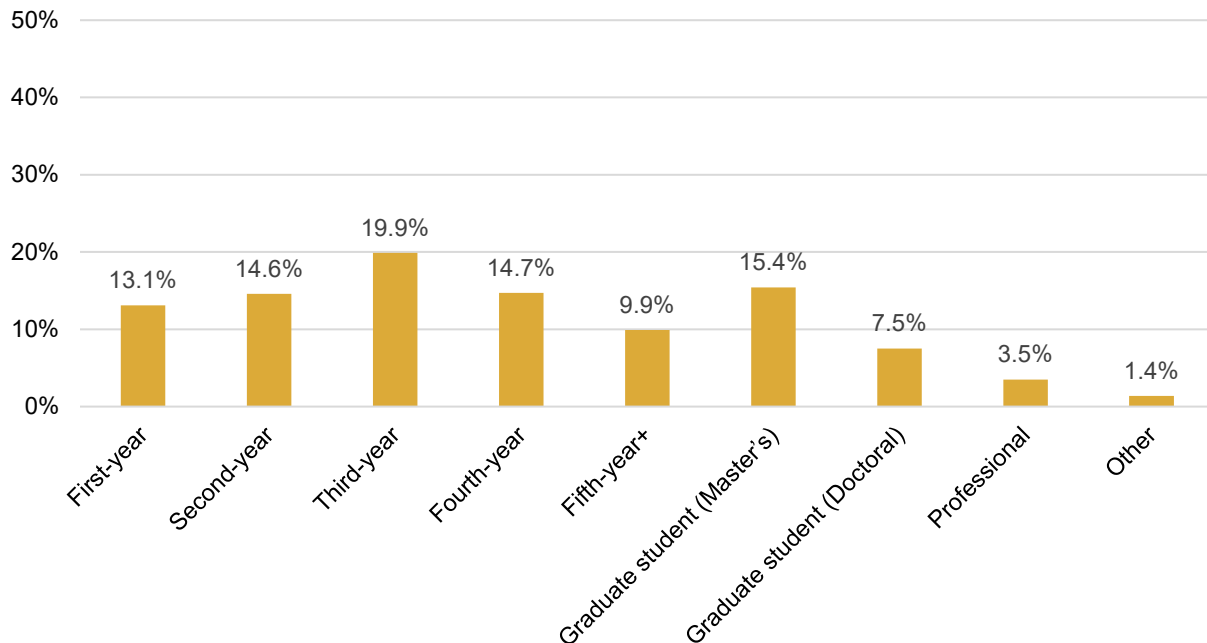
38.4%

Pain medication misusers reported it was somewhat easy or very easy to obtain pain medications without a prescription

Pain medication misuse by class rank

As illustrated in the chart below, the number of students that reported pain medication misuse increased each year from first-year undergraduate (13.1%) to third-year undergraduate (19.9%). Among graduate and professional students who reported ever misusing non-prescription stimulants, 15.4% of master's student respondents reported misuse, as well as 7.5% of doctoral students and 3.5% of professional students.

Ever Misused Pain Medications by Class Rank

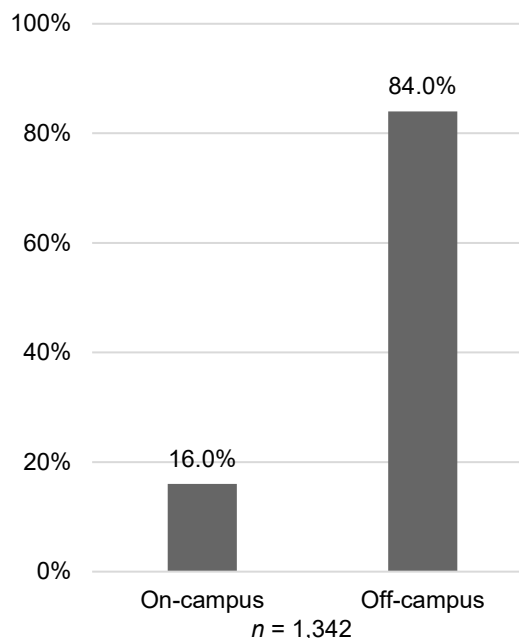
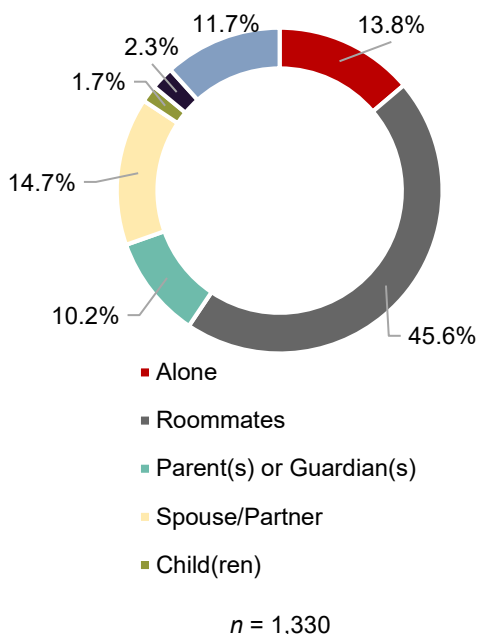


Note. The percentages reflect the percentage of students in each class rank that reported ever misusing pain medications.

Campus living and misuse

The majority (84.0%) of pain medication misusers reported living off-campus. When asked with whom they lived, 48.2% of respondents indicated that they lived with roommates, while 24.0% indicated with their spouse/partner. Approximately 16.0% of students who reported misusing pain medications also said that they currently live in residence halls or college/university-owned apartment or housing.

Current living situation and non-prescription pain medication misuse



MORE INFORMATION

The College Prescription Drug Study (CPDS) is a multi- institutional survey of undergraduate, graduate and professional students. The purpose of the CPDS is to gain a more thorough understanding of the non-medical use of prescription drugs among college students. Results provide a better understanding of the current state of non-medical use of prescription drugs on college campuses, including information on the types of prescription drugs misused, attainment of drugs, reasons for use and consequences of use. During spring 2018, the CPDS was administered to random samples of students attending institutions across the United States via an online anonymous survey.

Suggested Citation

College Prescription Drug Study. (November 2019). *An Overview of Pain Medication Misuse: Research Brief*. The Ohio State University, Center for the Study of Student Life, Columbus, Ohio.

If your institution is interested in participating in the next administration of the CPDS, please contact us at rxstudy@osu.edu.