



CWHS

# Data Points

RESULTS FROM THE 2009 CALIFORNIA WOMEN'S HEALTH SURVEY

Prescription drug misuse is associated with risks for overdose, dependence, and other health and social problems.<sup>1-6</sup> National studies have found that young people have higher rates of prescription drug misuse (including tranquilizers, sedatives, narcotic pain medications, and stimulants) and concurrent alcohol-use disorders than older people.<sup>3,7</sup> A recent national study found that 6.3 percent of women ages 18 to 25 and 2.1 percent of women ages 26 and older reported misusing prescription drugs in the preceding 30 days.<sup>7</sup>

Prescription drug misuse also includes unintended noncompliance or risky use of prescribed drugs. Older women are more likely than men or younger women

to be prescribed multiple prescription drugs,<sup>8</sup> which may increase the potential for unintended misuse. Furthermore, older women are particularly sensitive to the physical effects of prescription drugs and alcohol, and consequently are more vulnerable to their use and misuse.<sup>9</sup> With the aging of "baby boomers," rates of nonmedical use of prescription drugs among older women and men are expected to double by 2020.<sup>10</sup>

This report, based on combined data from the California Women's Health Survey (CWHS) 2008 and 2009 (N = 9001), examined prescription drug misuse and alcohol consumption among women. The 2008 and 2009 CWHS asked women how many different prescription drugs they

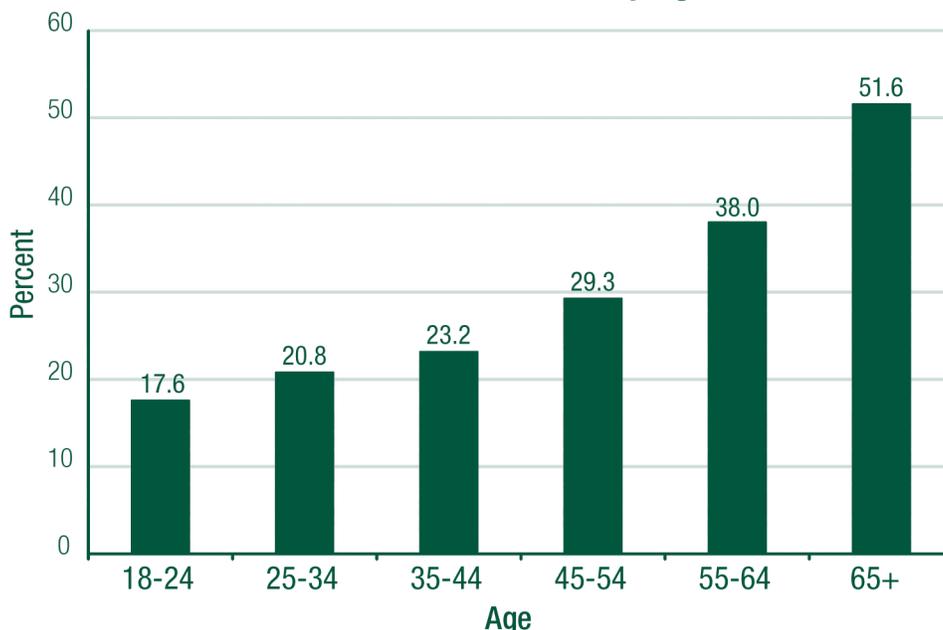
## Prescription Drug Use and Misuse Among Women: California Women's Health Survey, 2008-2009

Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs  
Office of Women's and Perinatal Services  
California Department of Public Health  
Chronic Disease Surveillance and Research Branch

### Public Health Message:

*These findings affirm the importance of prevention and interventions designed for women of all ages at increased risk for prescription drug misuse, including hazardous use of alcohol in combination with prescription drug use. Health providers, addiction treatment professionals, and other allied professionals should be trained and prepared to identify and address the needs of diverse women with co-occurring prescription drug misuse and alcohol-related problems.*

Figure 1  
**Percentage of Women Using One or More Prescription Drugs Per Week in the Past 12 Months by Age, 2008-2009**



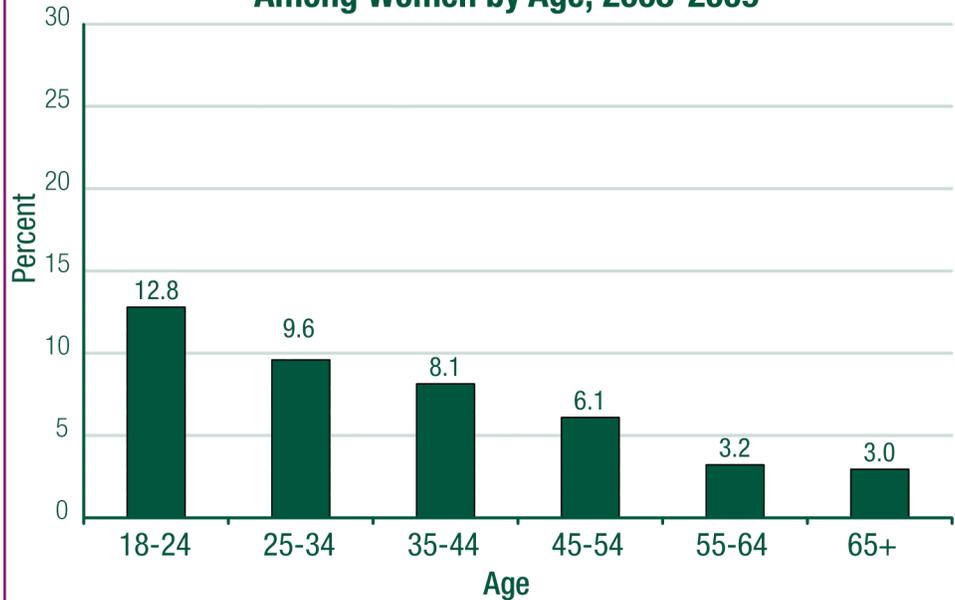
Source: California Women's Health Survey, 2008-2009

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Figure 2 **Prescription Drug Misuse in the Past 12 Months Among Women by Age, 2008-2009**



Source: California Women's Health Survey, 2008-2009

took each day or each week. Prescription drug misuse was determined based on a positive response to the following question: *During the past 12 months, have you ever, even once, used a painkiller, tranquilizer, sedative, or stimulant that was not prescribed for you or that you took only for the experience or feeling that it caused?* Respondents were also asked about alcohol consumption in the past 30 days, and were classified as either nondrinkers (consumed no alcohol in the past 30 days); moderate drinkers (consumed alcohol in the past 30 days, but did not consume four or more drinks on at least one occasion); or binge drinkers (consumed four or more drinks on one or more occasions in the past 30 days). Responses were weighted by age and race/ethnicity to reflect the 2000 California adult female population. Analyses were stratified by age, race/ethnicity, income, and sexual orientation using multiple logistic regression.

**Prescription Drug Use**

One-half of respondents (50.0 percent) did not use any medications at all, 17.2 percent used at least one prescription drug

per week, 10.3 percent used two weekly, 7.2 percent used three weekly, and the remainder (15.3 percent) used four or more per week in the past 12 months. The percentage of women using at least one prescription drug per week increased significantly by age ( $P < .0001$ , Figure 1). Women with access to health insurance of any kind and women with higher socioeconomic status (250 percent or above the federal poverty level) were also more likely than uninsured women or lower income women to report prescription drug use ( $P < .05$ ).

**Prescription Drug Misuse**

Prescription drug misuse was reported by 7.3 percent of respondents. Drug misuse differed significantly by age ( $P < .0001$ ). Although older women were more likely to use multiple prescribed drugs, younger women were at greater risk for prescription drug misuse (Figure 2). Prescription drug misuse was also significantly greater among Hispanic women than White women ( $P < .05$ ) and higher among lesbian or bisexual women than heterosexual women ( $P < .001$ ).

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Prescription drug misuse was strongly associated with heavier alcohol use. In the overall sample, 51.4 percent of respondents did not drink alcohol in the past 30 days (non-drinkers), 36.8 percent were moderate drinkers, and 11.8 percent engaged in binge drinking. However, binge drinking was significantly higher among respondents reporting prescription drug misuse (21.7 percent) than respondents who did not misuse prescription drugs (11.1 percent;  $P < .0001$ ).

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Submitted by: Laurie Drabble, Ph.D., California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs, Office of Women's and Perinatal Services and San Jose State University, School of Social Work, (408) 924-5836, [ldrabble@sjsu.edu](mailto:ldrabble@sjsu.edu) and Joan Epstein, Ph.D., California Department of Public Health, Chronic Disease Surveillance and Research Branch, (916) 552-9250, [jepstein@ccr.ca.gov](mailto:jepstein@ccr.ca.gov)