The Association Between Non-Medical Prescription Drug Use (NMPDU) and Suicidality

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Purpose: Studies have substantiated a relationship between drug use and suicidality. However, little research has examined this relationship with prescription drugs. Given the prevalence of NMPDU among college students, this study explored the association between general and specific NMPDU and suicidality.

Methods: The fall 2008 National College Health Association (NCHA) survey was utilized (N=22,783). Five separate logistic regression models were employed. The first combined any NMPDU (antidepressants, pain killers, sedatives, and stimulants) followed by four additional regressions for each drug, and then separately by gender. Models were estimated before and after control for key covariates.

Results: Approximately 13% (0.1331) of participants reported NMPDU. After covariate adjustment, those who reported feeling hopeless, sad, depressed, or considered suicide were between 1.22-1.31 times more likely to report NMPDU ($p<.05$). Those who reported feeling sad, depressed, or considered suicide were between 1.22-1.38 times more likely to report stimulant use; those who reported being depressed were 1.36 times more likely to report sedative use; those who reported feeling hopeless, sad, or depressed were between 1.18-1.43 times more likely to report pain killer use; and those who reported feeling hopeless or depressed were 1.44 and 1.91 times more likely to report antidepressant use ($p<.05$). When the adjusted models were repeated separately by gender, results were more pronounced for females, especially for females who reported pain killer use.

Conclusions: Suicidality significantly increased the odds of any NMPDU, with pain killer use (especially for females) representing the greatest correlate among college students. Implications will be discussed.