

Recreational Use of Adderall Among College Students

Helpful or Harmful?

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A desire to maintain attention, a crave for focus, a potential escape from reality, these are some of the potential reasons that a person would recreationally take a stimulant. A stimulant is a substance that raises levels of physiological or nervous activity in the body. Adderall (mixed amphetamine salts) is one of these prescribed stimulants that takes effect by changing the amount of certain natural substances in the brain. It is commonly associated as a prescription medication prescribed for attention deficit disorder (ADD) or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). It has been seen to help those diagnosed not only with focal, organizational and behavior issues but with some sleeping disorders as well like narcolepsy. One might ask who doesn't enjoy increased focus, mild mood stabilization, organization and even potential weight loss? The prescription and its apparent results have spread over time and are now commonly being taken for recreational use to provide a temporary high or help to crack down when focus is required. Marie Owoweye and Osman Moneer tell us that among all recreational users, college aged individuals are the most vulnerable group for use and abuse of the prescribed stimulant. It is quite apparent that recreational use takes place for a variety of reasons resulting in various outcomes. Many say that the recreational use can be tied back ethically to what Emmanuel Kant describes as Deontology, or intention with reason rather than consequence. (categorical imperative) No matter the intention or reason the question stands, is the recreational use of Adderall truly harmful to the physical and intellectual progression of the typical college aged individual? I hope to explore the harms and benefits of recreational use and then explain why I believe recreational use of Adderall to be most harmful to the college cohort.

Adderall has been studied for years as the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved the stimulant in 1996 and ever since, the drug has seen an enormous amount of popularity among prescribers, patients and the general public. Studies on the drug continue to advance to determine things such as the level of effectiveness, possibility of dependency, recreational use and the typical

benefit to harm ratios. A study performed at the University of Maryland found that nearly 60% of fourth year students were offered Adderall and over half of that number chose to use it recreationally. The *Journal of American College Health* later found that nationwide, between 4.1 and 10.8 percent of all college students report to have used someone else's stimulant medication to assist them with their studies. We can assume that many in the college cohort are aware of the stimulant and its potential benefits, so why don't they just get a prescription themselves?

The process that one goes through to obtain and maintain the prescription for Adderall can be quite extensive and expensive. The price, depending on dose and brand varies quite heavily, but a thirty-day prescription at your local pharmacy can range anywhere from \$100-\$360 (without insurance). Again, depending upon the immediate or extended release and dosage, street/recreational value averages approximately \$10-\$20 a pill. Jessica Flanigan and Dr. Michael Anderson found in their research on low income families and academic performance which took place near Atlanta, Georgia that simply, Adderall helps. Anderson said "we've decided as a society that it is too expensive to modify the kid's environment. So, we have to modify the kid." (Flanigan, 8) Alternative treatments such as meeting with a therapist, tutor or study programs, multiple medical procedures, medication trials all can be so strenuous and very expensive. Adderall becomes a safe and cheap way to address these modifications and improve overall performance. Support is offered as studies have shown that enjoyment of work and improved interest were seen among those surveyed that were prescribed Adderall. The defense is shown that although with the intent to enhance desire and interest, it will not increase overall intelligence. Stephanie Stolz reports in the *Journal of Law and Education* that students taking Adderall do however tend to perform better while on the medication as they have a greater focus to prepare and retain required information than those who did not take the stimulant. I believe that this is an important detail to include but is this

enhancement moral, equally accessible and respected as reciprocity suggests or does this deny justice to those without a “Dr. Anderson” and the financial resources to obtain the prescription?

College aged individuals usually face tremendous amounts of pressure as they balance finances, work, school, identity, marriage, graduation, continuing education that also factor into academic performance and emotional state. The financial factor and any of these factors, can lead to depression and the possible need for something to provide focus and organization to get the mind through all that is going on. Jessica Flanigan suggests how stimulant use can help with such symptoms. Although primarily for those with ADHD, stimulant use can help to “more easily form and maintain friendships while mitigating the risks of depression or aggressive behavior.” (Flanigan, 326) Flanigan continues to explain how maybe the recreational use has much more to offer than what meets the eye. Because it is often much less regulated, we see more consequences but what if we opened up more to the idea of recreational use? Would we see the same benefits as those diagnosed and prescribed with the properly dosed stimulant?

Both medical and recreational use have been argued to be a step towards utilitarianism in that a greater number of people are seeing a greater number of effects, both among male and now a rising number of female cohorts. While we see the obvious benefits of the medication, it is being argued at increasing rates that it is creating dependency, numbing individuality and creating an avoidance of natural problem solving.

Marie Owoweye with the Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN) and the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), found that the increase of prescription stimulants went from 4% in 1991 to 45% in 2010, just among young adults in the United States alone. This increase can obviously account for new technology, research and acceptability from seeing the success of a fairly new stimulant. Many who seek the prescription have to first see their psychiatrist or medical

provider and go through a series of questions, possible testing and interviews. With the significant increase, providers have been more cautious often policing those who are just seeking the recreational effects. Providers have to often use what Robert Veatch calls the four primary parts of principlism or a number of principles help to guide the physician. These principles consisted of nonmaleficence, beneficence, justice and autonomy. They help physicians to offer the least amount of harm, the most amount of good while honoring and respecting the patients right to their health and life decisions.

Henry Greenly believes that in comparing these principles to opportunity, all should have access to stimulants under specific dosing. “Because of their effects on the catecholamine (katecoleminen) system, these drugs increase executive functions in patients and most healthy normal people, improving their abilities to focus their attention, manipulate information in working memory and flexibly control their responses...A modest degree of memory enhancement is possible with the ADHD medications just mentioned as well as with medications developed for the treatment of Alzheimer's disease such as Aricept (donepezil), which raise levels of acetylcholine (chsetuhcoline) in the brain.” Greenly believes that Adderall does well for anyone who takes it. He points to the obvious that many who recreationally use do not take into consideration dosing and may need to but that overall, it caters to any and all who would take it. He alludes to how we allow children to take these supposed “dangerous” medications and see improvement in their academic performance, so why shouldn't mature adults have the access to medication that we have seen to work for children being children?

We can also add that those who already have a prescription and the financial means to renew this prescription are benefitting society as they are seeing a physician regularly. Addressing healthcare needs, minimizing and possibly preventing potential outbreaks of further disease and

illness. If recreational use was seen to be acceptable, general health and wellness could be addressed with increasing these many factors as well as users feeling an obligation to be more aware of bodily intake and upkeep. With appropriate dosing, the recreational use of Adderall can improve the intellectual aspects of a college student's life.

Some universities have done their best to provide more affordable healthcare for students by offering discounted and quick treatment for their full-time students. Stephanie Stolz reports that especially on college campuses, health care providers are bypassing certain requirements to medically obtain the prescription by eliminating the need to meet with a psychiatrist and avoid more strenuous testing for proper diagnoses. Stolz notes that the convenience of campus clinics and the leniency of providers are putting college student's availability with the "Adderall Black Market" at an all-time high. She continues that these increasing number of prescriptions can also be tied to the fact that there is no diagnostic criteria established for ADHD in adults. With long waitlists it is still fairly common but the increase of leniency among adult prescription recipients along with the depletion of the stigma that comes with both prescribed and recreational use, it is becoming easier and easier for one to have continual access to the stimulant.

About 54% of undergraduate students with a prescription stimulant for medical use admitted to sharing, selling or giving away their stimulant. (Owowe) This fact becomes quite dangerous to a measure to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) 2013 finding that Adderall has been identified as a potential addictive chemical substance meaning, the recreational use of Adderall can result in drug dependency. Stolz explains that it should be quite obvious of its dependent tendencies with its classification as a Schedule II drug.

College students who feel the exhaustion and need to use it for one exam, one week, one class then come to believe that their own abilities are not enough, they begin to trick themselves into

a dependent state and possible addiction. Osman Moneer shares in the *Columbia Undergraduate Science Journal* that “the issue of addiction to such an enhanced state exists as a significant concern. Because dopamine and norepinephrine (knar-epa-nef-rin) levels are at such peaks, chronic use of Adderall for an individual without ADHD may result in addictive use of the substance.” (Moneer)

Many students within the surveyed cohort stated that they believed that the use of Adderall was safer and less dependent as it was legally prescribed and formed with pure and clean substances, a potent substance that was less likely to be laced with other ingredients. This could potentially lead college aged students to using the medication more often and “that could ultimately affect the overall well-being of a person including the mental, physical, emotional, occupational and spiritual aspects.” (Owowe, 6) This dependency often falls in line with what Christian Teter discovered in his study being that severely depressed moods were found in approximately 30% of college students who frequently abuse prescription stimulants. Many would say that this could be worth the risk as again, the greatest good for the greatest number of people, but this could lead to increase use, health problems, possible overdose and/or suicide which all harm more than just those 30% originally effected. The continual, recreational use of Adderall results in further health risks.

The recreational use of Adderall has multiple health and legal concerns. As mentioned earlier, a common argument is that the use of Adderall is much better than using stimulants such a cocaine or other means as it is pharmaceutically constructed ensuring that it is not laced or dangerous. This does have truth behind it as it may be made clean and harder to dilute however, too many people taking Adderall are unaware of the significant health consequences and alternatives which in turn, result in uninformed dealers of the stimulant and as they pass the prescription onto their buyers without information regarding side effects or potential addictive tendencies. Improper use of stimulants (even when used as prescribed by a doctor) can lead to hostility, paranoia, and

even psychotic symptoms. Improper stimulant use can also result in unsafely elevated body temperature, irregular heartbeat, heart failure, and seizures. The National Institute of Drug Abuse (NIDA) reported that nationwide emergency department “visits involving nonmedical use of pharmaceuticals (either alone or in combination with another drug) increased 98.4 percent between 2004 and 2009, from 627,291 visits to 1,244,679, respectively.” Amelia Arria found that recreational stimulant use was heavily incorporated with binge drinking and more so with heavy illicit drug use primarily in less safe environments. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) recently discovered that stimulant use patterns from 2013-2014 show that Adderall is a clear transition drug. In just one year, Adderall use was seen to decrease as cocaine use among college students, almost doubled. We know that cocaine has clear potential health consequences along with the legal consequences that come with its current illicit use and possession standing. The combination of such drugs is too much for the body as it commonly leads to heart, brain and liver damage and can confuse the body into an accidental overdose.

Because of the stimulant being a schedule II drug, non-medical adult users of Adderall can be convicted of felony drug abuse and be punished with jail time for use and possession of the prescription drug. The combination of the amount of time, money and treatment that would come with the conviction of illegal prescription use alone would take years to recover from. The combination of other illicit substances with the pharmaceutical are destructive upon your overall health with loss of coping mechanisms and further legal consequences. Therefore, Adderall should not be used recreationally to avoid dependency, legal and behavioral issues.

In conclusion, I offer the principle of internal morality, the promotion of health over human happiness. Yes, researchers like Dr. Michael Anderson make a great point that many don't have proper access to ideal external circumstances such as materials, tutors, safe and appropriate study

environments but medically, we are to promote health over happiness. Yes, happiness is a part of mental health, but I believe that there is a difference between a chemical imbalance and less than desirable situation. I believe that if any person chooses to recreationally take a stimulant and finds success, overtime they will relate their success to a medication and not their own abilities. They will lose faith in their own abilities when they do not have access to the stimulant and take less individual credit for their successes in which they do accomplish.

It is evident the psychological and physical harm that can occur through the recreational use of Adderall. I think that we must value internal morality and promote health by not questioning someone's own abilities, not setting themselves up for dependency and by not putting someone in the situation of causing future harm to themselves or others. As a society we value "adaptability" and "competition" at a fearsome level, a malleable personality willing to do whatever it takes to get the grade, job, money or advancement. Those who perform and peak early, tend to burn out early as well. If we instead instead change our perspective to look at overall discipline, embracing creativity and individuality, we will in result better celebrate freedom and increase individuals to better appropriately exercise autonomy and choose the most appropriate and healthy form of care for all.

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