ADOLESCENT USE OF PRESCRIPTION DRUGS TO GET HIGH IN CANADA

What Role Does the School Environment Play?

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US - Prescription drug abuse is a growing problem.

Prescriptions are currently the 2nd most abused drug category after cannabis.
U.N. narcotics board warns of prescription drug abuse

Wed, Feb 24 2010

By Kate Kelland

LONDON (Reuters) - Abuse of prescription drugs is growing rapidly around the world, with more people abusing legal narcotics than heroin, cocaine and ecstasy combined, the United Nations global drugs watchdog said on Wednesday.
Most abused prescriptions are those **most potent** and **most available**

Canada is the world’s **top per capita consumer** of several high-potency opioids

**3rd** heaviest consumers of psychoactive prescriptions in the world

Yet to date, little information is available about the misuse of psychoactive prescription drugs in this country, despite calls for action
COMMENTARY

Non-medical Use of Prescription Opioids and Public Health in Canada

An Urgent Call for Research and Interventions Development

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ABSTRACT

While the public health problem of psychoactive drug use is well recognized, the emerging phenomenon of non-medical use of prescription opioids has been largely ignored in Canada. Most evidence on this issue and related harms in North America to date come from the United States (US), where the prevalence of non-medical opioid use in key populations, as well as related morbidity and mortality, recently have risen substantially. Also, given the increases in the overall consumption of prescription opioids similar to those in the US, a substantial expansion of problems related to non-medical opioid use appears to be occurring in Canada. For example, recent major increases in the use of prescription opioids – rather than heroin – are documented for street drug users in Canadian cities. However, a comprehensive assessment of the problem of non-medical prescription opioid use is hindered by the spotty – or absent – nature of crucial indicators and data. We urge that the necessary efforts and resources for systematic assessment of the evolving phenomenon of non-medical opioid use and its key facets be established in Canada, and that policy-makers implement sensible intervention strategies targeting this problem within a public health framework. Specifically avoiding unintended negative
Prevalence and Correlates of 12-Month Prescription Drug Misuse in Alberta

Cheryl L Currie, PhD Candidate¹; Donald P Schopflocher, PhD²; T Cameron Wild, PhD³

Objective: We examined the prevalence and correlates of prescription drug misuse (PDM) in a population-based sample of adults from Alberta.

Methods: Data were collected from 3511 adults in Alberta aged 18 years and older in 2002 using a computer-aided telephone survey; the survey response rate was 57.4%.

Results: The prevalence of 12-month PDM in Alberta was 8.2% in 2002. Opiates were the most frequently misused drug class, followed by sedatives, stimulants, and tranquilizers. Current disability was particularly associated with PDM. Odds of PDM were also elevated among adult students and adults with a high school diploma relative to adults with a post-secondary degree. Past-year problem gambling, illicit drug use, and alcohol use and dependence were each associated with PDM, while past-year binge drinking and daily smoking were not.

Conclusions: Findings suggest PDM was an important public health concern in Alberta in 2002. Estimates suggest prescription use and misuse have increased substantially in Canada since that time. There is an urgent need for an ongoing assessment of this evolving problem so that effective prevention and therapeutic strategies can be developed.

Can J Psychiatry 2011;56(1):27-34
8.2% of Alberta adults misused prescription drugs in the past year.

- Opiates (painkillers) abused most often
- Adults students, those who are disabled, and those with other addictive problems most likely to abuse prescription drugs

Link to article: [http://publications.cpa-apc.org/media.php?mid=1102](http://publications.cpa-apc.org/media.php?mid=1102)
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How many Canadian adolescents use prescription drugs for intoxication?

2. What role does the school environment play in this problem behaviour?
METHODS

- Data collected by Health Canada
- 45,000 children (12-17 yrs)
- Data collected in schools across Canada
In the last 12 months how often have you used the following to get high and not for medical purposes:

1. **Sedatives or tranquilizers** (such as Valium, Ativan, Xanax).

2. **Prescription pain relievers** (such as Percocet, Demerol, Oxycontin).

3. **Prescription stimulants** (such as Ritalin, Concerta, Adderall).
5.9% of Canadian adolescents used prescription drugs to get high in the past year.

Among those, 40% used Rx drugs across several categories to get high.
No gender difference

Elevated among:

- Older youth
- Youth living in BC
- Aboriginal youth
**FINDINGS**

- Females were more likely to use prescription **pain relievers** and **sedatives/tranquilizers** to get high.
- Males were more likely to use prescription **stimulants** for this purpose.
PREScription Drug Abuse

- Non Aboriginal: 5.6%
- Metis: 0.0%
- First Nations: 0.0%
- Inuit: 0.0%
PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE

Non Aboriginal: 5.6%
Metis: 8.8%
First Nations: 11.0%
Inuit: 18.4%
A particularly promising protective factor is **school connectedness** - the belief by students that adults and peers in school care about their learning and well-being.

Research indicates that children in schools that promote connectedness are more likely to:

- **Engage in healthy behaviours**
- **Succeed academically**
RCTs suggest the impact of increasing school connectedness on decreased substance abuse among teens is causal.
Evidence-based modifications shown to increase school connectedness include:

- Encouraging positive classroom management
- Encouraging student participation in extracurricular activities
- Tolerant disciplinary policies
- Small school sizes
## School Connectedness in Canada

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feeling</th>
<th>Non Aboriginal</th>
<th>First Nations Children</th>
<th>Inuit Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers don’t treat me fairly</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t feel safe at school</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t feel part of my school</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t feel close to people at my school</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Sample size: 45,000 Canadian children*
School connectedness was associated with a:

- **61%** reduction in likelihood of prescription drug abuse for *non Aboriginal children*.
- **69%** reduction for *First Nations* children
- **76%** reduction for *Métis* children.
- **83%** reduction for *Inuit* children.
Use of prescription drugs to get high is prevalent among adolescents in Canada.

School communities that meet the need adolescents have to feel safe, accepted, and supported by others at school are protective.

School connectedness may be particularly protective for Aboriginal youth.
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