

Dr. LEVINE. Total prescriptions for antidepressants also rose sharply from 9.4 to 14.8 million, but their percentage of all psychotropic drug prescriptions remains small. The total number of acquisitions for the stimulant and sedative classes has actually declined while major tranquilizers have remained relatively stable. Hypnotics have shown a small increase in total acquisitions over these years. Up to this point we have been talking about prescriptions.

Let us now turn our attention from the number of prescriptions filled to estimates of the actual number of adults—over 18 years of age—who have used psychotropic drugs in the United States. Information of this type is mainly available from probability-based survey studies in the general population. In one such study, performed in October 1967 by the Social Research Group of the George Washington University, respondents were asked the following:

Here are three questions about the types of pills that people use. For each of the three types of pills listed below, circle how recently you have used that type.

(a) Pills that help you sleep at night, like Sleep-Eze, Phenobarbital, and the like;

(b) Pills to calm you down and keep you from getting nervous and upset—pills that are often called tranquilizers, like Equanil, Compoz, and the like;

(c) Pills that pep you up, help you stay awake, make you more alert and less tired, that help you lose weight—pills that are often called stimulants, like Dexedrine, Dexamyl, No-Doz, Preludin, and the like.

Results of this national survey indicate that approximately one out of four adults have taken a psychotropic agent in the past 12 months and about one out of two have taken a psychotropic at some time in their lives.

Senator NELSON. Are you talking about those who get it both by prescription and illegally or—

Dr. LEVINE. No. I am talking about those who get it by prescription and over the counter.

Similar surveys performed in 1967, both national and regional, have yielded almost identical results. It is important to point out that the results of this survey, and you anticipated the point, include the use of over-the-counter—OTC—preparations as well as prescription psychotropics. When I answered by saying no, I meant that we are not talking about the large bulk of illicit use but we did sample from the general population and, to the extent that someone may have obtained one of these drugs from their mother, their daughter, their friend, they would be included. I do not think we want to call that necessarily illicit use in terms of narcotic drug abuse and other abuses.

In evaluating figures for psychotropic drug usage in the general population, both prescription and over the counter, it is important to make a distinction between use of a drug at one time or another and fairly regular or frequent use. Data collected in a recent statewide survey in California indicated that 51 percent of the adults had used a tranquilizer, sedative or stimulant—either a prescription or over-the-counter drug—at some time in their lives but only 17 percent had done so frequently. In a more detailed study of 1,104 respondents in San Francisco, investigators from the Family Research Center of the Langley-Porter Neuropsychiatric Institute found that 54 percent of those who had used a prescription psychotrope at any time had done so only on an irregular or occasional basis or for periods of less