



Pharmacological Cognitive Enhancement: Perceptions of Stimulant Misuse and Integrity

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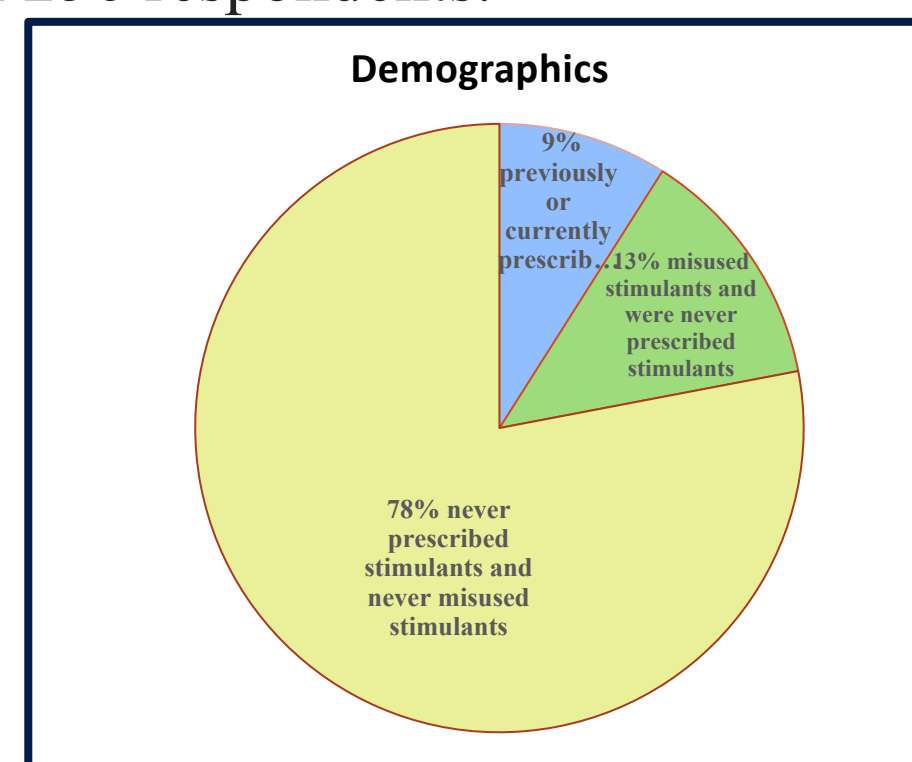
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INTRODUCTION

- Stimulant misuse is a widespread issue amongst both students and professionals.
- Studies estimate 17% of college students (1), 11% of medical students (2), and 5% of attorneys reported stimulant misuse in their lifetime (3).
- Reports suggest stimulant misuse is an important topic of discussion in academia and various professions, however research regarding the ethics of stimulant misuse is limited (4).
- Given its pervasiveness in society, it is important to consider how stimulant misuse for cognitive enhancement might affect a person's sense of authenticity, as well as impact academic and workplace integrity.**

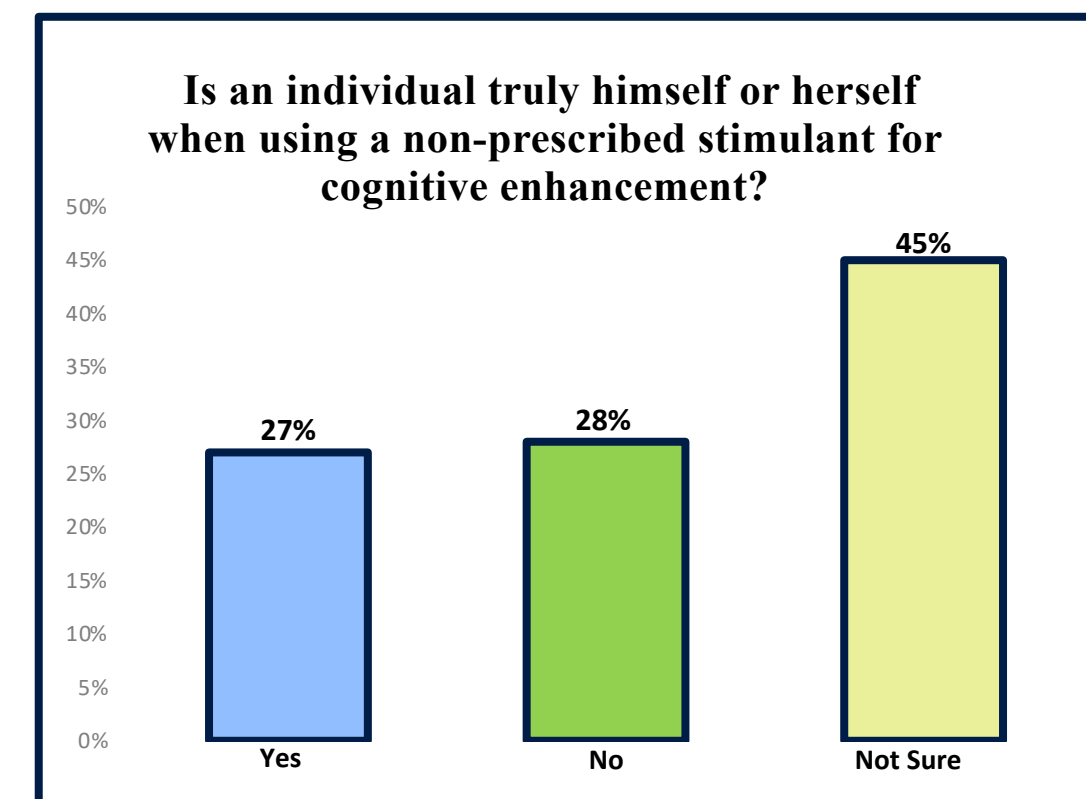
METHODS

- This quantitative study utilized a questionnaire examining perceptions regarding stimulant misuse for cognitive enhancement that was sent to a random sample of 2500 undergraduate students at a university in the Midwest.
- This sample was derived using randomizer software and provided to the research team by senior administrators of the university.
- The final sample consisted of 256 respondents.
- Descriptive and chi-square statistics were performed on results using R software.
- The study received approval from the Northwestern University Institutional Review Board.



RESULTS

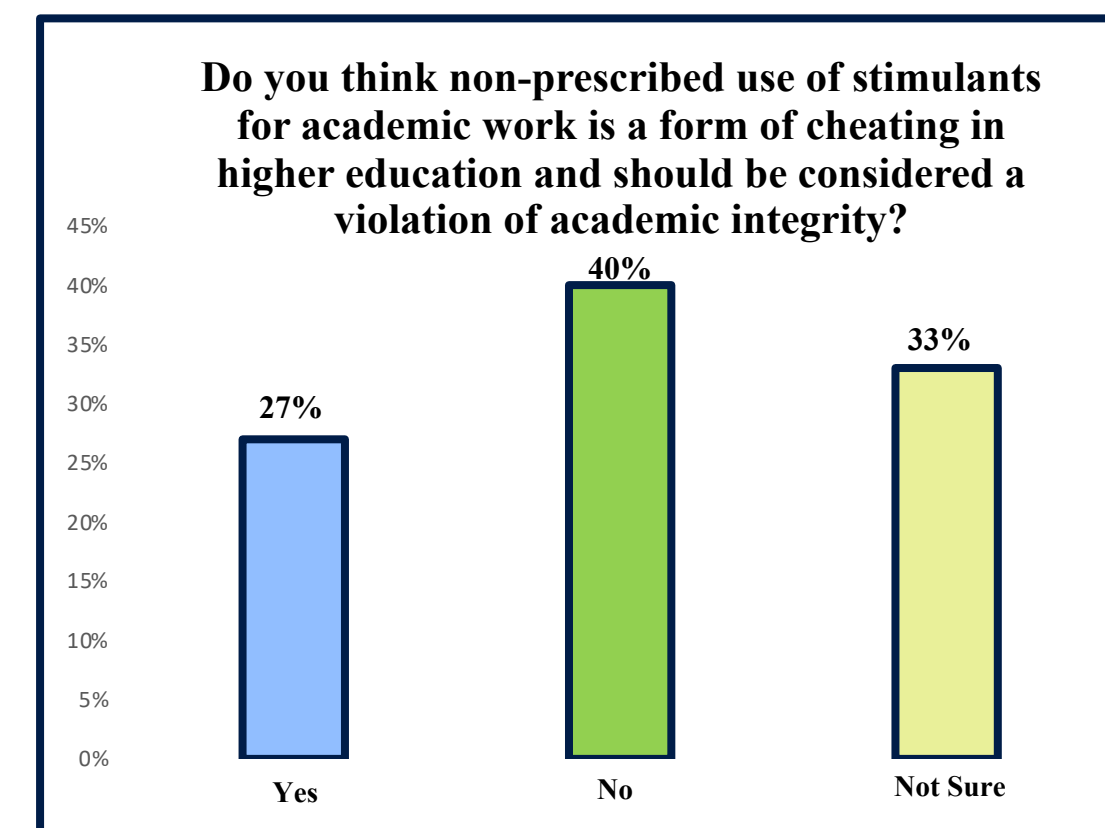
Authenticity



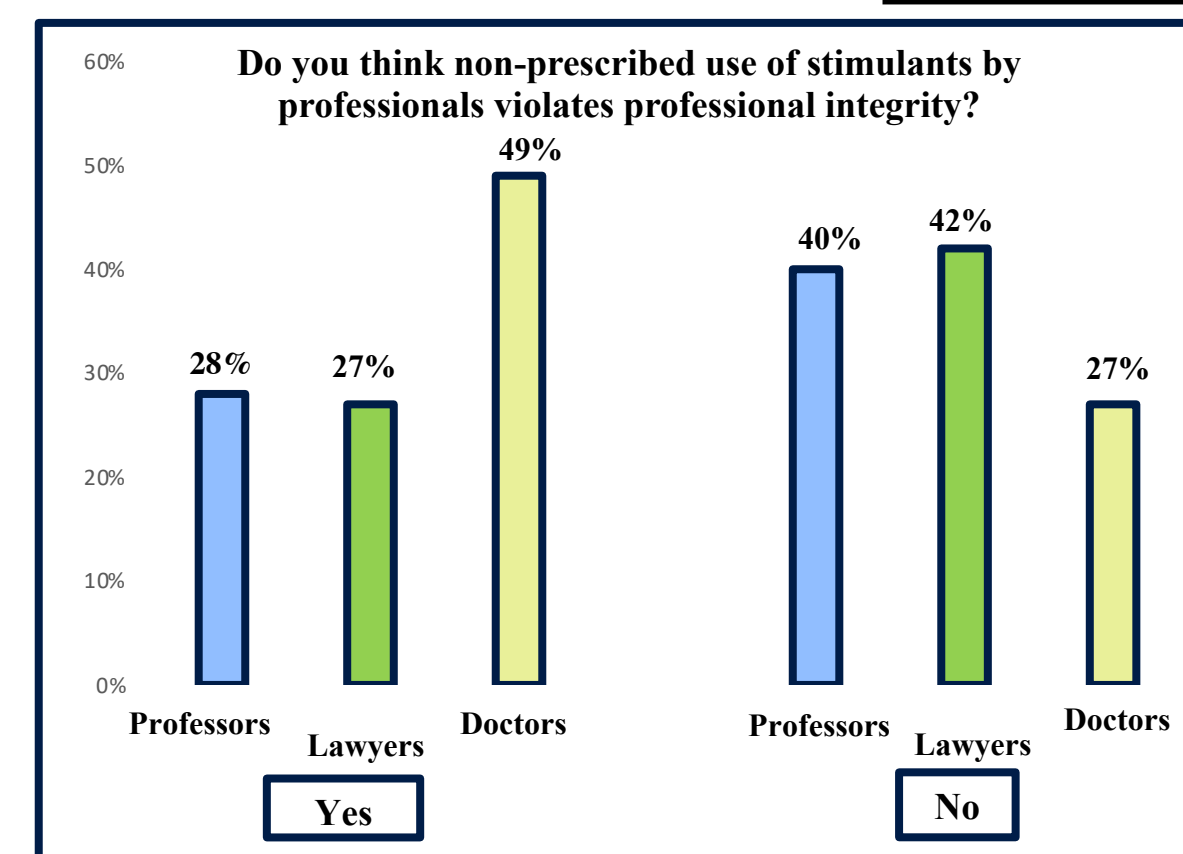
Perceptions of stimulant misuse and authenticity varied among all respondents as well as between subgroups. 69% of students who had previously misused stimulants believed an individual was truly himself with stimulant misuse, compared to only 18% of students who had never misused stimulants ($p < 0.01$).

Academic Integrity

Opinions differed regarding stimulant misuse and academic integrity among respondents, and significant differences in perceptions were noted between subgroups. About a third of students who never misused stimulants believed stimulant misuse was cheating, as did 27% of students who were prescribed stimulants, however only 3% of students who misused stimulants thought this was cheating ($p < 0.01$).



Professional Integrity



This significant difference in perceptions of professional integrity was consistent among all three subgroups of students as well, with more students finding stimulants to be a violation of physician integrity compared to other types of professional integrity ($p < 0.01$).

CONCLUSION

- This is one of the first studies to explore perceptions regarding the ethics of stimulant misuse specifically in relation to authenticity as well as academic and professional integrity.
- Our results showed significant variation in perceptions among respondents, with no clear consensus regarding the impact of stimulant misuse on authenticity and/or integrity. Perceptions varied significantly depending on whether or not student respondents had ever misused stimulants themselves.
- The significant variation in perceptions highlights a need for more in-depth and interdisciplinary research to better understand how and why individuals believe stimulants may affect authenticity and integrity.
- An additional significant finding that is worthy of further consideration is how more respondents believed stimulant misuse violated physicians' professional integrity, whereas fewer respondents overall felt stimulant misuse violated professional integrity among professors and lawyers.
- An area for further research would be to understand why individuals feel stimulants violate integrity for some professionals rather than others.
- Overall, this study adds to the growing literature regarding stimulant misuse and will hopefully inspire more discussion regarding stimulant misuse and its impact on integrity.

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- Picture obtained from: <https://nida.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/2018/04/five-million-american-adults-misusing-prescription-stimulants>.