

More mental health woes in college kids who abuse prescription drugs

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Large study found association was strongest with painkillers like OxyContin, Vicodin.

(HealthDay) -- Prescription drug abuse among American college students is linked to depression and suicidal thoughts, a new study finds.

Researchers analyzed data from more than 26,000 college students at 40 campuses who took part in the 2008 American College Health Association National College Assessment survey.

As part of the survey, the students were asked about their nonmedical use of prescription drugs such as painkillers, stimulants, sedatives and antidepressants, and about their mental health symptoms over the past year.

About 13 percent of the college students reported nonmedical use of prescription drugs. Those who said they had felt hopeless, sad, depressed or had considered suicide were much more likely to abuse prescription drugs.

This association was especially strong among female students who reported painkiller use, the researchers found.

The study will be published in the August issue of *Addictive Behaviors: An International Journal*.

"Because prescription drugs are tested by the U.S. [Food and Drug Administration](#) and prescribed by a doctor, most people perceive them as 'safe' and don't see the harm in sharing with friends or family if they have a few extra pills left over," study co-author Amanda Divin, an assistant professor of health sciences at Western Illinois University, said in a university news release.

"Unfortunately, all drugs potentially have dangerous side effects. As our study demonstrates, use of prescription drugs -- particularly painkillers like Vicodin and OxyContin -- is related to [depressive symptoms](#) and [suicidal thoughts](#) and behaviors in college students. This is why use of such drugs need to be monitored by a doctor and why mental health outreach on college campuses is particularly important," Divin explained.

The findings suggest that college students are abusing prescription drugs to ease [mental distress](#).

"Considering how common prescription sharing is on college campuses and the prevalence of mental health issues during the college years, more investigation in this area is definitely warranted," Divin said. "Our study is just one of the many first steps in exploring the relationship between nonmedical prescription drug use and mental health."

More information: The U.S. National Institute on Drug Abuse has more about [prescription drug abuse](#).

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