

Internet-based Diversion of Prescription Opioids

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Introduction

Although prescription drugs are readily available on the Internet, little is known about the prevalence of Internet use for the purchase of opioid medications without a legitimate prescription, and the characteristics of those that obtain non-prescribed drugs through online sources.

We recently obtained a large sample of diversion data from an NIH-funded study of substance abuse treatment clients (public and private pay), methadone maintenance (MM) clients, men who have sex with men (MSM), street drug users, and the elderly. These data are combined with national surveillance systems data to examine the prevalence of Internet-based opioid diversion.

Methods

We examined sources of diversion across six datasets [one NIH-funded study; three national surveys from the RADARS® System; and two national databases, NSDUH and MTF].

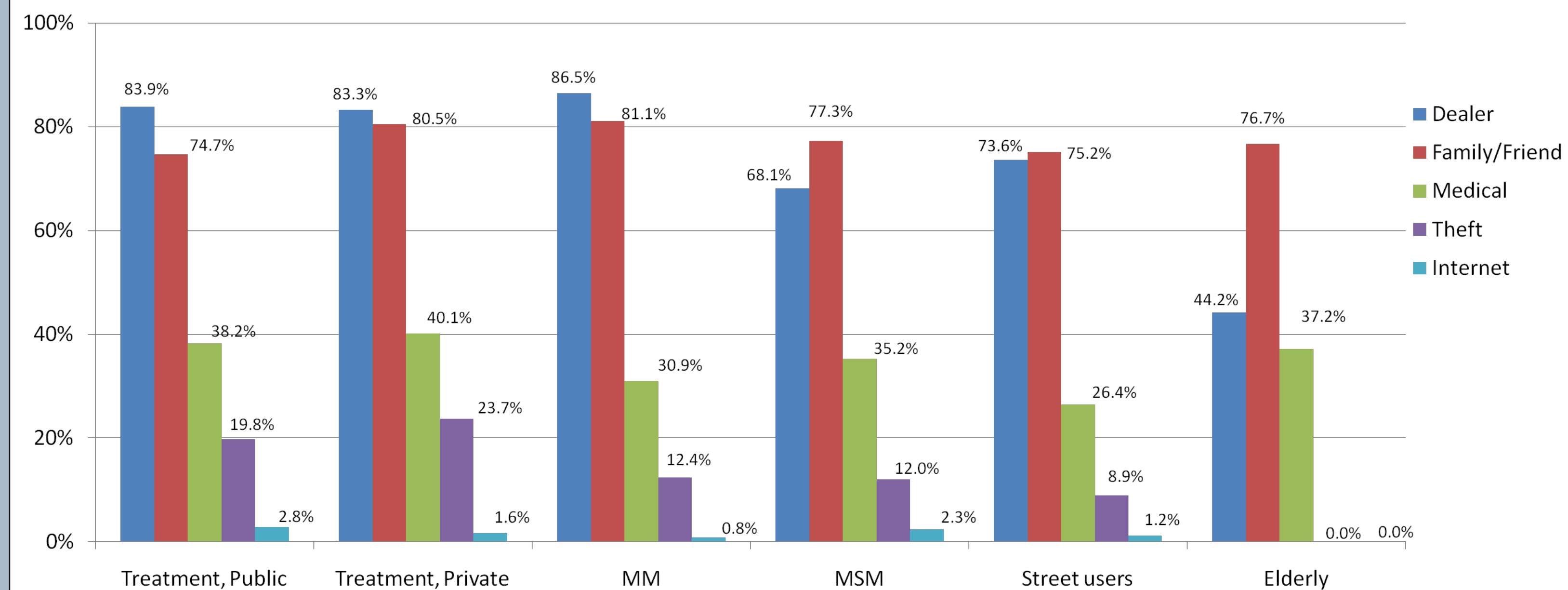
NIH study participants were recruited through targeted sampling strategies; RADARS system participants were recruited from new admissions to nationwide networks of substance abuse treatment and MM programs, and from a national registry of college students; procedures were approved by the responsible institution's IRB.

For participants endorsing prescription opioid misuse, we compared the prevalence of diverted opioid sources with a focus on Internet purchases.

Characteristics of prescription opioid abusers in South Florida (N=1238)

	N	%
Demographics		
Age (mean, SD)	36.0 (11.8)	
Male gender	750	60.6
Ethnicity:		
Hispanic	199	16.1
African American/Caribbean	301	24.3
White	678	54.8
Other	60	4.8
Physical Health		
Any health insurance	612	49.4
Severe pain, past 12 months	801	64.7
Rx Opioid Use (past 90 days)		
Hydrocodone	505	40.8
Oxycodone (immediate release)	990	80.0
Oxycodone (extended release)	657	53.1
Methadone	269	21.7
Morphine	133	10.7
Hydromorphone	140	11.3
Fentanyl	42	3.4
Substance Use (past 90 days)		
Marijuana	785	63.4
Powder cocaine	760	61.4
Crack cocaine	603	48.7
Heroin	351	28.4
Rx benzodiazepines (non prescribed)		
Alprazolam	902	72.9
Diazepam	344	27.8
Clonazepam	214	17.3

Recent Sources of Opioid Diversion by Subsample (Past 90 days)



Recent Sources of Opioid Diversion by Drug (Past 90 days)

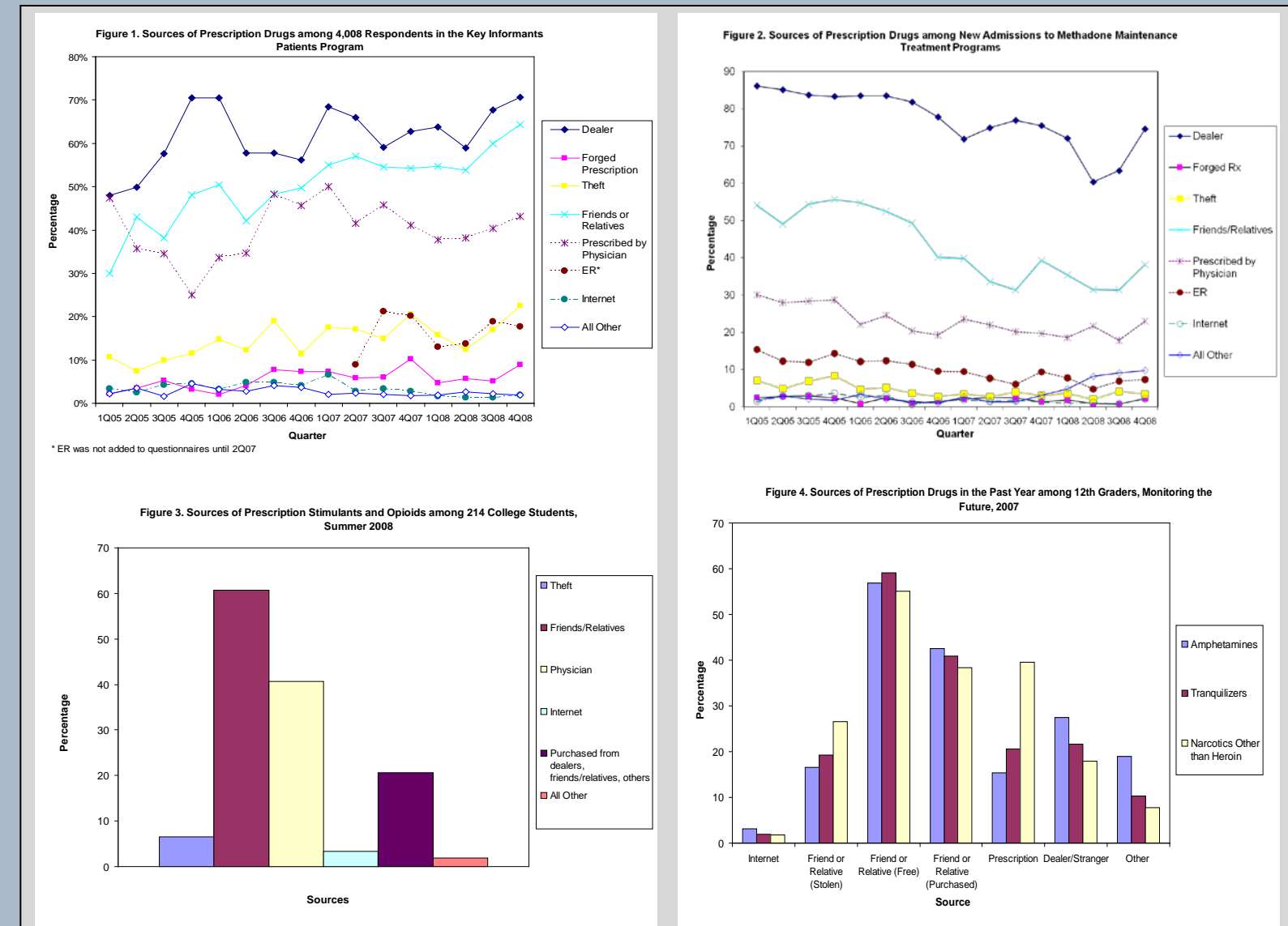
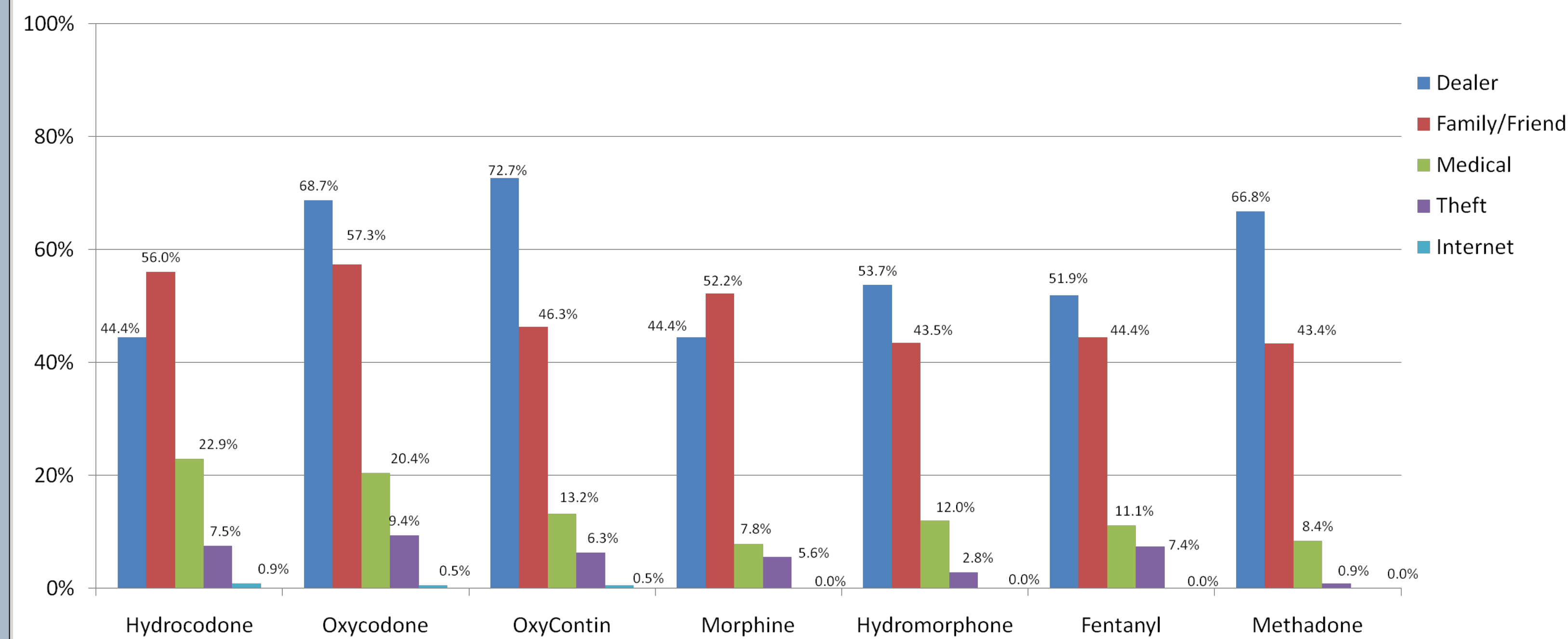


Table 1. Sources of Prescription Drugs for Most Recent Nonmedical Use Among Past Year Users, NSDUH, 2007

	Pain Relievers	Tranquilizers	Prescription Stimulants	Sedatives
One Doctor	18.1	9.5	9.7	-
More Than One Doctor	2.6	1	0.6	1.1
Forged Prescription	0.2	0.2	0.3	-
Stolen from Doctor's Office, Clinic, Hospital, or Pharmacy	0.3	0.3	1.3	1.2
Friend or Relative for Free	56.5	60.9	53.9	65.4
Bought from Friend or Relative	8.9	12.3	16.2	4.4
Stolen from Friend or Relative	5.2	6.6	4.9	2.5
Drug Dealer or Other Stranger	4.1	4.9	6.8	4.5
Internet	0.5	1	4.1	0.7
Other	3.7	3.4	2.3	3.6

Results

Internet-based prescription opioid acquisition was reported by:
 •2.8% of Miami public treatment clients; 1.6% of Miami private treatment clients
 •0.8% of Miami MM clients; 2.3% of Miami MSM
 •1.2% of Miami street drug users; 0% of Miami Elderly

•3% of RADARS® System treatment clients; 2% of RADARS® System MM clients
 •1.7% of RADARS® System college students
 •1.8% of MTF students
 •0.5% of NSDUH respondents

Conclusion

The uniformly low rates of acquisition from online sources in all systems suggest that the internet is a minor source of diverted prescription opioids.

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