

Perceived academic benefit is associated with nonmedical prescription stimulant use among college students

MAJOR FINDINGS:

College students are at higher than average risk for nonmedical use of prescription stimulants (NPS). A common motive for NPS among college students who do not have attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is to improve academic performance,^{1,2} despite evidence that prescription stimulant use without a doctor's prescription is not associated with better grades.³ In fact, NPS overlaps with excessive drinking and other substance use, particularly marijuana use.⁴

This research study described students' perceptions about the academic benefit of NPS among college students. Moreover, it was hypothesized that students who thought that NPS would improve grades would be more likely to engage in NPS. Based on prior work, researchers also hypothesized that higher levels of alcohol use, marijuana use, and perceived academic benefit of NPS would be associated with NPS.

The study included students who were attending multiple universities across the United States. In total, 6,962 full-time undergraduates between ages 18 to 25 who indicated that they had never been diagnosed with ADHD provided data via an online survey. About 11% of the overall sample engaged in NPS during the past six months. Perceived academic benefit of NPS was high, with 29% of students endorsing the belief that NPS could help students earn higher grades. An additional 38% said they were unsure. Alcohol and marijuana use were significantly and positively associated with NPS. As hypothesized, students reporting higher perceived academic benefit of NPS had twice the odds of engaging in NPS.

Practice and Policy Suggestions: The results of this study highlight the need for interventions among college students to target misconceptions regarding the academic benefits of NPS. One option is incorporating knowledge of NPS's actual effect on grades into established substance use intervention approaches such as Motivational Interviewing (MI). These strategies, coupled with information sharing, might correct normative perceptions, and therefore discourage NPS. Our investigative team is evaluating the efficacy of a web-based personalized feedback intervention to reduce NPS, alcohol, and marijuana use. The intervention addresses the student's own perceived academic benefit of NPS and challenges that belief with scientific data.

Of major interest to:

- College Administrators
- Parents
- Educators
- Health Professionals
- Students
- Law and Policy Makers



References Cited in the Research Brief:

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The complete publication referenced in this research brief can be found here: Arria, A.M., Geisner, I.M., Cimini, M.D., Kilmer, J.R., Caldeira, K.M., Barrall, A.L., Vincent, K.B., Fossos-Wong, N., Yeh, J.C., Rhew, I., Lee, C.M., Subramaniam, G.A., Liu, D., Larimer, M.E. (2018). Perceived academic benefit is associated with nonmedical prescription stimulant use among college students. *Addictive Behaviors*. 76, 27-33. doi:10.1016/j.addbeh.2017.07.013

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