

The NSDUH Report

April 2, 2009

Exposure to Substance Use Prevention Messages and Substance Use among Adolescents: 2002 to 2007

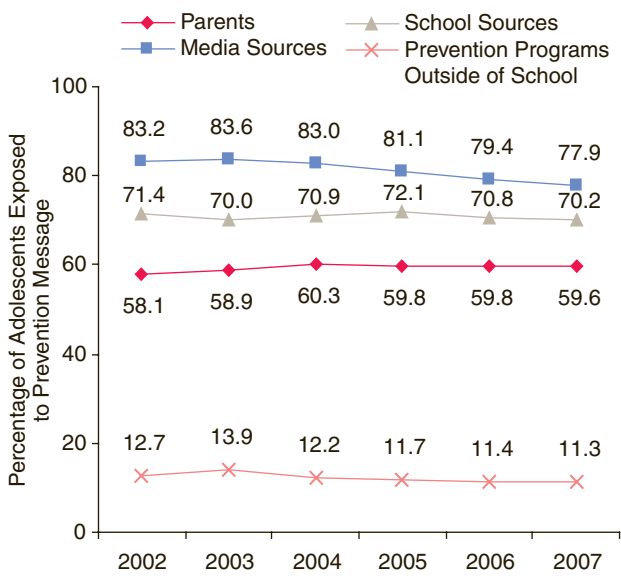
In Brief

- From 2002 to 2007, there were decreases in the percentages of adolescents aged 12 to 17 reporting exposure to drug or alcohol use prevention messages through media sources (from 83.2 to 77.9 percent) and prevention programs outside of school (from 12.7 to 11.3 percent), but the percentage who had talked with their parents about the dangers of alcohol, drug, or tobacco use in the past year increased (from 58.1 to 59.6 percent)
- Combined data from 2002 to 2007 indicate that talking with a parent about the dangers of substance use decreased with age (61.6 percent of those aged 12 or 13, 59.5 percent of those aged 14 or 15, and 57.1 percent of those aged 16 or 17), whereas the percentage receiving prevention messages through media sources increased with age (77.0, 82.7, and 84.2 percent, respectively)
- In general, adolescents who reported having been exposed to substance use prevention messages in the past year were less likely than those who were not exposed to have used cigarettes, alcohol, and illicit drugs in the past month

Adolescents are subjected to influences that may increase their risk for substance use or protect them from it.¹ Substance use prevention programs generally are designed to lessen the influence of risk factors and increase the influence of protective factors. Substance use prevention messages and programs are provided through parents, the media, schools, and other sources.² Gaining a better understanding of how many and which types of adolescents receive prevention messages and programs through each of the many potential sources is essential for the development of effective prevention programming.

The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) asks adolescents (i.e., youths aged 12 to 17) whether they have been exposed to prevention messages in the past 12 months through parental sources (i.e., talked with at least one of their parents during the past year about the dangers of tobacco, alcohol, or drug use)³ and media sources (i.e., seen or heard any alcohol or drug prevention messages from sources such as posters, pamphlets, radio, or TV). In addition, adolescents are asked

Figure 1. Trends in Exposure to Substance Use Prevention Messages in the Past Year among Adolescents: 2002 to 2007



Source: 2002 to 2007 SAMHSA National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUHs).

Table 1. Percentages of Adolescents Exposed to Substance Use Prevention Messages in the Past Year, by Demographic Characteristics: 2002 to 2007

Demographic Characteristic	Parents	Media Sources	School Sources	Prevention Programs Outside of School
Total	59.4	81.4	70.9	12.2
<i>Gender</i>				
Male	57.4	79.6	69.0	12.2
Female	61.5	83.2	72.9	12.2
<i>Age Group in Years</i>				
12 or 13	61.6	77.0	71.2	15.0
14 or 15	59.5	82.7	74.2	11.8
16 or 17	57.1	84.2	67.1	9.9

Source: 2002 to 2007 SAMHSA National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUHs).

whether they have been exposed to prevention messages in the past 12 months through school sources (i.e., a special class about drugs or alcohol in school; films, lectures, discussions, or printed information about drugs or alcohol in one of their regular school classes such as health or physical education; and films, lectures, discussions, or printed information about drugs or alcohol outside of regular classes such as in a special assembly),⁴ as well as whether they have participated in the past 12 months in an alcohol, tobacco, or drug prevention program outside of school.

This issue of *The NSDUH Report* examines trends in the rate of exposure of adolescents to prevention messages from 2002 to 2007. It also examines the percentages of those exposed to prevention messages by key demographic characteristics and the relationship between message exposure and substance use.⁵ All findings presented in this report are based on trends and annual averages in the NSDUH data for 2002 through 2007.

Trends in Adolescent Exposure to Prevention Messages

From 2002 to 2007, there were decreases in the percentages of adolescents reporting exposure to drug or alcohol use prevention messages through media sources (from 83.2 to 77.9 percent) and prevention programs outside of school (from 12.7 to 11.3 percent) (Figure 1). Conversely, the percentage who had talked with their parents about the dangers of alcohol,

drug, or tobacco use in the past year increased from 58.1 percent in 2002 to 59.6 percent in 2007. The percentage of adolescents exposed to school-based prevention messages in 2007 (70.2 percent) did not differ significantly from the percentage exposed in 2002 (71.4 percent).

Exposure to Prevention Messages, by Demographic Characteristics

Combined data from 2002 to 2007 indicate that females were more likely than males to have talked with a parent about the dangers of substance use, to have received prevention messages through media sources, and to have received prevention messages through school sources in the past year (Table 1). For example, 61.5 percent of females talked with a parent about the dangers of substance use compared with 57.4 percent of males. Males and females were equally likely to have participated in a substance use prevention program outside of school (12.2 percent).

The percentage of adolescents who talked with a parent about the dangers of substance use decreased with age, with 61.6 percent of those aged 12 or 13, 59.5 percent of those aged 14 or 15, and 57.1 percent of those aged 16 or 17 indicating that they had talked with a parent about substance use in the past year. The percentage who participated in a prevention program outside of school also decreased with age (15.0, 11.8, and 9.9 percent for those aged 12 or 13, 14 or 15, and 16 or 17, respectively). Conversely, the percentage

Table 2. Percentages of Past Month Substance Use among Adolescents, by Exposure to Substance Use Prevention Messages from Four Sources: 2002 to 2007

Exposure	Cigarette Use	Alcohol Use	Illicit Drug Use
<i>Parents</i>			
Yes	10.6	16.2	9.5
No	12.5	18.3	11.7
<i>Media Sources</i>			
Yes	10.8	17.2	10.1
No	13.4	16.4	11.9
<i>School Sources</i>			
Yes	10.4	16.6	9.7
No	13.7	17.9	12.2
<i>Prevention Programs Outside of School</i>			
Yes	11.0	14.7	10.1
No	11.4	17.3	10.5

Source: 2002 to 2007 SAMHSA National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUHs).

receiving prevention messages through media sources in the past year increased with age (77.0, 82.7, and 84.2 percent for those aged 12 or 13, 14 or 15, and 16 or 17, respectively). The percentage receiving prevention messages through school was highest among those aged 14 or 15 (74.2 percent).

Relationship between Exposure to Prevention Messages and Substance Use⁵

Adolescents who reported having conversations with parents about the dangers of substance use were less likely than those who did not have such conversations to have been past month users of cigarettes (10.6 vs. 12.5 percent), alcohol (16.2 vs. 18.3 percent), and illicit drugs (9.5 vs. 11.7 percent) (Table 2). Similarly, those who received prevention messages at school were less likely than those who did not to have used cigarettes (10.4 vs. 13.7 percent), alcohol (16.6 vs. 17.9 percent), and illicit drugs (9.7 vs. 12.2 percent).

Findings were mixed on the relationship between substance use and exposure to prevention messages through sources outside of school and through media sources. Past month alcohol use was lower among adolescents who received prevention messages through prevention programs outside of school than among those who did not (14.7 vs. 17.3 percent), but there was no difference in cigarette or illicit drug use. The prevalence of past month use of cigarettes or illicit drugs was lower among adolescents who reported

having received prevention messages from media sources than among those who reported having no such exposure, but past month alcohol use was slightly higher among those who received messages from media sources than among those who did not receive them (17.2 vs. 16.4 percent).

Discussion

In each year of data presented in this report, the majority of adolescents received substance use prevention messages through the media, school, and parents. Although this is encouraging, it is important for practitioners, policymakers, educators, and parents to note the percentage of adolescents who did *not* receive prevention messages through these sources—in 2007, about 30 percent of adolescents did *not* receive prevention messages through school sources, and 40 percent did *not* talk with one of their parents about the dangers of substance use. Taken together with the mixed results on trends (i.e., increases in exposure for some sources, decreases for some, and no change for others), these findings suggest the need for continued vigilance in ensuring that our nation’s adolescents are receiving prevention messages.

This report also reinforces findings from previous studies that emphasize the impact of parental and school involvement on the prevention of substance use. The prevalence of substance use was lower among adolescents exposed to prevention messages through parental and school sources than among those who were not exposed.

End Notes

- 1 Arthur, M. W., Hawkins, J. D., Pollard, J. A., Catalano, R. F., & Baglioni, A. J., Jr. (2002). Measuring risk and protective factors for substance use, delinquency, and other adolescent problem behaviors: The Communities That Care Youth Survey. *Evaluation Review, 26*, 575-601.
- 2 Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Office of Applied Studies. (July 29, 2005). *The NSDUH report: Youths' exposure to substance use prevention messages: 2003*. Rockville, MD.
- 3 Parents were defined as biological parents, adoptive parents, stepparents, or adult guardians whether or not they lived with the child. Responses to the question do not indicate whether the conversation was initiated by the parent or the adolescent, what the duration of the conversation was, or what specific content was discussed. Although generally regarded as an indication of parents' efforts to prevent their adolescent sons or daughters from initiating substance use, some of these conversations may reflect efforts to prevent further substance use by adolescents who are already using.
- 4 These questions are asked only of adolescents who reported attending any type of school or home-school in the past 12 months.
- 5 It should not be inferred that the associations discussed here reflect causal relationships, but only that correlations exist. Statistical controls for other factors that may explain or influence these associations were not implemented. Because of the cross-sectional nature of NSDUH data, the direction of the relationship between exposure to substance use prevention messages and use of substances cannot be determined.

Suggested Citation

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Research findings from the SAMHSA 2002 to 2007 National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUHs)

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The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) is an annual survey sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The 2002 to 2007 data used in this report are based on information obtained from 136,449 persons aged 12 to 17. The survey collects data by administering questionnaires to a representative sample of the population through face-to-face interviews at their place of residence.

The NSDUH Report is prepared by the Office of Applied Studies (OAS), SAMHSA, and by RTI International in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina. (RTI International is a trade name of Research Triangle Institute.)

The most recent information on NSDUH is available in the following publication:

Office of Applied Studies. (2008). *Results from the 2007 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National findings* (DHHS Publication No. SMA 08-4343, NSDUH Series H-34). Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Also available online: <http://oas.samhsa.gov>.



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