Nonmedical Use of Prescription Stimulants in the United States


Although stimulants are prescribed for effective treatment of a variety of medical conditions, including attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), concerns have arisen about their diversion for nonmedical use. These stimulants are classified as Schedule II drugs under the Controlled Substances Act, meaning that they are approved for medical use in the United States, but have a high potential for dependence or abuse.

This study, based on an analysis of data from the 2000, 2001, and 2002 National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH; called the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse in 2000 and 2001), estimated the prevalence and correlates of nonmedical use of prescription stimulants in the United States and examined relationships between nonmedical use and measures of abuse or dependence. NSDUH defines nonmedical use (misuse) as use of prescription drugs by persons for which they were not prescribed or only for the experience or feeling they caused.

Lifetime stimulant misuse included some misuse of longer-acting ADHD drugs. Extended-release stimulants typically contain a higher dosage of medication that is designed to be delivered over a longer period. Some of these drugs are prone to tampering by crushing or other mechanisms, which can result in a higher dosage being released into a person's system more rapidly.

The majority of past-year misuse involved stimulants other than methamphetamine, particularly for youth aged 12–17. Past-year misuse was more prevalent among persons aged 12–25, compared with older adults, and among whites, compared with other groups. Rates of misuse in large metropolitan areas were lower than or similar to those in less populated areas. About 13% of respondents who reported nonmedical use of stimulants in the past year met the survey criteria for dependence or abuse, as did about 10% of persons aged 12–25 who misused only nonmethamphetamine stimulants.