



# The Illicit Use of Non-Prescribed Adderall among College Students

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## INTRODUCTION

Previous literature has shown that heavy episodic drinking and marijuana use are prevalent in college, suggesting the importance of implementing substance use prevention programs. The current study attempts to shed light on the issue concerning the use of non-prescribed Adderall among college students within the context of alcohol and drug using behavior as it is more traditionally viewed. Few studies that examine alcohol and drug use among college students consider medications, such as Adderall, as drugs of choice in this population; however, recent studies suggest that the use of prescription medicine is becoming more common within the university setting. The current study examines the prevalence of Adderall use, factors associated with use, users characteristics and comparisons between features of Adderall use and use of other drugs of abuse. Ultimately, the findings from this study will be beneficial in informing the design of intervention programs that address health and social ramifications associated with the use of Adderall.

## METHOD

### PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURES

Participants included male and female college students from a large northeastern university. Students were recruited from a Communications class during the Fall 2007 semester. Of the 122 students who volunteered to complete the survey, 61.9% were females, 55.9% identified themselves as White/Caucasian, 67.8% reported living in a residence hall/dorm room, and 50.4% were first year students. Participants were entered in a raffle (for three \$25 amazon.com gift certificates). The survey took 30 minutes to complete.

### MEASURES

**Demographic variables:** Participants were asked to provide information regarding their age, gender, and ethnicity, as well as SAT score (< 1100), GPA (< 3.0), class standing, and major.

**Substance use variables:** Substance use questions were adapted from the Rutgers Health and Human Development Project (Pandina, Labouvie, & White, 1984) and the Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Study (Wechsler, Lee, Kuo, Seibring, Nelson, & Lee, 2002). Frequency and quantity of alcohol use and heavy episodic drinking (5+ drinks for males and 4+ drinks for females), and lifetime, high school, past year, semester, and summer use of cocaine/crack, hallucinogens, designer drugs, Methamphetamines, Ephedrine, other prescription drugs without a medical prescription, any banned performance enhancing drugs, weight loss products, and nutritional supplements were also assessed.

**Adderall use:** Prescription and non-prescription use of Adderall were assessed with 7 items that gauged prescription Adderall use, conversations about other students' use, non-Adderall users' reasons for engaging or not engaging in such use, Adderall users' age of first use, the largest dose that they had ever taken, and the frequency of use in the last year, current semester, and last summer.

**Adderall motives:** Those participants who reported illicitly using Adderall were asked to indicate their motives for such use using a 15-item survey (5-point Likert scale).

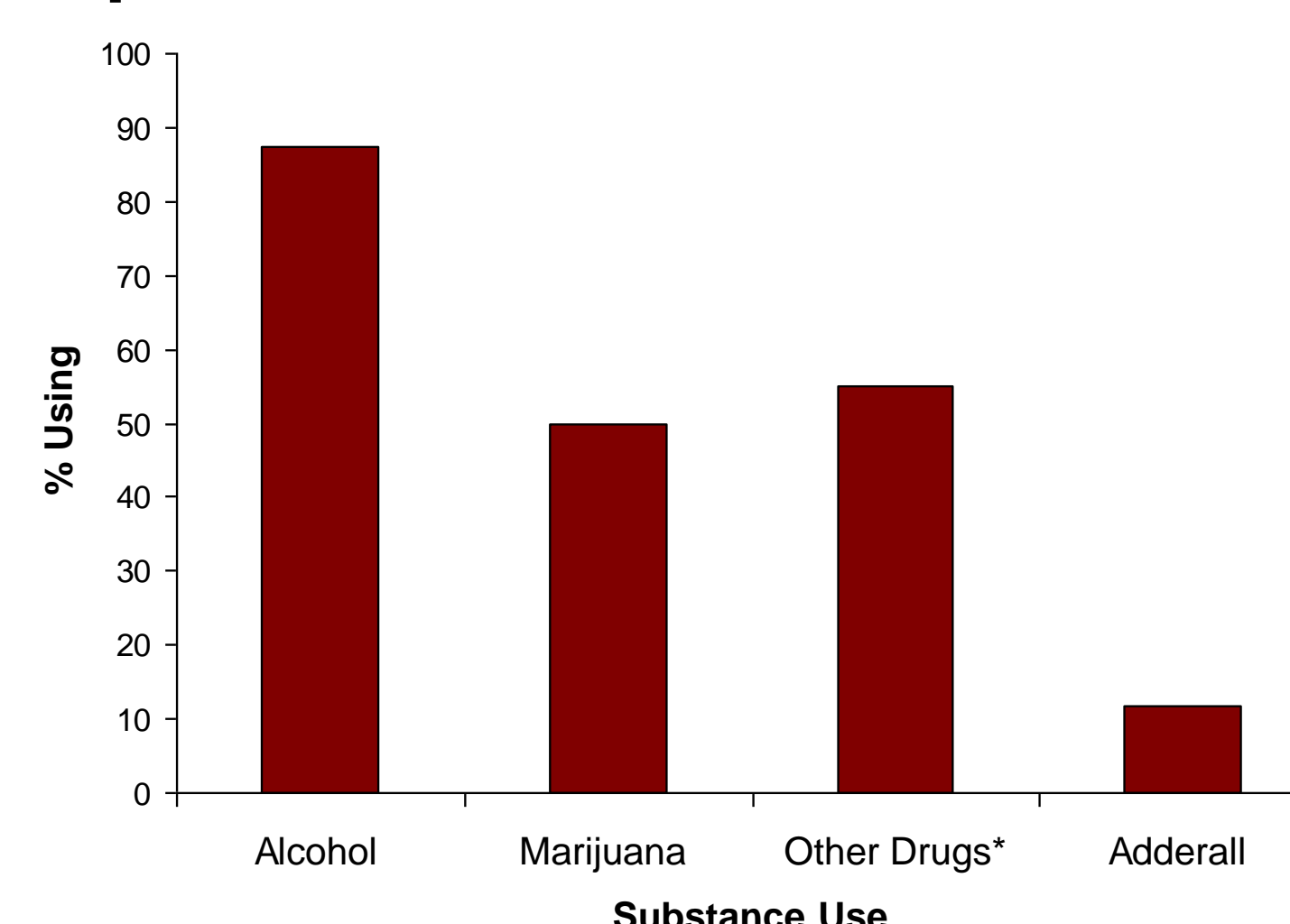
**Drug acceptability:** Drug acceptability questions were adapted from the "Social Context of Collegiate Prescription Drug Abuse Formative Interview Guide" (Quintero, Peterson, & Young, 2006). Participants were asked to indicate whether they thought certain drugs were socially accepted by college students in general and were also asked if the same drugs were socially accepted by their friends and themselves.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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## RESULTS

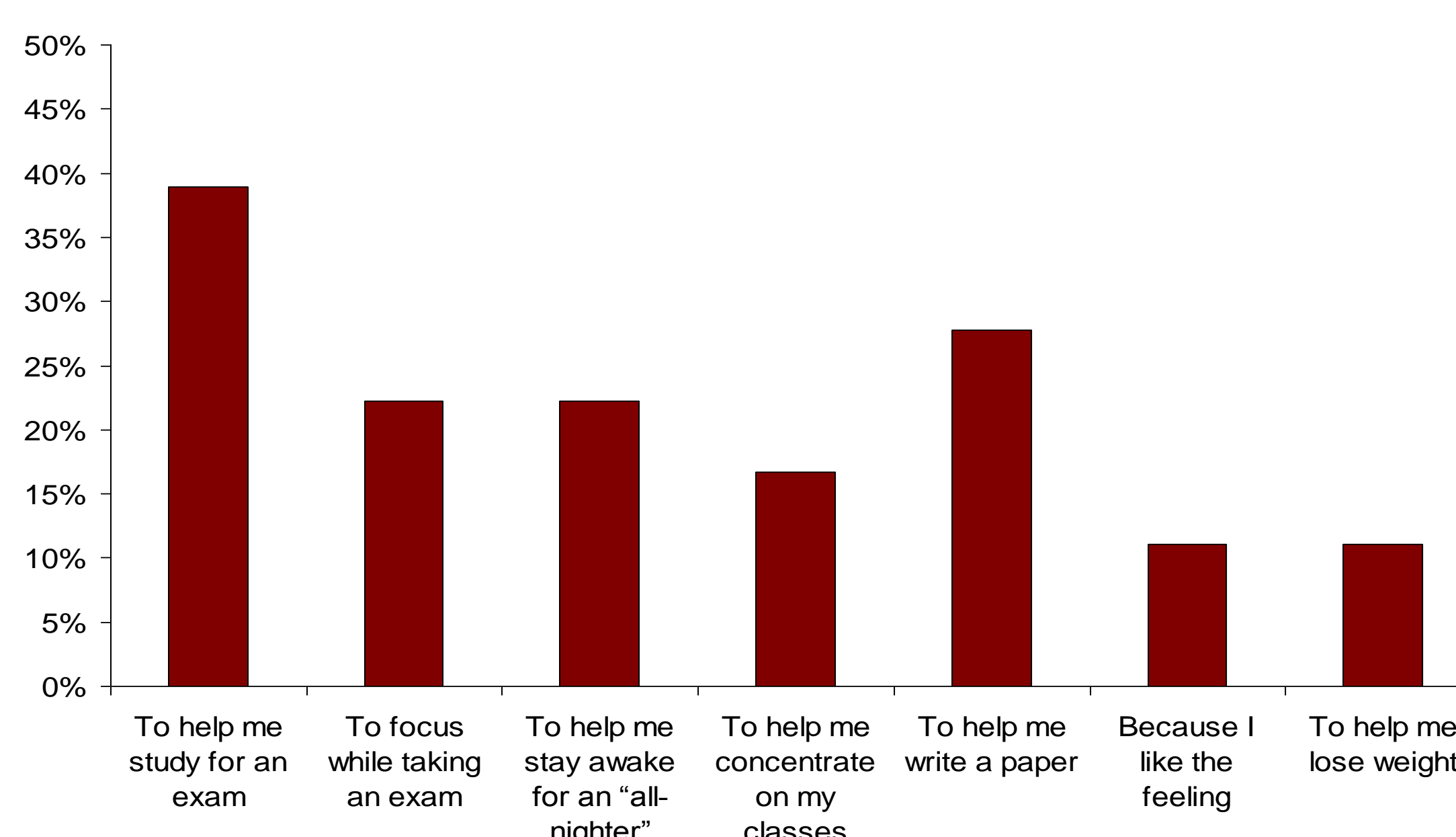
Figure 1. Lifetime prevalence of alcohol and other drug use



• Alcohol and other drug use was prevalent in this sample. Adderall use was not as prevalent, with only 11.9% of participants reporting lifetime use.

\*Other drugs included: cocaine/crack, hallucinogens, designer drugs, Methamphetamines, Ephedrine, other prescription drugs without a medical prescription, any banned performance enhancing drugs, weight loss products, and nutritional supplements.

Figure 2. Common reasons given for using non-prescription Adderall (among users)



- Academic enhancement appears to be the primary motivation behind non-prescription Adderall use.
- Adderall use for social reasons (e.g., to help enjoy a party, to be sociable, because it improves parties and celebrations, or because it is fun) was reported as a motive by only 1 participant "some of the time."
- Interestingly, there was a significant relationship between Adderall use and having a GPA above or below a 3.0 ( $\chi^2 = 12.4$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < .05$ ) with those students using Adderall, having lower GPAs on average.

Table 1. Reasons for abstaining from non-prescription Adderall use

REASONS	PERCENT
I can study fine without Adderall	76.27%
I do not need Adderall to have fun at a party	59.32%
I am scared that I will get sick if I take it	21.37%
I am scared that if I take it once, that I will become addicted	22.03%

Table 2. Percent of participants reporting a given drug as socially acceptable among college students and friends

	Accepted among college students	Accepted among you and friends
Cocaine/Crack	31.1%	5.9%
Hallucinogens	57.1%	16.9%
Designer Drugs	46.6%	5.1%
Marijuana/Hashish	93.2%	60.2%
Ephedrine	29.9%	6.0%
Methamphetamines	30.5%	2.5%
Non-prescribed Adderall	75.4%	27.9%
Other prescription drugs	51.7%	11.0%
Banned performance enhancers	45.7%	6.8%

• In general, participants believed that the vast majority of students viewed marijuana and non-prescribed Adderall as socially acceptable. They also believed that approximately half of students accepted the use of hallucinogens, designer drugs, prescription drugs, and banned performance-enhancing drugs. Methamphetamine, ephedrine, and cocaine were viewed as the least socially acceptable drugs among students in the university.

• Importantly, the social acceptability of non-prescribed Adderall among friends was most highly correlated with friends' acceptability of marijuana ( $r = .47$ ) and other prescription drugs ( $r = .56$ ).

## CONCLUSIONS

College drug use has been well documented, resulting in the creation of many effective substance use prevention programs. However, these preventative efforts can only be successful if they address all types of drug issues, since the landscape of drug use is constantly changing as new drugs become available or achieve greater popularity. This study examined the illicit use of non-prescribed Adderall, which is often overshadowed by more prominent issues of heavy episodic drinking and marijuana use. The results reinforce the view that the use of non-prescribed Adderall should be a focus of concern by universities and colleges in the United States.

Adderall use may represent a unique type of drug of abuse, as it appears to be used mainly for academic, rather than social, purposes. However, this study did not find that Adderall was beneficial to academic performance. In addition, students who believed marijuana use to be socially acceptable were likely to consider Adderall to be acceptable. Thus, Adderall and marijuana use may be considered less harmful than other drugs (e.g., cocaine) and nearly devoid of an addictive potential. Therefore, the health ramifications of Adderall use without a prescription should be addressed, as should the effects of overconsumption and mixing Adderall with other prescription and non-prescription medications. Ultimately, Adderall use has the potential of becoming a more serious issue if efforts are not made to educate students on the severity of the drug and address the fact that Adderall during finals period does not equate to a guaranteed "A" in the course.

## REFERENCES

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