

The NSDUH Report

March 11, 2010

Parents on Probation or Parole

The past two decades have seen large increases in the numbers of adults involved in the criminal justice system, including those incarcerated, on probation, and on parole.¹ Although the numbers of each of these groups increased substantially, the numbers of those on probation have increased at a much faster rate; yet, much less attention has been given to those on probation and to those on parole. Probationers and parolees often have an array of health problems, including substance use disorders.^{2,3}

One subgroup of those on probation or parole that may be of particular concern, however, comprises parents with children under the age of 18. Although research on the substance use behaviors of incarcerated parents and their children is limited,⁴ there is even less information about the behaviors of parents on probation or parole. Gaining a better understanding of this population and its substance use problems may help to inform criminal justice personnel, family services personnel, educators, and policymakers about the needs of this population (both parents and children) and help them with service planning.

The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) asks respondents if, at any time during the past 12 months, they were (1) on probation or (2) on parole, supervised release, or other conditional release from prison. NSDUH also asks about use of alcohol and illicit drugs, as well as dependence or abuse.^{5,6} This issue of *The NSDUH Report* focuses on substance use and dependence or abuse among persons aged 18 or older who were living with at least one biological, step-, adoptive, or foster child aged 17 or younger. All findings in the report are annual averages based on combined 2005 to 2008 data.

In Brief

- More than one quarter (28.4 percent) of the adults on probation or parole in the past year lived with a child aged 17 or younger
- Parents on probation or parole were more likely than parents not on probation or parole to have used tobacco in the past month (65.1 vs. 30.7 percent), to have engaged in binge alcohol use (38.0 vs. 24.5 percent), and to have used illicit drugs in the past month (19.8 vs. 6.0 percent)
- Parents on probation or parole were also significantly more likely than those not on probation or parole to have met the criteria for alcohol dependence or abuse (20.3 vs. 6.1 percent) or for illicit drug dependence or abuse (11.3 vs. 1.6 percent)

Parents on Probation or Parole

Combined data indicate that 2.4 percent of adults—an estimated 5.3 million persons—were on probation or parole in the past year. More than one quarter of these (28.4 percent, or an estimated 1.5 million) lived with a child aged 17 or younger, including 16.1

percent who lived with a child aged 5 or younger. Of all parents living with children aged 17 or younger, 2.1 percent were past year probationers or parolees.

Demographic Characteristics of Parents on Probation or Parole

The demographic characteristics of parents on probation or parole differed from those of other parents. Of probationers or parolees living with a child aged 17 or younger, 49.9 percent were males parenting with a partner or spouse, 23.3 percent were females parenting with a partner or spouse, 19.5 percent were females parenting alone, and 7.3 percent were males parenting alone; these percentages differed significantly from those of parents not on probation or parole (Table 1).

Slightly more than half (54.4 percent) of parents on probation or parole living with children were white, 23.8 percent were Hispanic, and 18.3 percent were black. By comparison, 63.5 percent of parents who were not on probation or parole were white, 17.8 percent were Hispanic, and 11.9 percent were black. Parents on probation or parole tended to be younger and to have less education and lower incomes than their counterparts who were not on probation or parole. Additionally, only about three fifths (61.4 percent) of parents on probation or parole had health insurance coverage compared with more than four fifths (84.5 percent) of parents who were not on probation or parole.⁷

Substance Use among Parents on Probation or Parole

Parents on probation or parole were twice as likely as parents not on probation or parole to have used tobacco in the past month (65.1 vs. 30.7 percent) (Figure 1). Although the rates of past month alcohol use for the two groups of parents did not differ significantly, those on probation or parole were more likely to engage in binge alcohol use (38.0 vs. 24.5 percent).⁸ The rate of past month illicit drug use among parents on probation or parole was about 3 times that of parents not on probation or parole (19.8 vs. 6.0 percent). Parents on probation or parole were also significantly more likely than those not on probation or parole to have met the criteria for alcohol dependence or abuse (20.3 vs. 6.1 percent) or for illicit drug dependence or abuse (11.3 vs. 1.6 percent) (Figure 2).

Discussion

The findings that 1.5 million parents are on probation or parole and have substantially higher rates of substance abuse problems suggest the need for increased attention to both of these populations in terms of problem identification, service provision, and policy development. Children of substance abusers are themselves at increased risk of using substances,⁹ and children of criminally involved parents are also more likely to become involved with the criminal justice system

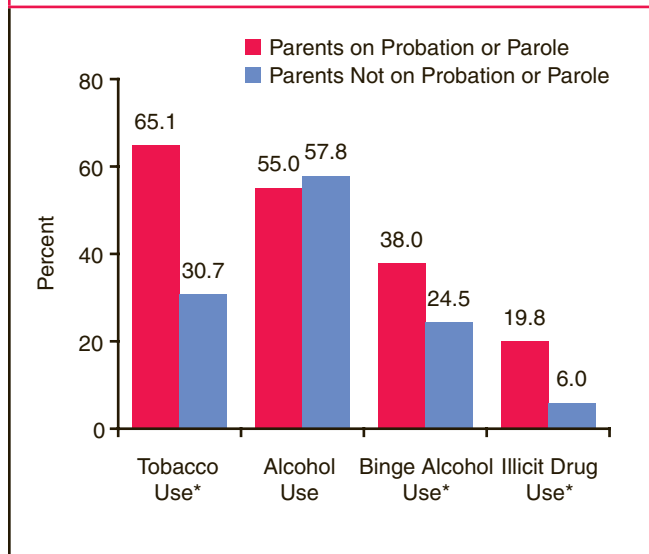
Table 1. Percent Distribution, by Sociodemographic Characteristics, among Parents Aged 18 or Older Living with Children Aged 17 or Younger, according to Parents' Past Year Probation or Parole Status*: 2005 to 2008

Sociodemographic Characteristic	Parents on Probation or Parole	Parents Not on Probation or Parole
Total	100.0	100.0
Female Parenting Alone	19.5	12.8
Female Parenting with Partner/Spouse	23.3	43.4
Male Parenting Alone	7.3	2.7
Male Parenting with Partner/Spouse	49.9	41.2
Aged 18 to 25	21.0	7.6
Aged 26 to 34	36.9	26.7
Aged 35 to 44	31.8	40.5
Aged 45 or Older	10.2	25.2
White	54.4	63.5
Hispanic or Latino	23.8	17.8
Black or African American	18.3	11.9
Two or More Races	1.2	0.9
American Indian or Alaska Native	1.0	0.5
Asian	0.9	5.0
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0.4	0.4
Less Than High School Education	40.1	14.4
High School Graduate	36.5	28.8
Some College	18.1	26.1
College Graduate	5.3	30.7
Family Income of Less Than \$20,000	34.5	13.2
Family Income of \$20,000 to \$49,999	39.5	30.6
Family Income of \$50,000 to \$74,999	14.0	19.4
Family Income of \$75,000 or More	11.9	36.8

* Respondents with missing data on number of children, as well as respondents with missing data on probation or parole, were excluded from the analysis.

Source: 2005 to 2008 SAMHSA National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUHs).

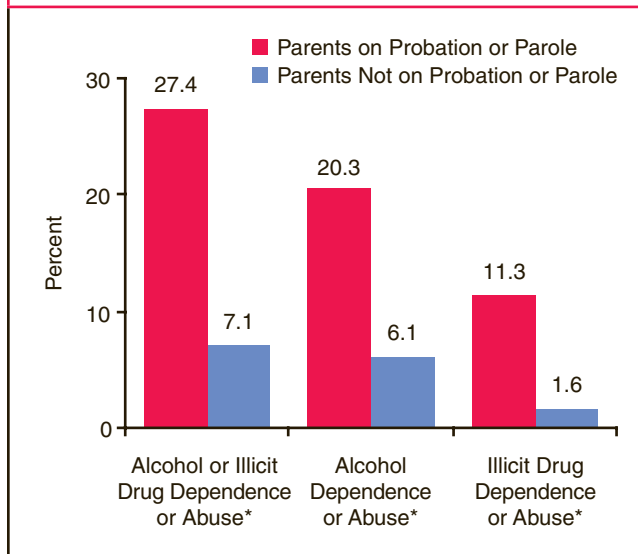
Figure 1. Substance Use in the Past Month among Parents Living with Children Aged 17 or Younger, by Past Year Probation or Parole Status: 2005 to 2008



* The difference between parents on probation or parole and those not on probation or parole is statistically significant at $p < .05$.

Source: 2005 to 2008 SAMHSA National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUHs).

Figure 2. Substance Abuse or Dependence in the Past Year among Parents Living with Children Aged 17 or Younger, by Past Year Probation or Parole Status: 2005 to 2008



* The difference between parents on probation or parole and those not on probation or parole is statistically significant at $p < .05$.

Source: 2005 to 2008 SAMHSA National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUHs).

than children whose parents have had no such involvement.¹⁰ For these at-risk children, coordinated programs that promote identification of their circumstances, outreach, and engagement, coupled with appropriate educational, social, and, if necessary, prevention or treatment services may be needed to promote healthy and well-adjusted lives. Similarly, as individuals are released into the parole or probation systems, gatekeepers in these systems need to be aware of the adults' needs for treatment and other services and to identify dependent children who may also be at risk.

End Notes

- ¹ Bureau of Justice Statistics. (2010). *Key facts at a glance*. Retrieved February 4, 2010, from <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/glance/corr2.cfm>
- ² Adams, S. B., Olson, D. E., & Adkins, R. (2002, March). *Results from the 2000 Illinois Adult Probation Outcome Study* (Report 02-230). Chicago: Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, State of Illinois. [Available as a PDF at <http://www.icjia.state.il.us/public/pdf/ResearchReports/2000Probation%20Outcome%20Study.pdf>]
- ³ Mallik-Kane, K., & Visher, C. A. (2008, February). *Health and prisoner reentry: How physical, mental, and substance abuse conditions shape the process of reintegration*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute, Justice Policy Center. [Available as a PDF at http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411617_health_prisoner_reentry.pdf]
- ⁴ Hairston, C. F. (2007, October). *Focus on children with incarcerated parents: An overview of the research literature*. Baltimore, MD: The Annie E. Casey Foundation. [Available as a PDF at <http://www.aecf.org/childrenofincarcerated.aspx>]
- ⁵ NSDUH defines illicit drugs as marijuana/hashish, cocaine (including crack), inhalants, hallucinogens, heroin, or prescription-type drugs used nonmedically.

Nonmedical use is defined as the use of prescription-type drugs not prescribed for the respondent by a physician or used only for the experience or feeling they caused. Nonmedical use of any prescription-type pain reliever, sedative, stimulant, or tranquilizer does not include over-the-counter drugs; nonmedical use of stimulants includes methamphetamine use.

- ⁶ Dependence on or abuse of alcohol or illicit drugs is defined using criteria specified in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV). Dependence or abuse includes such symptoms as withdrawal, tolerance, use in dangerous situations, trouble with the law, and interference in major obligations at work, school, or home during the past year. For details, see the following resource: American Psychiatric Association. (1994). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (4th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.
- ⁷ A respondent is classified as having health insurance coverage if he or she has private insurance, Medicare, Medicaid/Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Uniformed Services (CHAMPUS), TRICARE, Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs (CHAMPVA), Veterans Affairs (VA), military health care, or any other type of health insurance.
- ⁸ Binge alcohol use is defined as drinking five or more drinks on the same occasion (i.e., at the same time or within a couple of hours of each other) on at least 1 day in the past 30 days.
- ⁹ National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University. (2005, March). *Family matters: Substance abuse and the American family*. New York: Author. [Available as a PDF at http://www.casacolumbia.org/templates/publications_reports.aspx]
- ¹⁰ Dannerbeck, A. M. (2005). Differences in parenting attributes, experiences, and behaviors of delinquent youth with and without a parental history of incarceration. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, 3(3), 199-213.

Suggested Citation

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Office of Applied Studies. (March 11, 2010). *The NSDUH Report: Parents on Probation or Parole*. Rockville, MD.

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Findings from the SAMHSA 2005 to 2008 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 2005 to 2008 data used in this report are based on information obtained from 58,107 parents aged 18 or older living with at least one child aged 17 or younger; 1,793 of these were on probation or parole. 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 on the most recent NSDUH is available in the following publication:

Office of Applied Studies. (2009). *Results from the 2008 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National findings* (DHHS Publication No. SMA 09-4434, NSDUH Series H-36). Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Also available online: <http://oas.samhsa.gov>.



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