

Motives, diversion and routes of administration associated with nonmedical use of prescription opioids[☆]

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Abstract

Objectives: The main objectives of this study were to assess the motives, diversion sources and routes of administration associated with the nonmedical use of prescription opioids as well as to examine substance use related problems associated with the nonmedical use of prescription opioids.

Method: A self-administered, cross-sectional Web survey was conducted in 2005 at a large public Midwestern 4-year university in the U.S. using a probability-based sampling approach. The final sample included 4580 full-time undergraduate students.

Results: The three most common motives associated with the nonmedical use of prescription opioids were to relieve pain, get high, and experiment. The leading sources of prescription opioids were friends and parents although there were gender differences in reports of primary sources. More than 1 in every 10 nonmedical users reported intranasal administration. Multivariate analyses indicated nonmedical users of prescription opioids who used for motives other than to relieve pain, obtained these drugs from non-parental sources, or used these drugs via non-oral routes of administration were significantly more likely to experience substance use related problems.

Conclusions: These results indicate that nonmedical use of prescription opioids represents a considerable problem for particular subgroups of college students. While additional research is needed, the present study offers important new directions for policy and research regarding prescription opioid misuse.

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Keywords: Prescription opioids; Route of administration; Motives; Diversion; College students; Substance abuse

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1. Introduction

The nonmedical use of prescription opioids among college students has increased over the past decade in the U.S. (e.g., Johnston, O'Malley, Bachman, & Schulenberg, 2005a; Mohler-Kuo, Lee, & Wechsler, 2003) and previous studies indicate several potential severe consequences associated with the nonmedical use of prescription opioids (e.g., Cone et al., 2004; Jewers et al., 2005; Katz & Hays, 2004; SAMHSA, 2004; Watson et al., 2004). Despite the possible deleterious effects associated with the nonmedical use of prescription opioids, there is a paucity of studies regarding the motives, sources of diversion, and routes of administration associated with the nonmedical use of these medications among college-age youth (Compton & Volkow, 2006; Zacny et al., 2003).

Undeniably, prescription opioids are the foundation for the treatment of moderate to severe pain within young adults, but this age group also has the highest prevalence rate of nonmedical use of prescription opioids in the U.S (SAMHSA, 2005a). Previous exploratory studies have identified parents and peers as possible sources for abusable prescription drugs obtained without a prescription by adolescents and young adults (Boyd, McCabe, & Teter, 2006; McCabe, Teter, & Boyd, 2005a; Pedersen & Lavik, 1991). However, there has been relatively little epidemiological work examining how college-age youth obtain prescription opioids not prescribed to them and scant research regarding the motives underlying nonmedical use.

The main objectives of the present study were to use a probability-based sample of college students to 1) assess the motives, sources, and routes of administration associated with the nonmedical use of prescription opioids; and 2) examine several measures of drug use and drug use related problems as a function of motive, source, and route of administration associated with the nonmedical use of prescription opioids.

2. Methods

2.1. Study design

After receiving Institutional Review Board approval, this study was conducted in January and February of 2005, drawing on a total undergraduate population of 20,138 full-time students (10,339 women and 9799 men) attending a large public research university located in the U.S. A simple random sample of 5389 full-time undergraduate students was drawn from the total undergraduate population. An additional 652 Hispanic, 634 African-American and 244 Asian undergraduate students were selected using stratified random sampling to ensure adequate representation of these racial/ethnic groups. The entire sample was mailed a pre-notification letter with \$2 enclosed describing the study and inviting students to self-administer a Web survey by using a URL address and unique password. Informed consent was obtained online from each participant. Non-respondents were sent up to three reminder e-mails. The Web survey was maintained on an Internet site running under the secure socket layer protocol to ensure privacy and security. By participating in the survey, students became eligible for a sweepstakes that included cash and other prizes. The final response rate was 66.2% and the completion rate was 97%. Nonresponse bias was assessed by administering a short form of the questionnaire via telephone to a randomly selected sample of 750 students who did not respond to the original Web survey, and 159 students responded. The demographic characteristics of the 159 students who responded to the telephone survey were compared with the 591 nonrespondents; there were no significant differences in terms of gender, race, age, and class

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