Exploring the perceptions among undergraduates on the usage of prescription stimulants

Alexandria Spates; Charles Kraemer, PhD; Stephanie M. S. Thomas; PhD
Psychological Sciences, LaGrange College

Abstract

There are a limited number of studies that have examined the perceptions of undergraduates and prescription stimulant usage in a multifaceted approach. The objective of this study was to explore the perceptions of LaGrange College students in relation to the prevalence, contributing factors, motivations, and safety related to undergraduate prescription stimulant use. Results showed that most students agreed that the prevalence of prescription stimulants usage among undergraduates was high. Females reported a higher level of agreement than males that students obtain prescription stimulants from drug dealers. The most commonly reported reasons that students believe other students use prescription stimulants are academic in nature. Honor society members reported significantly higher perceptions of the prevalence of the use, abuse of stimulants, and ease of obtainability compared to non-members. Nonathletes reported significantly higher agreement that prescription stimulants are dangerous compared to athletes. Students who live off campus reported significantly higher agreement that prescription stimulants are dangerous compared to students who live on campus.

Methods

- I conducted this study over two semesters Fall 2018 (Phase 1) and Spring 2019 (Phase 2).
- Participants read a short introduction that described the purpose behind the study and the directions for completing the survey.
- Participants then completed the questionnaire.
- After completing the survey participants placed their questionnaires in a manila envelope and were thanked for their participation.

Materials

Participants

- A total of 77 LaGrange College undergraduate students participated.
  - 36 participants were recruited using the Psychological Science Research Pool and 41 participants were recruited via a table set up on campus
- Gender - 29 males and 48 females
- Class rank - 16 freshman, 20 sophomores, 21 juniors and 20 seniors
- Organizations - 32 participants were athletes, 7 reported being members of the Honor Society and 30 belonged to of a Greek Organization

Questionnaire

- Phase 1 consisted of 31 questions.
  - 9 basic demographic questions
  - 3 questions assessed the participants' perceptions of the prevalence of use, misuse, and abuse of prescription stimulants.
  - 7 questions assessed possible contributing factors related to the misuse of prescription stimulants such as the ease of obtainability, the use of illicit or illegal drugs, the use among friend circles and the strength of academic achievement.
  - 9 questions assessed reasons or motivations that drive undergraduates to misuse prescription stimulants such as staying awake, concentrating, memorizing information, cramming for exams, partying purposes, suppressing appetite, weight loss, self-medicating for ADHD, making work interesting and getting high.
  - 6 questions assessed students' perceptions on the safety of prescription stimulants such as the risk of side-effects, danger, mental illness, sleep disturbance and the likelihood of psychological dependence or addiction.
- After analyzing the data from Phase 1, curiosity lead to the addition of 6 questions…
  - 3 questions assessed the perceived methods of obtaining prescription stimulants such as from other students, drug dealers, and from a physician.
  - 3 additional demographic questions such as credit hours, GPA, and number of clubs and organizations.
  - Thus, Phase 2 had a total of 37 questions.

Results

- Combined 5 items together to create a variable on perceptions of reasons why individuals misuse prescription stimulants, $\alpha = 0.780$.
- Combined 10 items together to create a variable on perceptions of dangerousness of prescription stimulants, $\alpha = 0.779$.

Correlations

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.
1. Reasons for Use	1											
2. Dangerousness	0.268*	1										
3. Common Use	0.198	-0.022	1									
4. Common Misuse	0.287*	0.279*	0.237*	1								
5. Stimulant Abuse	0.288*	0.184	0.142	0.358**	1							
6. Ease of Obtainability	-0.013	-0.004	0.284*	0.158	0.392**	1						
7. Obtain from other Students	-0.161	-0.097	0.260	0.118	0.281*	0.463**	1					
8. Obtain from Drug Dealer	0.354**	0.077	-0.153	0.338*	0.441**	0.054	0.282*	1				
9. Obtain by Persuading Physician	0.403**	0.225	0.127	0.270*	0.196	0.148	0.164	0.103	1			
10. Academic Achievement	0.344**	0.023	0.225*	0.131	0.137	0.216	-0.027	-0.041	0.222	1		
11. Friend circles	0.165	0.123	0.161	-0.098	0.019	0.035	-0.096	-0.015	0.100	0.028	1	
12. Illegal Drug Use	-0.011	-0.042	-0.005	0.050	0.058	0.101	0.092	0.125	0.180	-0.118	0.328**	1

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Gender

- Females reported higher agreement to the statement that students obtain stimulants from drug dealers than males, $t(53) = -2.769$, $p = .008$.

Greek

- No significant differences in perceptions between Greek and non-Greek students, all ps $\geq .098$.

Athletes

- Nonathletes reported significantly higher agreement that prescription stimulants are dangerous compared to athletes, $t(74) = -2.242$, $p = .028$.

Honor Society

- Honor society members reported significantly higher perceptions of prevalence of the use of stimulants compared to non-members, $t(75) = 2.444$, $p = .017$.
- Honor society members reported significantly higher perceptions of the prevalence of the abuse of stimulants compared to non-members, $t(75) = 1.945$, $p = .055$.
- Honor society members reported significantly higher perceptions of the ease of obtainability compared to non-members, $t(75) = 2.341$, $p = .022$.

Living Situation

- Students who live off campus reported significantly higher agreement that prescription stimulants are dangerous compared to students who live on campus, $t(74) = -2.348$, $p = .022$.

Conclusion

- The most surprising results indicated that Honor Society students showed significant differences in their perceptions compared to other students. This may suggest that, unlike other misused/abused drugs, stimulants are mainly being used by high academic achievers in order to compete.
- Perceptions of prevalence of misuse ($\bar{X} = 3.97$) and abuse ($\bar{X} = 4.18$) were high suggesting this is an issue that deserves attention

Limitations

- Only measured perceptions, not actual usage
- Small sample of Honors Society members
- Only gathered data at small, religiously affiliated private college