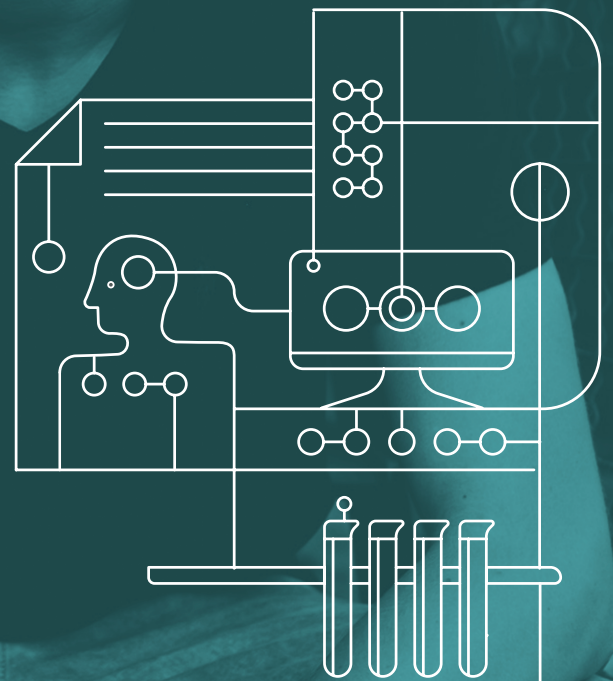




**PRESCRIPTION
DRUG SAFETY
NETWORK**



Teens and Prescription Drugs: Usage, Perceptions and Pervasiveness

EVERFI



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Background

Important Definitions:

The three main categories of commonly misused prescription drugs are opioids, stimulants, and depressants.

Drug misuse is the improper use of medications (taken in ways or amounts other than as prescribed; taken without a prescription) for purely therapeutic gains.

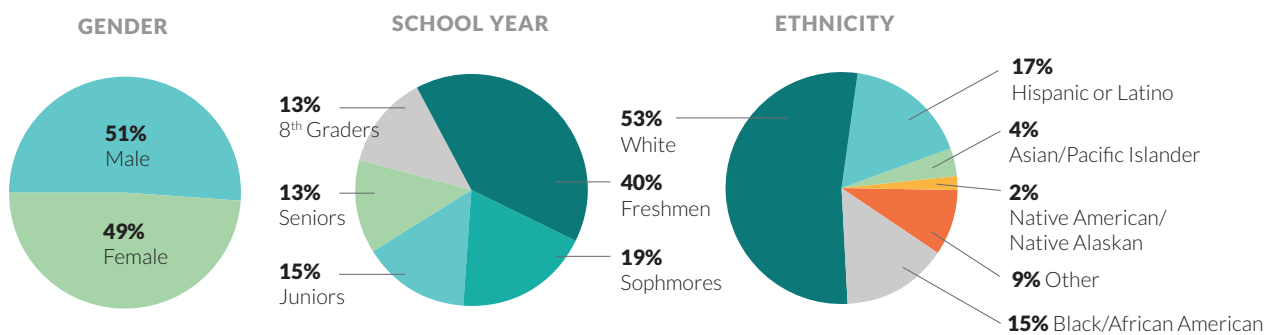
Drug abuse is a more repetitive and willful habit of taking drugs for recreational purposes (pleasure, ecstasy, or feelings of euphoria).⁶

Context:

- The amount of prescriptions for these medications have increased dramatically over the past several decades and the addictive properties of these drugs are often downplayed, resulting in increased dependence.⁴
- When users no longer have access to their prescriptions, they sometimes turn to alternative, cheaper options that are often more addictive and more dangerous.
- After alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana, prescription drugs are the most commonly used drug by high school seniors.⁵

Methodology and Student Demographics

The analysis in this report is based on 14,958 student survey responses from 328 middle and high schools in 39 different states as part of EVERFI's Prescription Drug Safety course with the highest states being: Arkansas, Pennsylvania, Kansas, California, and Florida.



4. Johnston, L., Miech, R., O'Malley, P., Bachman, J., Schulenberg, J., & Patrick, M. (2018) Monitoring the Future national survey results on drug use: 1975-2017: Overview, key findings on adolescent drug use. Institute for Social Research at The University of Michigan

5. National Institute for Drug Abuse (2018)

6. National Drug Intelligence Center (2018) U.S. Department of Justice

Analysis

Part I: Usage Snapshot

Students' Self-Reported Usage, Misuse, or Abuse Across Three Drug Categories

	Prescribed	Misused	Abused
OPIATES	26.1%	5.5%	3.5%
STIMULANTS	19.4%	4.7%	3.3%
DEPRESSANTS	12.3%	4.8%	3.6%

(% of all students who responded)

There are small percentages of students who self-report either misusing or abusing prescription drugs. It is important to consider that many students may not have a strong grasp of what “appropriate prescription drug use” looks like, as evidenced by the low pre-course knowledge scores gleaned from students. All of these data points represent responses from students before being exposed to the educational content. It is possible that actual rates of misuse and abuse in this population may be higher than originally reported here.

Part II: Risk Relevance

Pervasiveness of Prescription Drug Misuse, and Perceived Risk to Self and School Community

Anyone can become addicted to prescription drugs	82%
Preventing misuse of prescription drugs is a priority among the administration and teachers at my school	61%
Sharing medication may cause harm to myself or someone else	83%
I don't think prescription drug misuse/abuse is a problem at my school	46%
I would like to learn more about prescription drug misuse/abuse at my school	31%
I can play a role in preventing prescription drug misuse/abuse at my school	18%
I am planning to get more involved in preventing prescription drug misuse/abuse at my school	4%
I am currently involved in preventing prescription drug misuse/abuse at my school	2%

(% of students who agree with each statement)

31% of students report wanting to learn more about prescription drug misuse/abuse, but only **2%** are involved in preventing misuse/abuse at their school.

A large majority of students recognize that most of the population is susceptible to prescription drug abuse, misuse, or addiction, that it is pervasive, and that it is a point of focus among adults in their community. While 46% of the student body doesn't recognize this issue is a problem at their particular school, more than half of respondents want to get more engaged with prevention efforts, either by learning more or playing an active role.

Part III: Self-Efficacy

Students' Confidence in their Ability to Identify Misuse and Abuse of Prescription Drugs

I know how to read a drug label effectively	67%
I can identify the signs of prescription drug misuse/abuse	49%
I am confident in my ability to step in to help someone who demonstrates signs of misusing or abusing	55%
It is my responsibility to prevent prescription drug misuse at my school	38%

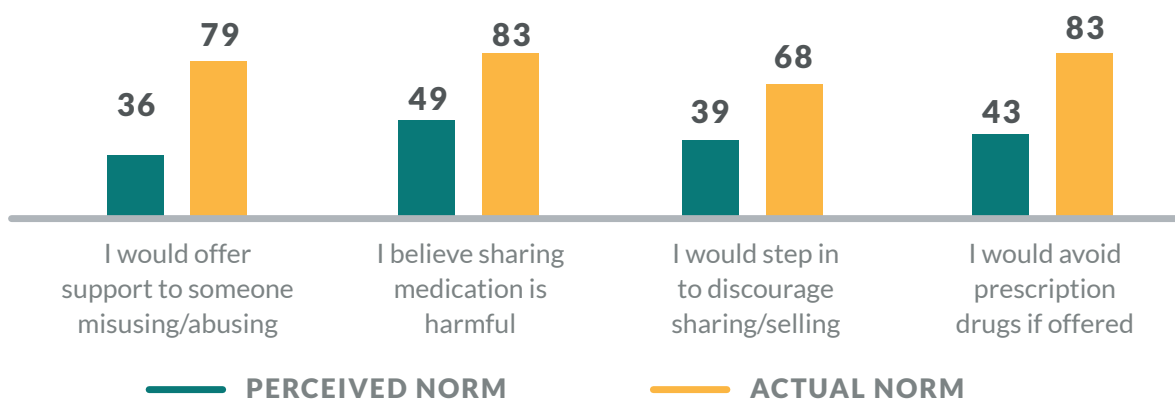
(% of students who agree with each statement)

There is a self-reported lack of skills and self-confidence in high schools students when it comes to dealing with prescription drug abuse and misuse at their school and very little sense of personal agency in correcting this problem. Only half of students report that they can identify the signs of prescription drug abuse or misuse, but more than that number feel confident in their ability to help someone who demonstrates signs of problematic prescription drug use. Only a third feel it is their personal responsibility to prevent prescription drug misuse and abuse at their school.

Part IV: Willingness to Intervene

Students' Ability to Intervene in Situations of Misuse/Abuse, and Perceptions of their Peers' Willingness

Perceived and Actual Norms for Behaviors Surrounding Prescription Drug Misuse/Abuse



(% of students who agree with each statement)

One obstacle to intervention for students is their perception of how socially acceptable their attempts to intervene would be to their peers. When there is a large difference between a student's perceptions of their own inclinations compared to their peers, they may hesitate to step in. Our survey data suggests that students always underestimate the normality of prosocial behavior, whereas the actual behavioral norms—what students say they themselves would do—are much more positive.

Students recognize that sharing medication is a real problem and risky behavior; however, there is a noticeable gap between students recognizing this risk (83%) and feeling like they would step in to stop this type of prescription drug diversion (68%). The gap between students' perception of the problem and their willingness to intervene signals a need for students to develop positive bystander intervention skills.

Part V: Subgroup Analysis

A Breakdown of Student Attitudes and Behaviors by Gender and Year in School

Gender: Female students are more likely to support a friend than male students, but males and females have very similar views of their peers. Female students are more likely to agree that anyone can be addicted to prescription drugs and are also much more likely than male students to want to know more about the issue. Males are more likely to have been prescribed stimulants, which aligns with the broader research that shows stimulant treatment peaks in adolescence, especially for boys.⁷ However females are more likely to have been prescribed depressants. The difference in prescribed depressants is likely due to higher rates of diagnosed anxiety among female adolescents than males⁸.

Year in School: We observed very little change across age groups in attitudes toward prescription drugs, only a slight move in the unhealthy direction as students got older. The most dramatic differences between middle school and high school students is in their perceptions of their peers' behaviors, where agreement with statements about peers' intentions to engage in intervention or support drops by 10-15%.

Percentage of Students Misusing or Abusing Prescription Drugs by Gender

	Opiates		Stimulants		Depressants	
	MISUSE	ABUSE	MISUSE	ABUSE	MISUSE	ABUSE
BOYS	6%	4%	6%	4%	5%	4%
GIRLS	5%	3%	4%	2%	4%	3%

7. Olsson M., King M., and Schoenbaum M. (2016) Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychopharmacology

8. McLean, C., Asnaani, A., Litz, B., and Hofmann S. (2011) Gender Differences in Anxiety Disorders: Prevalence, Course of Illness, Comorbidity and Burden of Illness; Journal of Psychiatric Research

Students generally see prescription drug abuse as a bigger problem as they progress through school. In addition to this heightened perception, students also want to become more involved in making a difference in their community on this issue and want to become better informed.

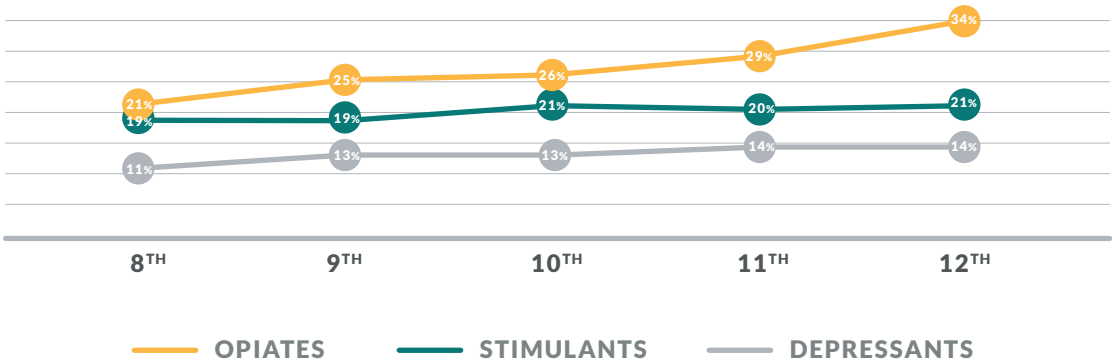
As students make their way through high school, our data shows that they are prescribed drugs more frequently. The largest increase in our survey from 8th to 12th grade was in the frequency with which students report being prescribed opiates, a 13 percentage point difference between younger and older students. Consequently, misuse and abuse rates for all three drug categories rise as students get older, but remain highest for those with drug prescriptions. By comparison, students who have not been prescribed opiates are less likely to misuse and abuse those drugs, with 5.5% of students misusing and 3.5% of students abusing. For those students who have been prescribed opiates, misuse and abuse rates increase to 12% and 7% respectively.

Students who are prescribed opiates are **2.2 times more likely to misuse and 2 times more likely to abuse** these drugs than their peers who are not prescribed opiates.

Self-reported rates of any prescription drug use under a doctor's orders, by school year

	8 th	9 th	10 th	11 th	12 th
OPIATES	21%	25%	26%	29%	34%
STIMULANTS	19%	19%	21%	20%	21%
DEPRESSANTS	11%	13%	13%	14%	14%

Cross-Sectional self-reported rates of prescription drug use under a doctor's orders, by school year



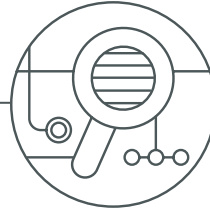
Summary and Implications

- 26% of students surveyed reported that they had been prescribed opiate-type drugs. Students who were prescribed opiates were more likely to misuse and abuse those drugs than their peers who did not have prescriptions.
- Students are less likely to have healthier attitudes toward prescription drugs as they get older and are more likely to have access to opiate, stimulant, and depressant prescription drugs.
- More than half of respondents want to get more engaged with curbing this epidemic, either by learning more or playing a more active role in their school community.
- There were large differences between perceived and actual norms for prescription drug use behavior, which may result in lower rates of intervention on the part of students.

Evaluated alongside the broader substance abuse habits of teens, this analysis shows the need for ongoing prevention education efforts. It is encouraging to see that a relatively small number of teens are engaged in prescription drug misuse and abuse, but as their access to prescription drugs grows as they age, so do the opportunities for misuse or abuse.

Further, there is a large difference between students' perceptions of their own inclinations compared to their peers' when it comes to pro-social behavior (willingness to intervene, etc.). This presents opportunities to employ social norming and other evidence-based strategies to correct misperceptions and encourage a culture of shared responsibility for keeping communities safe and drug free.





Questions to Consider:

What role do prescriptions drugs play in the lives of students in your community? How are you capturing that data and are you tracking trends over time?

What are the different strategies that can be used to develop higher levels of self-efficacy when it comes to protecting students and their peers from prescription drug abuse and misuse? How can you measure the impact of and improve those strategies?

What are the social norms around prescription drugs in your community? Is there a gap between what students in your community believe they would do and what they believe their peers would do when it comes to these drugs



