

The NSDUH Report

November 11, 2004

Male Veterans with Co-Occurring Serious Mental Illness and a Substance Use Disorder

In Brief

- In 2002 and 2003, an estimated 25.4 million male and 1.6 million female military veterans were living in the United States
- An estimated 340,000 male veterans had co-occurring serious mental illness (SMI) and a substance use disorder in 2002 and 2003
- Younger male veterans were more likely to have co-occurring SMI and a substance use disorder than older male veterans

The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) includes questions for adults aged 18 or older to assess serious mental illness (SMI) during the year prior to the survey interview. Individuals are classified as having SMI if at some time during the past 12 months they had a diagnosable mental, behavioral, or emotional disorder that met criteria specified in the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV)¹ and that resulted in functional impairment that substantially interfered with or limited one or more major life activities. NSDUH measures SMI using the K-6 distress questions.^{2,3} NSDUH also asks persons to report their past year use of alcohol and illicit drugs⁴ and includes a series of questions to assess dependence on or abuse of alcohol or illicit drugs based on criteria specified in the DSM-IV. For the purpose of this report, individuals with both SMI and a substance use disorder are said to have co-occurring SMI and a substance use disorder.

Figure 1. Percentages of Male Veterans and Nonveterans Reporting Substance Dependence or Abuse, by Age Group: 2002 and 2003

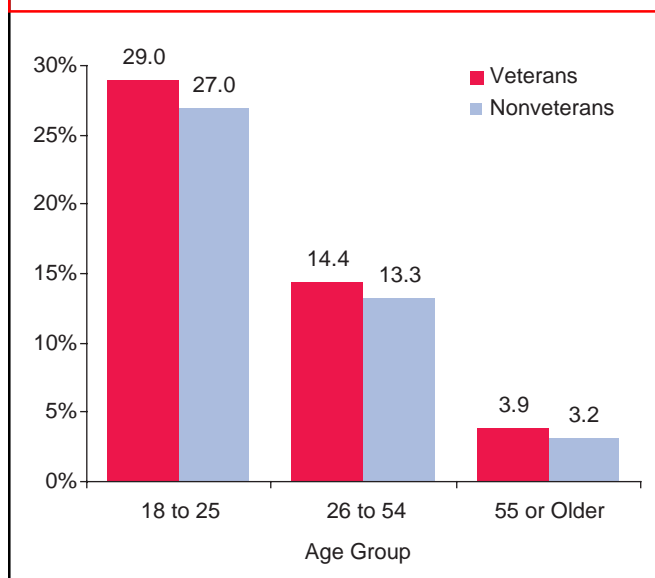
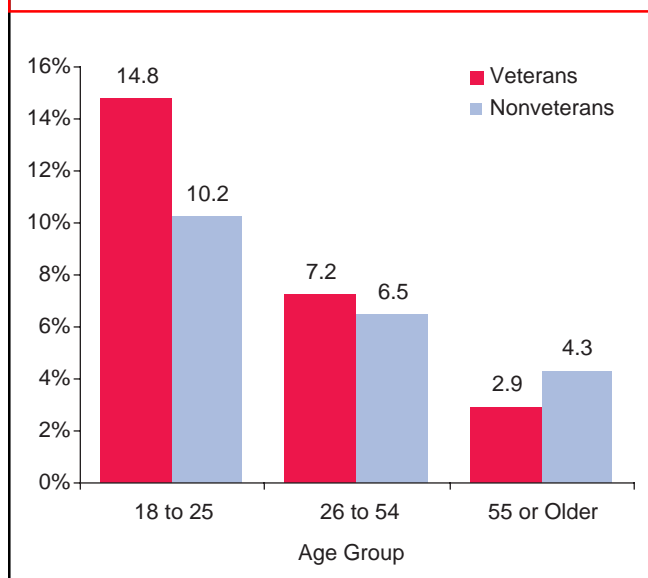


Figure 2. Percentages of Male Veterans and Nonveterans with a Serious Mental Illness, by Age Group: 2002 and 2003



NSDUH respondents also are asked about their military veteran status. A veteran is defined as an individual who has served in any of the U.S. Armed Forces (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps) but who is not currently serving in the military. This report uses data combined from the 2002 and 2003 NSDUH, which estimates that 25.4 million male and 1.6 million female military veterans were living in the United States in 2002 and 2003.

Prevalence of Substance Dependence or Abuse

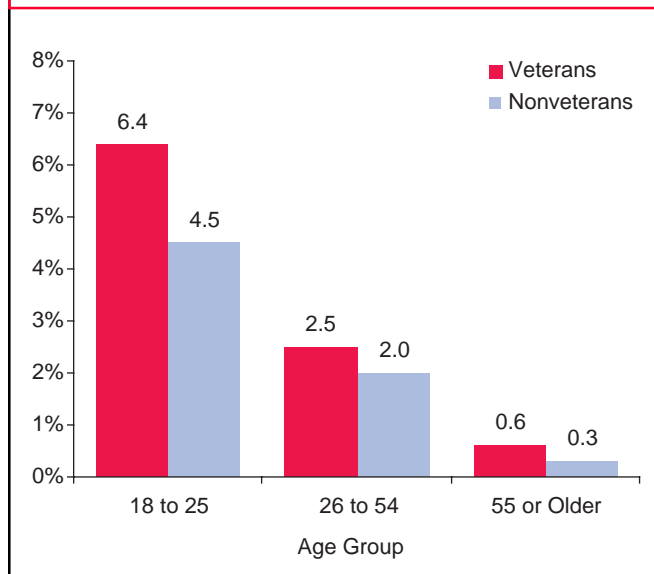
In 2002 and 2003, an estimated 8.0 percent (2.0 million) of male veterans aged 18 or older were dependent on or abusing alcohol or illicit drugs.⁵ Among male nonveterans aged 18 or older, 14.6 percent (11.1 million) were dependent on or abusing alcohol or illicit drugs. Although the rate of dependence or abuse among male veterans is lower than that of male nonveterans, this appears to be due to the older age of veterans. Comparisons controlling for age show that the rates of dependence and abuse

among male veterans were greater than that of male nonveterans, although these differences were not statistically significant (Figure 1).

Prevalence of Serious Mental Illness

An estimated 4.6 percent (1.2 million) of male veterans and 7.0 percent (5.3 million) of male nonveterans had SMI in 2002 and 2003.⁵ As with substance dependence and abuse, although veterans overall have a lower rate of SMI than nonveterans, a different pattern emerges when the rates are examined by age group (Figure 2). Younger male veterans aged 18 to 25 were more likely to have had SMI than male nonveterans in the same age group (14.8 vs. 10.2 percent, respectively). Among males aged 26 to 54 and 55 or older, the differences in rates of SMI between veterans and nonveterans were not statistically significant. Male veterans aged 18 to 25 were more likely to have had SMI (14.8 percent) than male veterans aged 26 to 54 (7.2 percent) or male veterans aged 55 or older (2.9 percent).

Figure 3. Percentages of Male Veterans and Nonveterans with a Co-Occurring Serious Mental Illness and a Substance Use Disorder, by Age Group: 2002 and 2003



End Notes

1. American Psychiatric Association. (1994). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (4th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.
2. Kessler, R. C., Barker, P. R., Colpe, L. J., Epstein, J. F., Gfroerer, J. C., Hiripi, E., Howes, M. J., Normand, S. L., Manderscheid, R. W., Walters, E. E., & Zaslavsky, A. M. (2003). Screening for serious mental illness in the general population. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 60, 184-189.
3. A discussion of the methods used to generate SMI estimates can be found in Office of Applied Studies. (2004). Appendix B: Statistical methods and measurement. *Results from the 2003 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National findings* (pp. 109 - 112, NSDUH Series H-25, DHHS Publication No. SMA 04-3964). Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.
4. "Any illicit drug" refers to marijuana/hashish, cocaine (including crack), inhalants, hallucinogens (including LSD and PCP), heroin, or any prescription type drugs used nonmedically.
5. An estimated 61,000 female veterans (3.8 percent) in 2002 and 2003 were dependent on or abusing alcohol or illicit drugs. Approximately 209,000 female veterans (13.1 percent) reported serious mental illness, and 25,000 (1.6 percent) reported co-occurring substance use disorder and SMI.

Figure Note

Source: SAMHSA, 2002 NSDUH and 2003 NSDUH.

Co-Occurrence of Serious Mental Illness and a Substance Use Disorder

In 2002 and 2003, approximately 340,000 male veterans had co-occurring SMI and a substance use disorder.⁵ The rate of co-occurring SMI and a substance use disorder was lower for male veterans than male nonveterans overall (1.3 percent vs. 2.3 percent), in part because of the older age of veterans. Comparisons within age groups indicate higher rates among veterans, although these were not statistically significant differences. However, veterans reported different rates of co-occurring SMI and a substance use disorder within age categories. Younger male veterans aged 18 to 25 (6.4 percent) were more likely than male veterans aged 26 to 54 (2.5 percent) or male veterans aged 55 or older (0.6 percent) to have had co-occurring SMI and a substance use disorder (Figure 3). Similarly, male veterans aged 26 to 54 were more likely than male veterans aged 55 or older to have had co-occurring SMI and a substance use disorder.

The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) is an annual survey sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Prior to 2002, this survey was called the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse (NHSDA). The 2002 data are based on information obtained from 68,126 persons aged 12 or older, including 44,481 persons aged 18 or older and 2,804 veterans. The 2003 data are based on information obtained from 67,784 persons aged 12 or older, including 45,119 persons aged 18 or older and 2,891 veterans. 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.)

Information and data for this issue are based on the following publications:

Office of Applied Studies. (2003). *Results from the 2002 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National findings* (DHHS Publication No. SMA 03-3836, NSDUH Series H-22). Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

Office of Applied Studies. (2004). *Results from the 2003 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National findings* (DHHS Publication No. SMA 04-3964, NSDUH Series H-25). Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

Also available online: <http://www.oas.samhsa.gov>

Because of improvements and modifications to the 2002 NSDUH, estimates from the 2002 and 2003 surveys should not be compared with estimates from the 2001 or earlier versions of the survey to examine changes over time.

