



Women and prescription drugs

Office of National Drug Control Policy April 2007

While overall illicit drug use is declining, the abuse of prescription drugs, particularly narcotic pain killers, remains disturbingly high. Data reveal that females are at particular risk for prescription drug abuse, with higher rates of abuse among teen girls, more emergency room visits among young women, and higher rates of treatment admissions for dependence on some prescription drugs among females. This disturbing new trend runs counter to traditional drug use patterns, where males have typically exceeded females.

Abuse Rates

- Traditional gender differences are reversed when it comes to teen prescription drug abuse.
- Nearly one in ten (9.2 percent) teen girls report using a prescription drug for non-medical purposes, to control their weight or to get high at least once in the past year, compared to one in 13 (7.5 percent) teen boys.

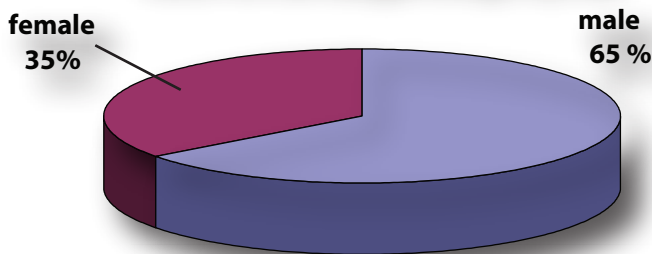
Emergency Room Visits

- For emergency room visits involving prescription drug abuse, females were involved in 55 percent of the cases. Compared to females being involved in just 35 percent of emergency room visits where street drugs were involved.

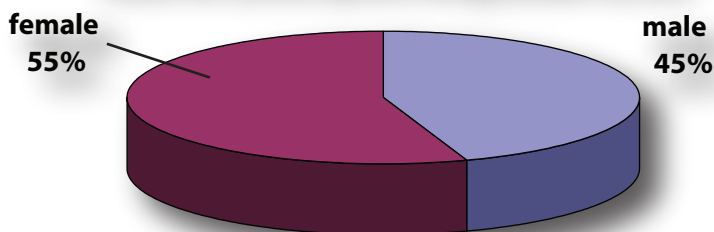
Dependence and Treatment

- 56 percent of those being treated for dependence on sedatives and 53 percent of those being treated for dependence on tranquilizers are women.
- Among 12-17 year-olds, girls had higher rates of dependence or abuse involving prescription drugs (1.8 percent for girls and 1.1 percent for boys).

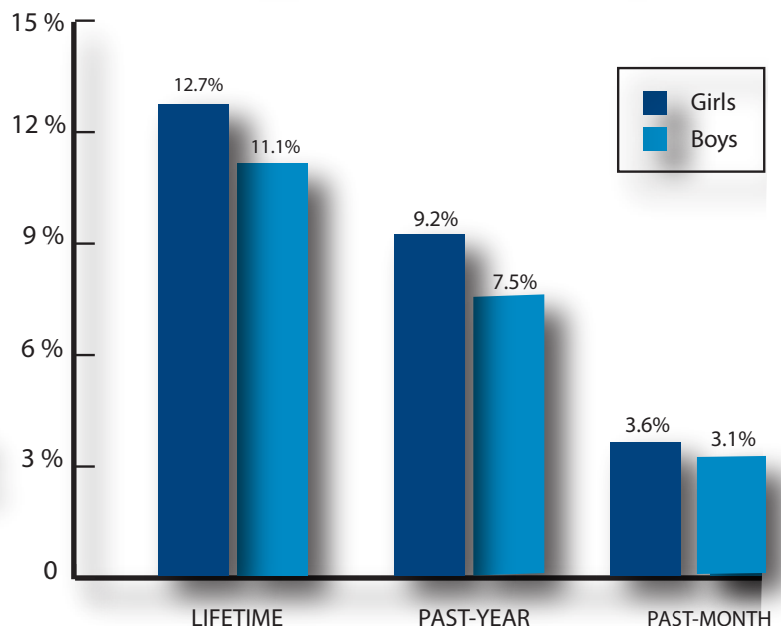
Emergency department visits for all illegal drugs by sex



Emergency department visits for visits for prescription drug abuse by sex



Teen girls abuse prescription drugs at higher rates than teen boys



Source: SAMHSA, 2005 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (September 2006).

Source: DAWN, 2005: National Estimates of Drug-Related Emergency Department Visits

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Office of National Drug Control Policy
Washington, D.C. 20503
p (202) 395-6618 f (202) 395-6730

