

# Opioid Misuse on Missouri Campuses: At Risk Populations and Harm Reduction

Partners in Prevention (PIP) is Missouri's higher education substance misuse consortium dedicated to creating healthy and safe college campuses. The coalition is comprised of 26 public and private colleges and universities in the state working to prevent high-risk behaviors by implementing evidence-based strategies, including education, social norming campaigns, policy review and enforcement, and more. This brief includes data for the 23 4-year institutions in the coalition; 2-year campuses participate in a separate version of the survey, and their data is not included in this statewide aggregate. To measure progress and obtain data needed for the implementation of programs, PIP created the Missouri Assessment of College Health Behaviors (MACHB) Survey. The MACHB is an annual, online survey that has been implemented each spring since 2007. The survey assesses the roles that alcohol, drugs (illegal and prescription), tobacco/nicotine, interpersonal violence, and mental health have on student health and wellness. This brief will focus on opioid use and misuse among Missouri college students, specifically at-risk populations, mental health concerns of those who misuse, and methods of harm reduction.

## Background

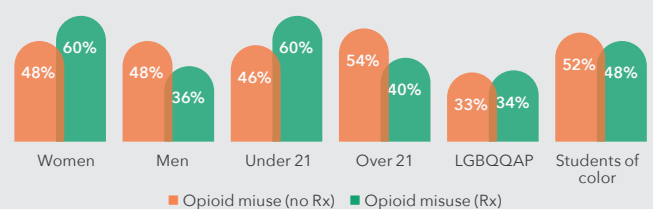
Opioids are a class of drug that combats moderate to severe pain. The pain relief drugs come from the opium poppy plant, known to have relaxing and calming effects that are often described as a "high." People chasing this high often misuse opioids for non-medical reasons and are sought after even when they are not prescribed. The MACHB survey asks students to report their past year prescription drug misuse, defined as taking a prescription drug in a manner other than prescribed or taking a medication that was not prescribed. In 2024, 5.5% of students reported misuse of a prescription drug without a prescription with 1.9% of those students misusing pain medication/opioids. Regarding the prescription drug misuse from those who have a prescription, in 2024 4.6% of students reported misusing their own prescription, with 1.8% of those students' misusing pain medication/opiates.

## Demographics

The MACHB survey asks students various multiple-choice questions about their demography. Among

those students who misused opioids in the past year with no prescription, there was a roughly equal breakdown of female- and male- identifying students (48%). There was a higher percentage of females (60%) out of those who misused their opioid prescription compared to men (36%). A higher percentage of students who misused prescriptions were under age 21 (60%; 40% over 21) compared to students who misused their own prescription. A similar percentage of people who misused opioids with no prescription (33%) and people who misused their prescribed opioids (34%) identify as LGBTQAP\*, while about half of people who misused with no prescription (52%) and misused their prescribed opioids (48%) reported being students of color.

Chart 1: Demographics of Opioid Users



For more information, visit [mopip.org](https://mopip.org)

Funded by the Missouri Department of Mental Health, Division of Behavioral Health

# Mental Health & Well-being of Students who Misuse Opioids

Mental health concerns were some of the more alarming percentages when it came to those who have misused opioids regardless of prescription in the past year. Among those who misused opioids without a prescription, 40% reported that they had felt stressed in the past two weeks, but were able to manage, 29% reported feeling overwhelmed by their stress, and 5.0% experienced unbearable levels of stress in the past two weeks. Students who misused their own prescription reported higher stress rates in every category except stressed but managing (36%) when compared to the statewide aggregate and students who misused with no prescription.

**Table 1: Stress Levels of Students that Misuse Opioids**

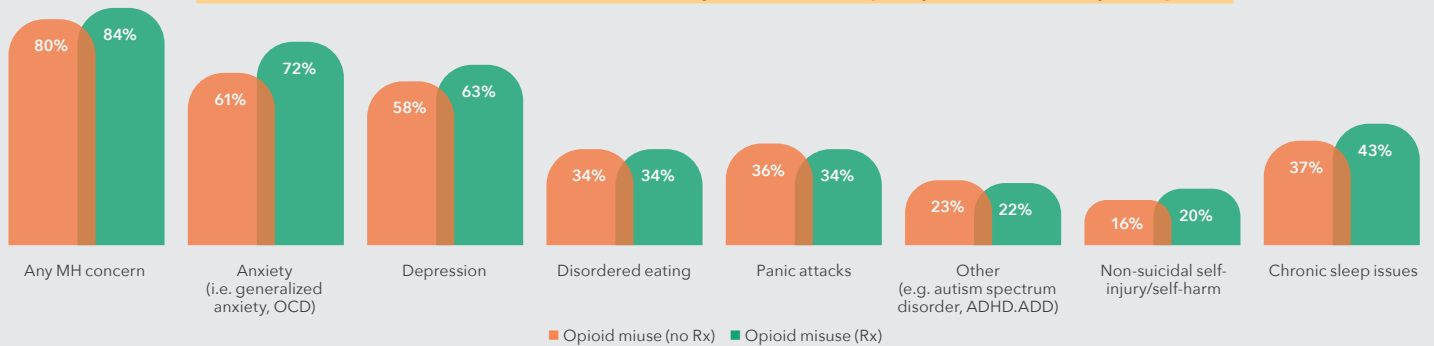
	Opioid Misuse (no Rx)	Opioid Misuse (Rx)	Statewide Aggregate
Stressed, but managing	40%	36%	46%
Overwhelmed	29%	37%	29%
Unbearable	5.0%	9.6%	4.4%

Four in five of Missouri students who misused prescription drugs (80%) or misused their own prescription (84%) also reported experiencing mental health concerns. A lower percentage of students misused opioids regardless of prescription reported diagnoses of any mental health concerns in the past year, with 52% of people who misused opioids without a prescription and 61% of people who misused their opioid prescription reporting diagnosis.

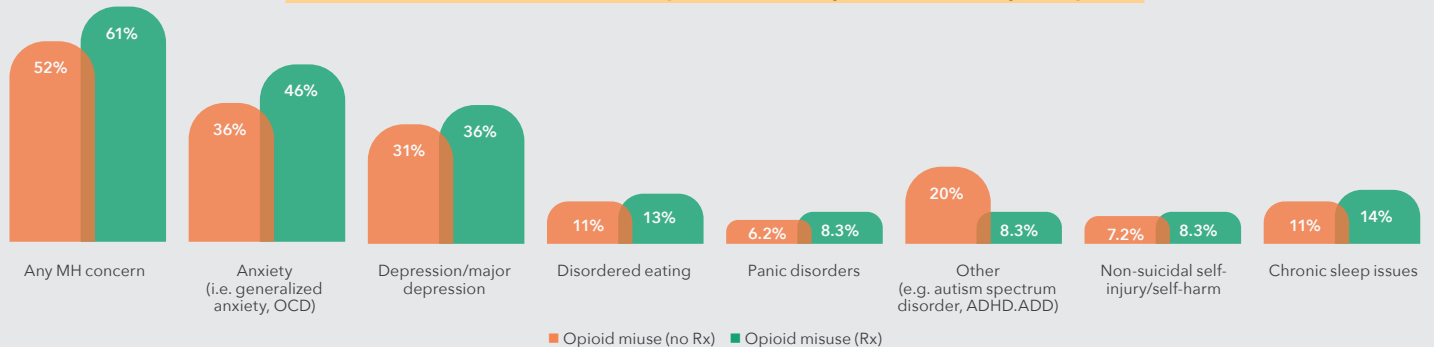
The three most reported mental health concerns that were experienced in the past year by both people who misused opioid medication regardless of prescription in Missouri were Anxiety (e.g., generalized anxiety, OCD), Depression, and Chronic Sleep Issues. The 2024 MACHB survey results also determined that it was more common for people who misused their opioid prescription to experience mental health concerns than it was for these concerns to be diagnosed.

For students who misused without a prescription, Anxiety (e.g., generalized anxiety, OCD), Depression/Major Depression, and Other Mental Health Concerns (e.g., Autism Spectrum Disorder, ADHD/ADD) were the three most reported diagnoses, while students

**Chart 2: Mental Health Concerns Experienced by Opioid Users (past year)**



**Chart 3: Mental Health Diagnoses of Opioid Users (past year)**



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who misused their prescribed opioids reported Chronic Sleep Issues as being the third most prevalent instead of Other Mental Health Concerns.

## Suicidality

The 2024 MACHB survey determined that a large portion of students that misuse opioids that were or were not prescribed to them have experienced suicidal thoughts and behaviors both in their lifetime and in the past year. Over half of students who misused opioids regardless of prescription reported having suicidal ideations during their lifetime, while almost one-third of people who misuse opioids that were not prescribed to them and over one-third of people who misuse their own opioid prescription responded that they have had these thoughts in the past year.

Table 2: Suicidal Behaviors of Missouri Students that Misuse Opioids

	Opioid Misuse (no Rx)	Opioid Misuse (Rx)	Statewide Aggregate
Lifetime suicidal thoughts	57%	64%	45%
Past year suicidal thoughts	30%	37%	22%
Past year attempted suicide	4.5%	8.9%	1.5%

## Summary

In analyzing the data obtained via the 2024 MACHB survey, it is of significance that mental health concerns and suicidality are trends seen among Missouri college students that misuse opioids, given that 80% of students that misuse opioids without a prescription and 84% of students that misuse their opioid prescription experienced mental health concerns in the past year. Additionally, 57% of those who have misused opioids without a prescription and 64% of those who misuse their own prescription have had suicidal thoughts in their lifetimes. It can be determined that students are likely misusing pain medications to combat or distract from the mental health struggles they are experiencing. Educating students of on-campus mental health

and wellness resources or forming focus groups for students to discuss their experiences could be a great opportunity for campuses to decrease the misuse of opioids amongst students. The data also shows that women and students under age 21 are more likely to misuse their opioid prescription, while students over the age of 21, men, and students of color are more likely to misuse an opioid when not prescribed. Since students involved in a diverse range of communities have misused opioid medication in the past year, a prime opportunity to provide harm reductive services to a variety of students would be making Narcan/naloxone accessible on Missouri college campuses.

## Resources

### PIP Basecamp for Prescription Drug Misuse Prevention

Offers sample Narcan policy, Narcan toolkit for campuses, Narcan brochures, and Good Samaritan Law graphics. [Learn more here.](#)

### Opioid Overdose Training & Resources

PIP training and educational resources for students and educators. [Learn more here.](#)

### Missouri Institute of Mental Health

Where to get Narcan and fentanyl test strips from the Missouri Institute of Mental Health. [Learn more here.](#)

### Missouri Department of Health & Senior Services

Resources offered by Missouri Department of Health & Senior Services, overdose prevention and response, link to Time 2 Act, and additional resources. [Learn more here.](#)

### National Harm Reduction Coalition

Resources for persons who use substances and providing harm reductive care. [Learn more here.](#)

Contact Partners in Prevention at (573) 884-7551.

Brief and Research prepared by Partners in Prevention Research Team Intern, Madeline Freeman. Published in October of 2024.

\*LGBQQAP (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer, Questioning, Asexual, Pansexual)