

Prescription Opioid Misuse Among Missouri College Students

Partners in Prevention (PIP) is a statewide coalition dedicated to creating healthy and safe college campuses in Missouri. PIP tracks students' high-risk behaviors through the annual implementation of the Missouri Assessment of College Health Behaviors (MACHB) survey. The student demographic information and responses from students on health behaviors are collected from the 2019 survey. This brief focuses on differences in opioid use rates and other high-risk behavior rates among Missouri college students.

Today prescription medications are readily available and quick fixes are expected, resulting in a normalization of the misuse of medications. Prescription medications are seen as acceptable and are readily available due to the high volume at which these medications are prescribed. This access is an underlying factor to this growing problem. Some students try to manage pain, stress, or other concerns by misusing prescription pain medications (opioids), either with their own prescription or with medications for which they do not have a prescription. Medication misuse is defined as using a prescription in a manner other than prescribed or using a medication that was not prescribed. Prescription opioid medications include Vicodin, OxyContin, Tylenol 3 with codeine, Demerol, and Morphine.¹ Prescription opioid misuse rates are higher among certain demographic groups and students who exhibit other high-risk behaviors. This brief examines behaviors of students who misuse prescription opioids compared to students who do not misuse prescription opioids.

Demographics

Differences in prescription opioid use can be seen among different genders, races, and ethnicities. Among females, 4.8% misuse prescription opioids. Misuse is slightly higher among males (5.9%). The highest rate of misuse is seen in transgender students (9.1%). It is important to note that only 59 transgender students responded to the survey. Race is another

factor that affects rate of prescription opioid misuse. Students of color are any students that identify as non-white; 7.5% of students of color misuse prescription opioids. More specifically, 7.2% of black students and 6.5% of Asian students misuse. White students misuse prescription opioids at lower rates than all other racial groups (4.8%). In regard to ethnicity, Hispanic/Latino students misuse prescription opioids at a higher rate than non-Hispanic/Latino students (6.7% and 5.1%, respectively). It is important to note that although prescription opioid misuse affects certain demographic populations at higher rates, everyone is vulnerable. Opioids do not discriminate and have the potential to impact anyone regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, education, or income.

Student-Athletes

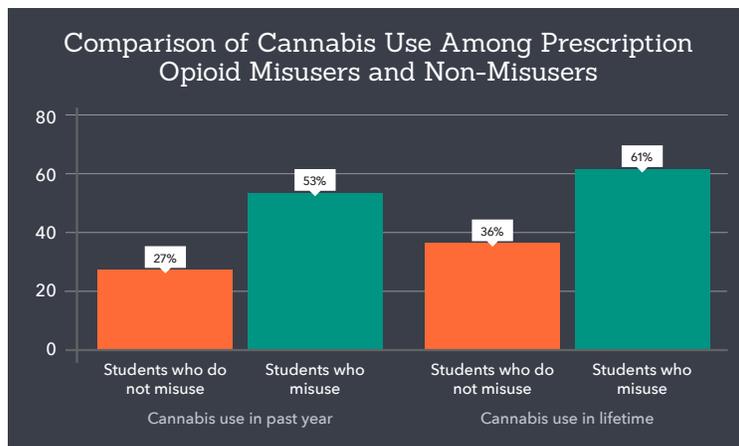
Student-athletes put more strain on their bodies than the typical non-student-athlete, so we might expect them to have higher rates of prescription opioid misuse. However, student-athletes and non-student-athletes report similar rates of prescription opioid misuse. Only 6.4% of students that respond to the survey are athletes. In the past year, 3.4% of non-student-athletes reported having used prescription opioids without a doctor's prescription. Student athletes reported a similar rate of misuse (3.9%). In the past year, 2.6% of non-student-athletes misused a prescription opioid that was prescribed to them. Student athletes reported a similar rate of use (2.9%).

Alcohol

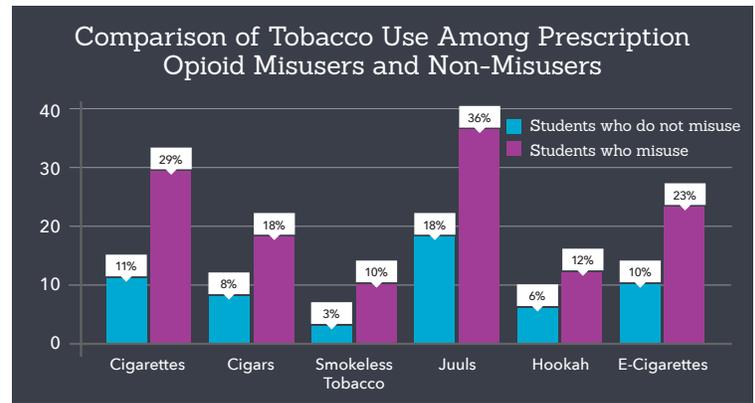
Students who misuse prescription opioids use alcohol at higher rates than students who do not misuse prescription opioids. Binge drinking is defined as having 5+ drinks in a 2-hour period. Twenty percent (20%) of non-misusers reported binge drinking in the past 2 weeks while 36% of students who misused prescription opioids reported binge drinking in the past 2 weeks.

Other Substances

Missouri college students who misuse prescription opioids use other substances at higher rates than Missouri college students who do not misuse prescription opioids. Missouri college students who do not misuse prescription opioids use cannabis less frequently than students who misuse prescription opioids. Twenty-seven percent (27%) of Missouri college students who do not misuse prescription opioids have used cannabis in the last year while 53% of students who misuse prescription opioids have used cannabis in the last year. Thirty-six percent (36%) of Missouri college students who do not misuse prescription opioids have used cannabis in their lifetime while 61% of students who misuse prescription opioids have used cannabis in their lifetime. The chart below depicts the aforementioned data.



Missouri college students who do not misuse prescription opioids use tobacco products less frequently than students who misuse prescription opioids. The chart below depicts the differences in tobacco use between Missouri college students who misuse prescription opioids and those that do not misuse prescription opioids.



Summary

Missouri Partners in Prevention has been educating students about the dangers of prescription pain medications through its MoSafeRx program since 2012 in collaboration with funding from the Missouri Department of Mental Health, Division of Behavioral Health. The MoSafeRx program combines three strategies: educate students on the dangers of prescription drugs, recommend safe pain management alternatives, and provide safe places for students to store or dispose of prescription drugs. Funding obtained through the State Opioid Response Grant in 2018 has been used to finance a variety of targeted public service announcements relating to opioid pain management, safer opioid use, the Good Samaritan Law, Narcan and messages focused toward Historically Black Colleges and Universities, including Lincoln University and Harris-Stowe State University. This grant-funded project focuses on two main messages: 'Overdoses are Preventable' and 'Stay Calm, Get Help'. The latter refers to Missouri's Good Samaritan Law, which offers legal protections for an individual who seeks medical assistance for someone experiencing a drug or alcohol overdose and the individual who is experiencing said overdose. For more information, visit rx.missouri.edu.

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1. <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/research-reports/misuse-prescription-drugs/what-scope-prescription-drug-misuse>

For more information, visit pip.missouri.edu

Funded by the Missouri Department of Mental Health, Division of Behavioral Health