Household Diversion of Prescription Stimulants: Medication Misuse by Parents of Children with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder

Pham Tammy, Milanaik Ruth, Kaplan Alyson, Papaioannou Helen, and Adesman Andrew.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.1089/cap.2016.0058

ABSTRACT

Objectives:
The primary objective of this study is to investigate household diversion of stimulant medication. Secondary objectives are to examine clinical/demographic predictors of diversion, types of formulations diverted, exposure to household diversion in the media, and storage of prescription stimulants within households.

Methods:
Questionnaires were completed by 180 parents of youth who were currently taking stimulant medication for treatment of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Parents were asked whether they or another adult in the home had ever taken their child's stimulant medication or given one child's stimulant medication to another child in the home. Additionally, data regarding demographics, parental ADHD (diagnosed or suspected), past suspicions of missing medication, and medication storage were also collected. Responses were compared using Pearson's chi-squared test with Yates' continuity correction.

Results:
Sixteen percent of parents reported diversion of stimulant medication to another household member, with the majority admitting to taking the medication themselves. Another 13% had been tempted to illicitly self-administer their child's medication. Parents with suspected or diagnosed ADHD showed greater risk of self-administration or temptation to do so, compared to parents without (33% vs. 17%, p = 0.01). The majority of parents (71%) stored prescription stimulants “in plain sight,” or “out of sight but available to all.”

Conclusion:
Although previous research has focused on peer diversion among adolescents and young adults, clinicians must be vigilant for the possibility of diversion by parents of children treated with stimulant medication.