Prevalence and Characteristics of Stimulant Use and Prescription Stimulant Misuse (PSM) in a Treatment-Seeking, Military Sample

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A RED SOX FOUNDATION AND MASSACHUSETTS GENERAL HOSPITAL PROGRAM

HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL

HOME BASE — VETERAN AND FAMILY CARE

## Introduction

Background

- Stimulant use, particularly prescription stimulant misuse (PSM) is understudied among service members and veterans.
  - PSM is mainly studied within academic environments.
  - Substance use screening tools used with military personnel primarily assess alcohol and cannabis use.
  - Assessments of stimulant use often neglect to screen for *prescription* stimulant use, misuse, and attitudes.

Aims

- Examine the prevalence and characteristics of stimulant use/PSM in a military (veteran and service member) patient sample.
- Assess perceived attitudes and knowledge of PSM.

Method

- Participants (N=480) completed a substance use screening questionnaire before initiating care at an outpatient mental health clinic.
- Past two-week substance use of: alcohol, cannabis, stimulant (prescribed or non-prescribed), opiate, and steroid use was assessed:
  - Participants that endorsed stimulant use were asked additional questions about PSM, as well as their perceptions, attitudes, and knowledge of PSM.

480 patients screened

↓

155 patients reported stimulant use

↓

155 patients asked additional PSM questions
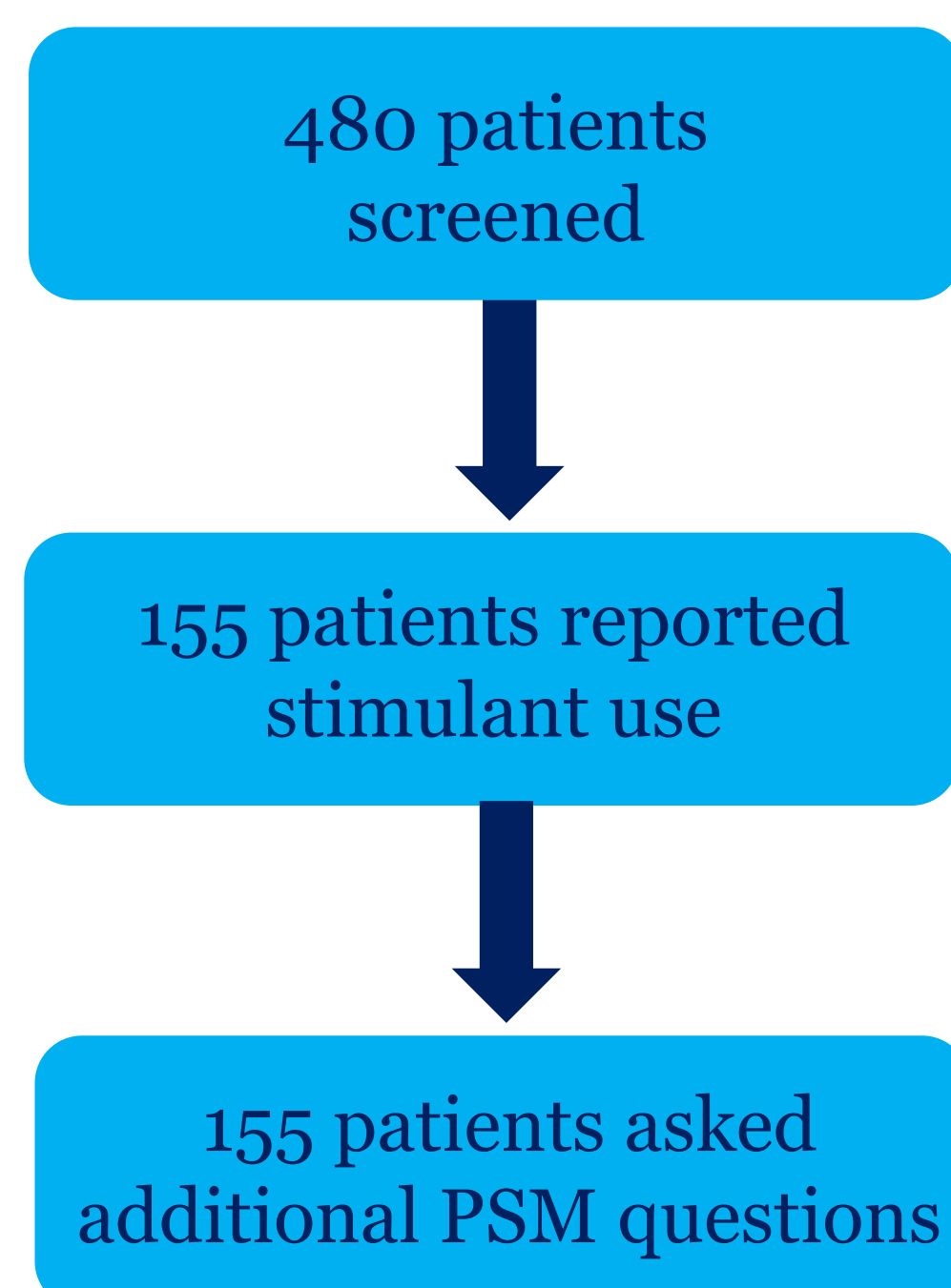
Results

Prevalence

- **155 participants (33%)** reported *any* form of **stimulant use** (e.g. cocaine, Adderall, methamphetamines, etc.) in the past two weeks.
- New patients who identified as Black were more likely to endorse recent prescribed or non-prescribed stimulant use (54%) than were new patients who identified as White (28%; $p<.05$).
- New patients who were employed were more likely than those where were unemployed to report stimulant use ($p<.05$).

Stimulant use is **prevalent** within this **treatment-seeking, military sample** with a **third of new patients endorsing past two-week use. Perceptions, attitudes, and knowledge** of **prescription stimulant misuse** within this group **highlight areas** for improved **screening and clinical intervention.**

## Results ct.

Attitudes, Perceptions, and Knowledge

"I am aware of the recommended dosage levels for prescription stimulant use"

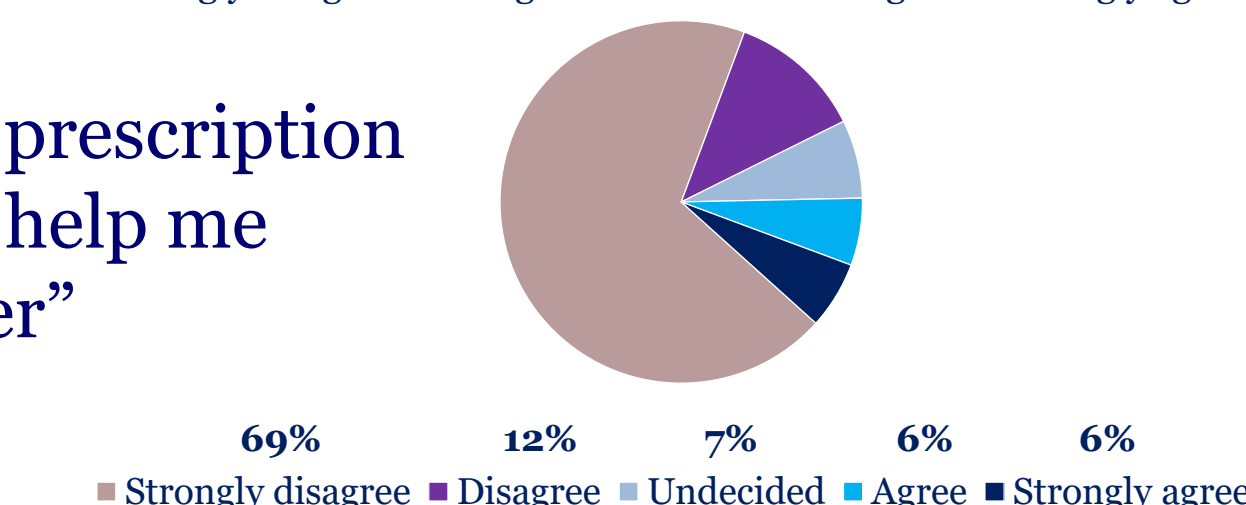6% Strongly disagree 2% Disagree 10% Undecided 21% Agree 61% Strongly agree
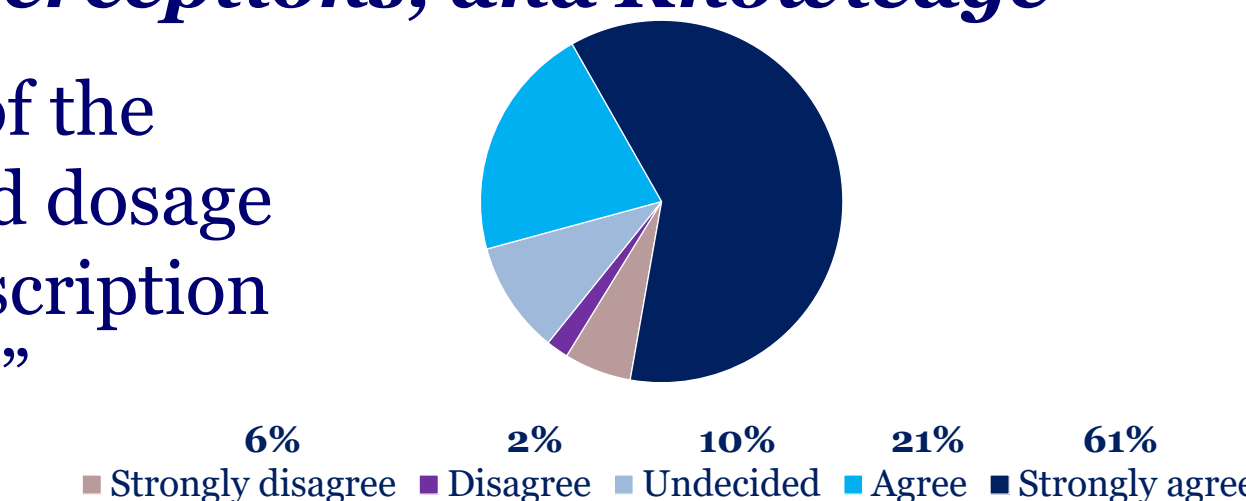
"The healthcare Providers that I have been to have talked to me about the safety of prescription stimulants"

16% Strongly disagree 4% Disagree 13% Undecided 21% Agree 46% Strongly agree
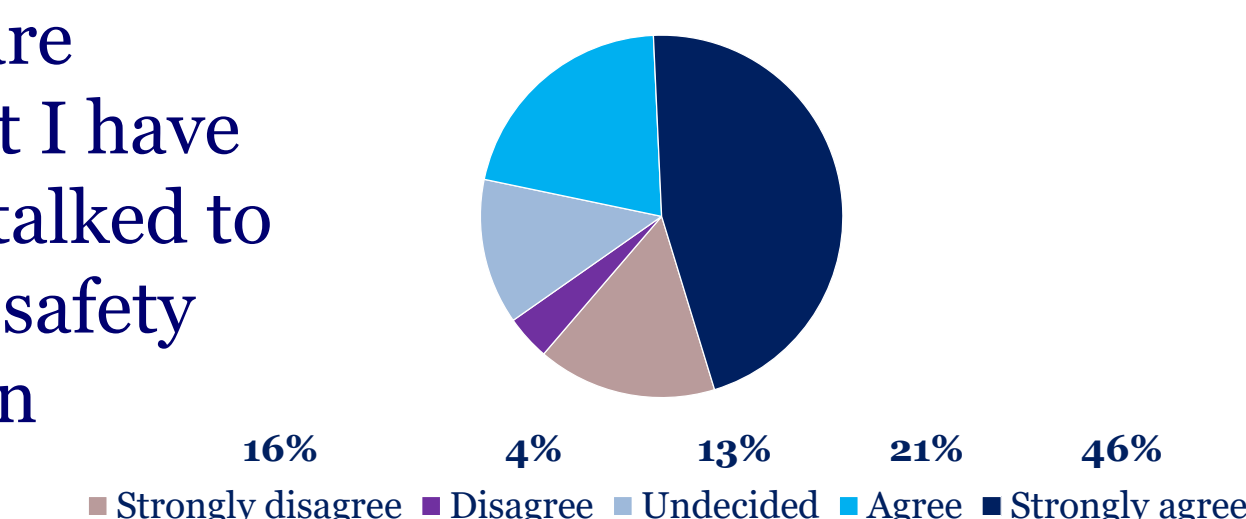
"Misusing prescription stimulants occasionally is harmless"

45% Strongly disagree 14% Disagree 21% Undecided 9% Agree 10% Strongly agree
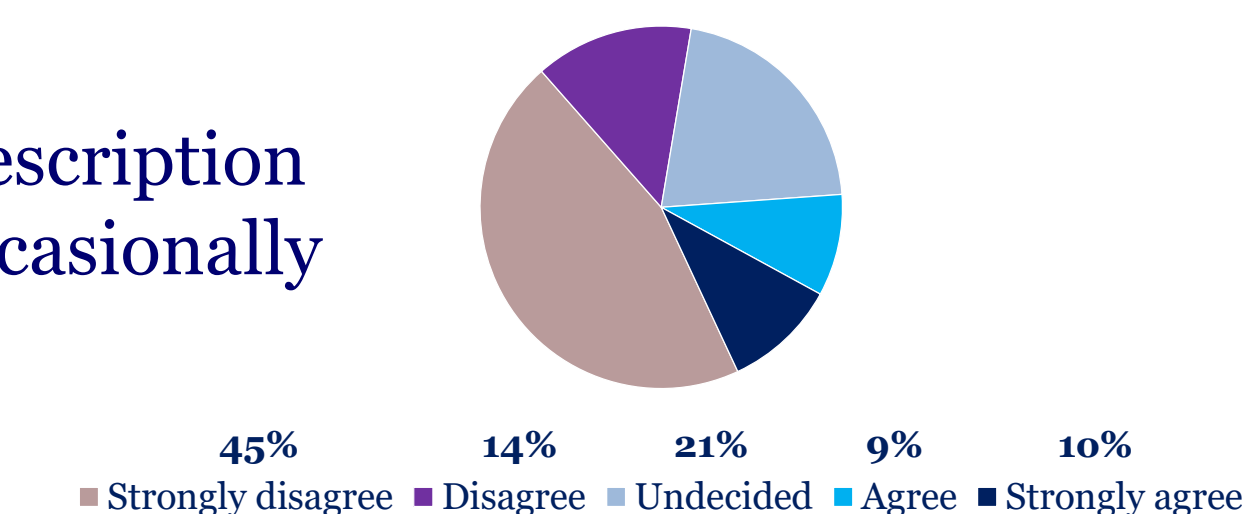
"I have taken prescription stimulants to help me socialize better"

69% Strongly disagree 12% Disagree 7% Undecided 6% Agree 6% Strongly agree

"I have taken prescription stimulants to help me lose weight"

80% Strongly disagree 11% Disagree 3% Undecided 4% Agree 2% Strongly agree
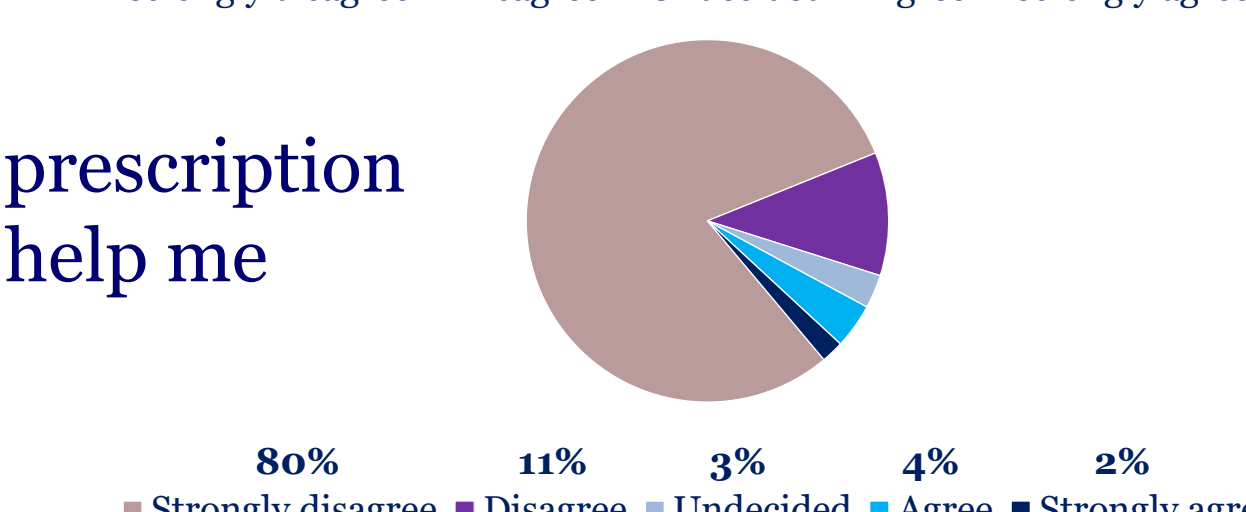
"I have taken prescription stimulants to 'get high'"

84% Strongly disagree 9% Disagree 4% Undecided 2% Agree 1% Strongly agree
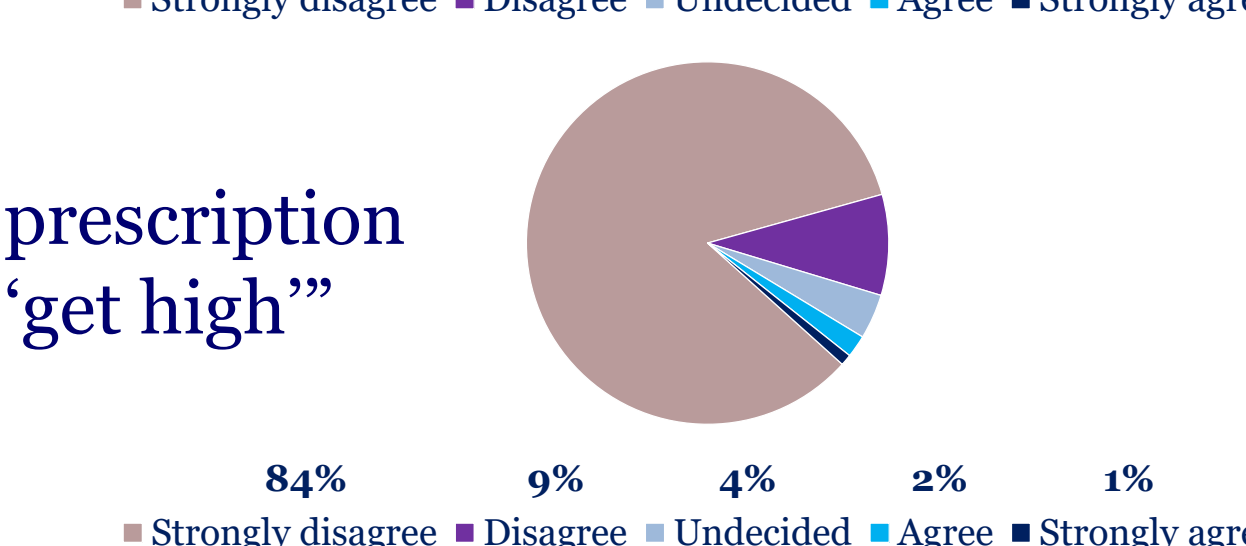
Discussion

Takeaways

- Stimulant use is prevalent within this treatment-seeking, military sample.
  - Clinics serving this demographic should ensure assessment of stimulant use and PSM
- Stimulant use might be more common among certain demographic groups.
  - Treatment team should consider factors contributing to these differences.
- PSM was only endorsed by 1% of patients when directly provided with the PSM definition, yet based on responses to the attitudes, perceptions, and knowledge questionnaire many more patients *endorsed engaging in forms of PSM*.
  - Clinical assessments should be as destigmatizing as possible, with questions about specific PSM behaviors.
- Clinical screening and intervention informed by patient's attitudes, perceptions, and knowledge of PSM is crucial.

Future Directions

- An expansion of studies assessing stimulant use, particularly PSM, within military samples is warranted.
- Additional studies will be critical to inform clinical intervention following positive screens.

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