

Stimulant Use Disorder on Campus: Characteristics of Canadian University Students

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Background

Stimulant use is highly prevalent among post-secondary students. Cook, Kurtz-Costes & Burnett surveyed one US university and found a prevalence of 11.7% use of non-prescribed prescription stimulants and 18.9% use of non-prescription stimulants.¹ They found that more than 75% of students used the stimulants for academic reasons and 11.9% used them for recreational purposes.¹

Research investigating the prevalence and demographics of students who meet stimulant use disorder criteria in Canada is lacking.

Research Objective

To determine the demographics of stimulant use disorder among students at the University of British Columbia (UBC).

Methods

Data was collected as part of the Minder: Student e-Mental Health Project. Data was obtained from a weekly cross-sectional survey of probabilistic samples of students from the UBC between February 2020 and October 2022.

Demographic data were analyzed descriptively. Medians and interquartile ranges were computed for ordinal data related to stimulant use disorder symptoms. Stimulant use disorder was defined using DSM-5 criteria. Data analysis was completed in SAS 9.4.

Results

11,004 participants responded to our survey. 216 respondents (1.96%) met criteria for stimulant use disorder. Median age was 25 (IQR: 8). 85 participants (39.4%) were cis-men, 117 (54.2%) were cis-women and 14 (6.48%) were non-binary or another gender. 142 respondents (65.7%) were White, 33 respondents (15.3%) were East Asian, and 41 respondents (19.0%) were another ethnicity/race. 111 respondents (51.4%) were undergraduate students, 65 respondents (30.1%) were graduate students, and 40 respondents (18.5%) were another category of student.

Table 1: DSM-5-Defined Lifetime Stimulant Use Disorder Severity among UBC Students

Stimulant Use Disorder Severity	N (Percentage)
Mild	35 (16.2%)
Moderate	27 (12.5%)
Severe	154 (71.3%)
Total	216 (100.0%)

Table 2: Type of Stimulant(s) Used by UBC Students during their Lifetime

Type of Stimulant	N (Percentage)
Prescription Stimulants	42 (19.4%)
Street Stimulants	76 (35.2%)
Prescription and Street Stimulants	98 (45.4%)
Total	216 (100.0%)

Discussion

Few comparable previous studies exist as much of the research has focused on stimulant use in this population rather than DSM-5 defined stimulant use disorder. Nonetheless, the prevalence of stimulant use disorder among this population is significantly lower than stimulant use noted in these previous studies.²⁻⁴

Conclusion

Among our university population, stimulant use disorder was predominately of high severity and included use of both street and prescription stimulants.

Reference / Bibliography

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