



CONTACT: Joe Sutherland, Burness Communications
301-652-1558
Prabhu Ponshe, Health Matrix
703-918-4930
202-942-1538 (May 25-27, 2005)
703-615-2466 (cell)

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Editor's Note: The following research will be released at the Society for Prevention Research (www.preventionresearch.org) 2005 annual meeting, May 25-27, 2005, Washington, DC.

WHY DO YOUNG PEOPLE ABUSE PRESCRIPTION DRUGS?

New studies profile teenage, college drug abusers

- How do college students get prescription drugs?
- How does prescription drug abuse differ between college men and women?
- Is abuse of prescription drugs among teenagers associated with drinking, smoking, and illicit drug use?
- What prescription medications are abused by teenage and college students?

The proportion of teenagers and young adults abusing prescription drugs has soared in recent years, and is growing faster than in any other age group. Among young adults, prescription drug abuse increased from 7 percent in 1992 to over 22 percent in 2002. Much of the increase has been in the recreational abuse of prescription pain medication such as Oxycontin and Vicodin, but college students have also turned to drugs used for attention-deficit disorder, such as Ritalin and Adderall, in an attempt to improve concentration when studying.

Preliminary data presented at the Society for Prevention Research (SPR) meeting in Washington, DC finds that 48% of 7th to 12th graders in one study had been prescribed opioid pain medications in their lifetimes. Of these students, 23% had been approached to sell their pain medications and of those approached, 20% sold them (diversion of scheduled medications). Eight percent of the students had themselves used prescription pain medication (illegally). The medications were not prescribed to them.

Other studies at the SPR meeting will profile teenage and college abuse of prescription drugs. College students' attitudes about the acceptability and safety of prescription drugs influence their decision to use them. While much use is recreational, academic pressures, self-medication, and other concerns can prompt college students to use these drugs. Male and female college students obtain and abuse prescription pain medications in different ways, and researchers have identified factors, such as grade point average and living situation, that are linked to higher abuse of these drugs. A survey of middle- and high-school students in Detroit links abuse of prescription pain medication among teenagers to their likelihood to use illicit drugs, smoke cigarettes, or engage in binge drinking.

Sources: Lynda Erinoff, Ph.D., National Institutes of Health, NIDA, Bethesda, Maryland; Linda Simoni-Wastila, Ph.D., University of Maryland at Baltimore; Gilbert Quintero, Ph.D.; Sean Esteban McCabe, Ph.D., University of Michigan Substance Abuse Research Center, Ann Arbor; Carol Boyd, Ph.D., University of Michigan Institute for Research on Women and Gender.