

The DASIS Report

July 26, 2002

Prescription and Over-the-Counter Drug Abuse Admissions

In Brief

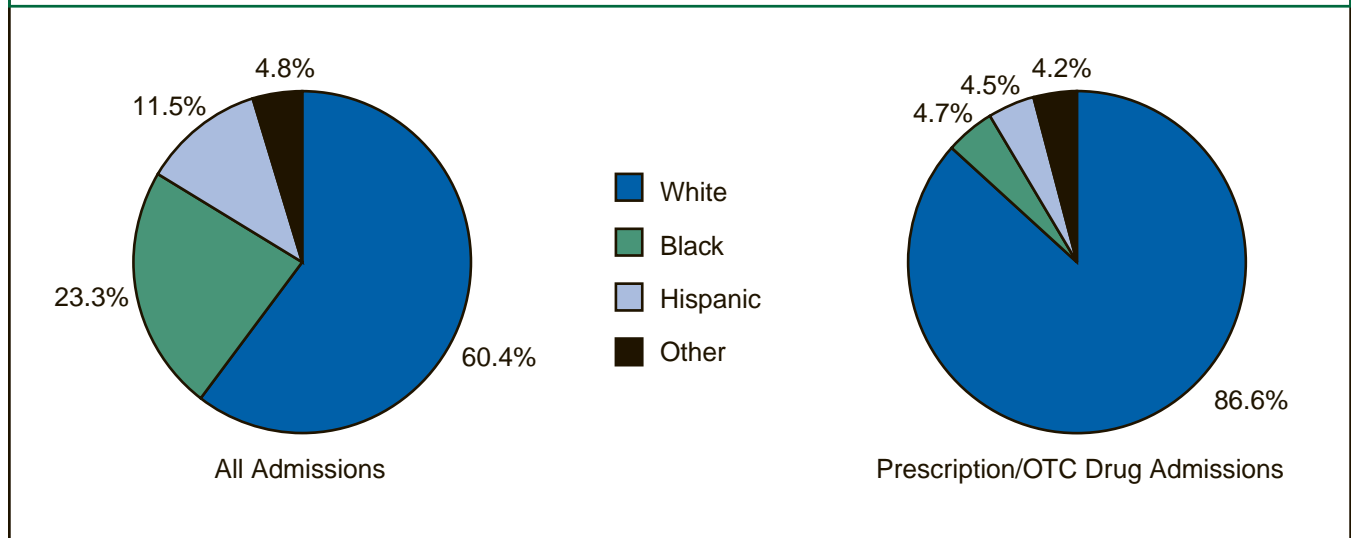
- In 1999, 87 percent of admissions for prescription and OTC drug abuse were among Whites
- Admissions for abuse of tranquilizers and sedatives were more likely to be female; admissions for abuse of prescription stimulants and OTC drugs were more likely to be male
- Age at admission for prescription stimulants was generally younger than for other prescription or OTC drugs

Prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) drug abuse accounted for a small fraction (3 percent) of the 1.6 million admissions reported to the Treatment Episode Data Set (TEDS) in 1999. Prescription drugs in TEDS are grouped as follows: prescription narcotics (e.g., Demerol), prescription stimulants (e.g., Ritalin), tranquilizers (e.g., diazepam), and sedatives (e.g., Seconal). OTC drugs include aspirin, cough syrup, and any other legally-obtained nonprescription medication.

Nearly half (46 percent) of the 44,000 treatment admissions for primary prescription and OTC drug abuse in 1999 were for prescription narcotic drugs. Prescription stimulant drugs accounted for an additional one third (33 percent) of admissions, while tranquilizers accounted for 11 percent. Sedatives and OTC medications made up 7 percent and 2 percent of these admissions, respectively.

TEDS is a compilation of data on the demographic characteristics and substance abuse problems of those admitted for substance abuse treatment. The information comes primarily from facilities that receive some public funding. TEDS records represent admissions rather than individuals, as a person may be admitted to treatment more than once.

Figure 1. All Admissions and Prescription/OTC Drug Admissions, Percentage by Race/Ethnicity: 1999



Source: 1999 SAMHSA Treatment Episode Data Set (TEDS).

Race/Ethnicity

The racial/ethnic composition of TEDS admissions for prescription and OTC drug abuse differed from that of the total admissions population (Figure 1). In 1999, Whites accounted for 87 percent of prescription and OTC drug admissions compared with 60 percent of all admissions. Blacks made up only 5 percent of admissions for prescription and OTC drugs, but nearly one quarter (23 percent) of all admissions. Hispanics accounted for 4 percent of prescription and OTC drug treatment admissions and 12 percent of all TEDS admissions.

Admissions by Sex

The proportion of males and females in treatment for abuse of prescription and OTC drugs in 1999 varied according to the type of drug abused (Figure 2). Prescription narcotic admissions were

equally likely to be male or female. Admissions for prescription stimulants were more likely to be male (56 percent); however, admissions for abuse of tranquilizers and sedatives were more likely to be female (58 percent and 59 percent, respectively). Treatment admissions for abuse of OTC drugs were primarily male (67 percent).

Age at Admission

The distribution of age at admission for abuse of prescription narcotics and tranquilizers/sedatives was somewhat similar (Figure 3). OTC admissions demonstrated an early peak at age 16 that prescription narcotics and tranquilizer/sedative admissions did not. Age at admission for prescription stimulants was generally younger than for other prescription or OTC drugs. The average age for prescription stimulant admissions in 1999 was

31 years compared with 36 to 38 years for the other types of prescription and OTC drugs.

Age at First Use

Among admissions for abuse of prescription and OTC drugs in 1999, the age at initiation of prescription and OTC drug abuse differed according to the type of drug abused. The median age at first use was 18 for OTC and prescription stimulant admissions (data not shown). This was younger than the median age at first use for prescription narcotic admissions (24 years), tranquilizer admissions (23 years), and sedative admissions (22 years).

Source of Referral

The source of referral to treatment among prescription and OTC admissions varied according to the drug being abused (Figure 4). In 1999, over half (51 percent)

Figure 2. Prescription and OTC Drug Admissions, Percentage by Sex: 1999

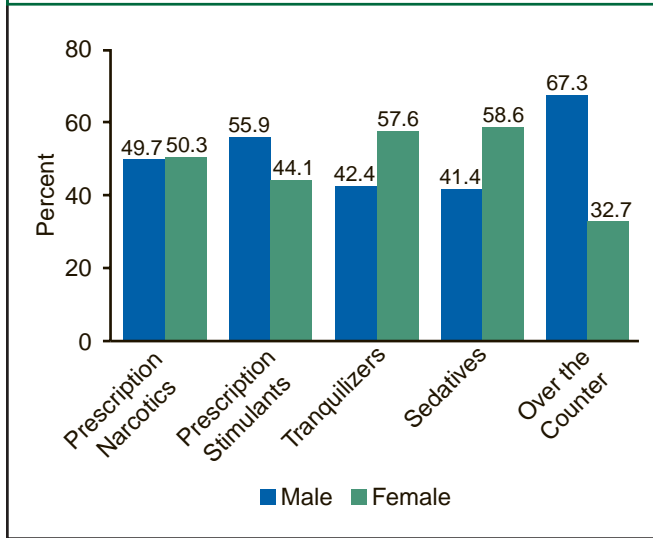
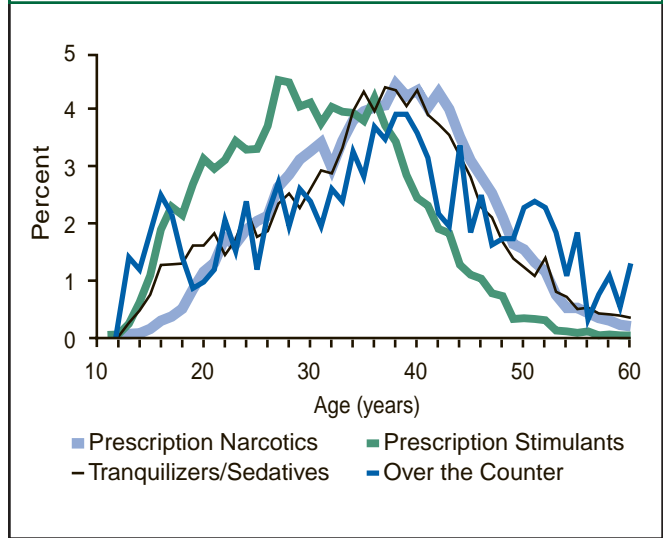


Figure 3. Prescription and OTC Drug Admissions, Percentage by Age at Admission: 1999

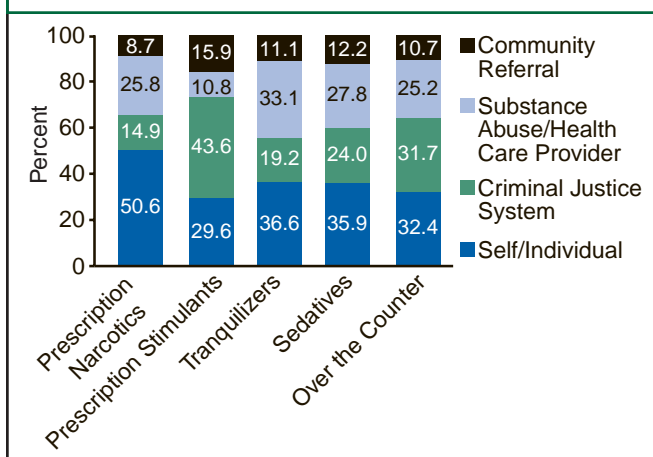


of prescription narcotic admissions resulted from a self- or individual referral compared with 30 to 37 percent of other prescription and OTC drug admissions. Referrals from the criminal justice system were most likely to occur among admissions for prescription stimulant abuse (44 percent) and least likely to occur among admissions for prescription narcotic abuse (15 percent).

One quarter to one third of admissions for abuse of prescription drugs other than prescription stimulants were the result of a referral by substance abuse and health care providers, while only 11 percent of admissions for prescription stimulant abuse resulted from this referral source. Community referrals

to treatment occurred in relatively similar proportions across the different prescription and OTC drug types and ranged from 9 percent of admissions for prescription narcotic abuse to 16 percent of admissions for prescription stimulant abuse.

Figure 4. Prescription and OTC Drug Admissions, Percentage by Source of Referral: 1999



The Drug and Alcohol Services Information System (DASIS) is an integrated data system maintained by the Office of Applied Studies, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). One component of DASIS is the Treatment Episode Data Set (TEDS). TEDS is a compilation of data on the demographic characteristics and substance abuse problems of those admitted for substance abuse treatment. The information comes primarily from facilities that receive some public funding. Information on treatment admissions is routinely collected by State administrative systems and then submitted to SAMHSA in a standard format. Approximately 1.6 million records are included in TEDS each year. TEDS records represent admissions rather than individuals, as a person may be admitted to treatment more than once.

The DASIS Report is prepared by the Office of Applied Studies, SAMHSA; Synectics for Management Decisions, Inc., Arlington, Virginia; and RTI, Research Triangle Park, North Carolina.

Information and data for this issue are based on data reported to TEDS through April 16, 2001.

Access the latest TEDS reports at:

<http://www.samhsa.gov/oas/dasis.htm>

Access the latest TEDS public use files at:

<http://www.samhsa.gov/oas/SAMHDA.htm>

Other substance abuse reports are available at:

<http://www.DrugAbuseStatistics.samhsa.gov>



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