

A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

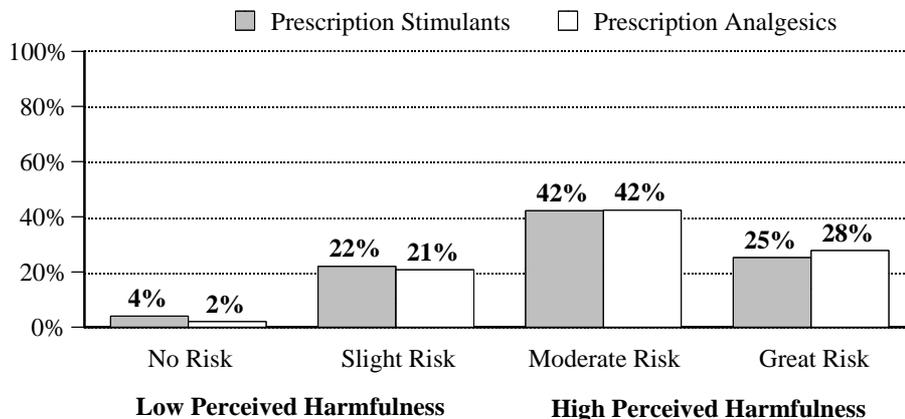
University of Maryland, College Park

## *Majority of Students at One Mid-Atlantic University Perceive Moderate to Great Risk of Harm in Using Prescription Drugs Nonmedically*

More than two-thirds of college students at one university believe that the nonmedical use of prescription analgesics and stimulants has a high risk of harm,\* according to data from CESAR's College Life Study (CLS). The findings for prescription stimulants and analgesics were strikingly similar: 25% and 28% of college students perceived a great risk in the occasional nonmedical use of prescription stimulants and analgesics, respectively, and 42% of students thought there was a moderate risk of using either substance nonmedically (see figure below). Furthermore, the study found that among students who had the opportunity to use these drugs nonmedically, low perceived harmfulness was associated with nonmedical use, even after controlling for demographics, prior nonmedical use, and sensation-seeking. For both prescription stimulants and prescription analgesics, students with low perceived harmfulness were approximately 10 times more likely to engage in nonmedical use than those with high perceived harmfulness (data not shown). In addition, the relationship between low perceived harm and nonmedical use was less pronounced among the highest sensation-seekers. The authors suggest that "increasing perceived harmfulness may be a viable prevention strategy for most students, but alternative approaches might need to be developed that are tailored to high sensation-seekers."

### **"How Much Do You Think People Risk Harming Themselves If They Take Prescription Drugs Occasionally Nonmedically?"\*\***

(weighted N=2,271 first-year college students)



\*To put these findings into perspective, occasional nonmedical prescription drug use was seen as less risky than occasional cocaine use (72% of students believed there was a great risk from using cocaine) but more risky than occasional marijuana use (7%) or drinking five or more alcoholic beverages every weekend (17%).

\*\* For both types of drugs, an additional 7% of students reported "can't say."

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from Arria, A.M., Caldeira, K.M., Vincent, K.B., O'Grady, K.E., and Wish, E.D., "Perceived Harmfulness Predicts Nonmedical Use of Prescription Drugs Among College Students: Interactions with Sensation-Seeking," *Prevention Science* 9(3):191-201, 2008. Available online at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11121-008-0095-8>. The College Life Study was funded by NIDA RO1-14845.