

## **Adderall as an enhancer - why it is ethically wrong to take Adderall**

### Paper Review

DeSantis and Hane (2009) demonstrated how students constructed a justification for their usage of Adderall. Adderall is the most widely prescribed medicine for ADHD in both children and adults. It is classified as a Schedule II substance by the US Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) and is *legally available* only through prescription. While Adderall serves as a crucial first-line pharmacotherapy for ADHD, empirical evidence showed a rise in the illegal abuse of ADHD stimulants around the late 1990s on American college campuses. DeSantis and Hane's 2009 study aimed to present qualitative research about the student's views and justifications for illegal use, supplementing their 2008 study which reported quantitative data.

Through the research, DeSantis and Hane found four main themes of reasoning used by students in justifying their illegal use. The most dominant justification was **Comparison and Contrast**. While there are 5 sub-arguments under this point, it generally focuses on framing Adderall as a "good drug" compared to "bad drugs" such as cocaine or methamphetamines. The next reason is **Moderation**. Most users claim to take stimulants during periods of high stress, such as during midterms or finals. There are two distinct categories which students use to define moderation. The first is in terms of frequency of use, ranging from key periods such as finals to others who used comparison with others to define moderation. The second is dosage, though to a lesser extent. The third justification is the **Self-Medicating Argument**. Here, students claim that they suffer from ADHD and hence it is morally right to take the stimulants. Some focused on the presence of ADHD symptoms, while others cited the drug's positive results as proof of correct diagnosis. Another group of students in this category blamed the medical establishment for self-medicating. Reasons range from a lack of time, and lack of money to general distrust in doctors. Lastly, students used the **Minimisation Argument** to justify their illegal use. Under this argument, students downplayed the dangers of amphetamines by portraying them as harmless, benign and socially acceptable aids to combat fatigue. Students drew comparisons between ADHD amphetamines to commonly used stimulants like caffeine, which can be found in various forms such as coffee, soft drinks or pills. This argument, however, overlooks "significant legal, social and pharmacological differences", which ultimately differentiate the two substances.

DeSantis and Hane conclude by recommending solutions to tackle the illegal use of Adderall. The suggestions mainly centre around education and breaking the students' views, illusions and narratives about such drugs, either by highlighting the harm of Adderall or showing that it is not safe even for un-prescribed sporadic usage.

This study illustrates what happens when false framing and narratives perpetuate on campus, normalising illegal and unethical behaviour. It is important to acknowledge the study's limitations, as recognised by the authors. These limitations include the study's focus on the US, in particular, the Southeastern region. Factors such as the region of the country and the competitiveness of schools may result in differing rates of use or justifications for illegal use. It is also worth pointing out that in the US, there is a culture towards greater tolerance of drugs like marijuana, which can influence societal narratives.

### Using three ethical frameworks to review the use of Adderall

Next, the ethics of Adderall use is examined using three major ethical frameworks.

#### 1. The Consequentialist Framework

Using this framework, the students claim that Adderall is good because it helps them with their exams and results but it is only a short-term evaluation. A proper application of consequentialism would require them to weigh the short-term gain compared to the long-term risk of taking Adderall. The students are likely making such decisions based on incomplete facts, as seen from the Self-medicating and Minimization Arguments. If students knew the risk of taking Adderall when not prescribed, they might not have reached this erroneous conclusion.

#### 2. The Duty Framework

Under this framework, students may be misguided in thinking that they have the duty to do well, and taking Adderall helps them achieve this end outcome and hence morally right. Based on Kantian ethics, moral rule is a universalizable rule. In this case, since the students try to improve their exam results by engaging in unethical practices, it does not stand up to the universalizable rule, and the students are using themselves as a means to reach the end.

#### 3. The Virtue Framework

In this framework, we need to identify traits that people should follow to make someone virtuous. Related to this framework is the concept of eudaimonia or flourishing as a human being. It emphasises the development of virtuous traits and habits that lead to morally good actions. However, because we are trying to define if the use of Adderall is ethical, it might not be as strong a framework and we may end up in a circular argument.

### Objective vs. subjective moral truths

Moving on, there is an area of study on objective and subjective moral truths in philosophy. This [discussion](#) (Philosophy Stack Exchange, 2015) provides a brief explanation of the topic. Moral truths are objective if the truth is regardless of the person saying it. Examples often cited to be objective moral truths include “murder for fun is wrong”. Objective moral truths are believed to be universally true regardless of opinions, cultural beliefs or circumstances. On the other hand, subjective moral truths may vary based on individual opinions, cultural beliefs or circumstances. The ethics of Adderall use as a stimulant is a subjective moral truth and hence we are studying the ethics of it. This means that it can be much harder to tackle the misuse of Adderall, as different people have differing standards on the ethics of its use.

### Conclusion

Adderall is a controlled prescription drug, given to people diagnosed with ADHD. Adderall has negative side effects on health as a stimulant and enhancer and is different from other substances (Caffeine, Essence of chicken, Sugary drinks, Red Bull) and is not considered an enhancer, although it may help a person in their alertness. Additionally, caffeine is not a biotechnological enhancement, while Adderall is.

To sum up, while the ethics of Adderall use can be considered a subjective moral truth, by applying major ethical frameworks, it can be established that the use of Adderall is unethical and therefore wrong.

## **References**

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