

The NSDUH Report

October 8, 2009

Mental Health Support and Self-Help Groups

In Brief

- Combined 2005 to 2008 data indicate that an annual average of 2.4 million adults aged 18 or older (1.1 percent of the population in that age group) received support from a mental health self-help group for their emotions, nerves, or mental health problems in the past year
- Among persons who received support from a mental health self-help group in the past year, the majority (61.2 percent) were female, 89.4 percent were over the age of 25, 75.2 percent were white, and 46.8 percent were employed full time
- Two thirds (65.6 percent) of adults who received support from mental health self-help groups also received traditional treatment (i.e., inpatient, outpatient, or prescription medication) in the past year; an estimated 829,000 users of self-help groups (34.4 percent) did not receive past year traditional mental health treatment
- About 5.5 percent of the 28.8 million adults who received any traditional type of mental health treatment in the past year also received support from a mental health self-help group in that time period

There has been an increasing awareness of the role that mental health support and self-help groups play in recovery from mental illnesses. Mental health support and self-help groups, historically considered as an alternative to traditional mental health treatment, are now recognized as partners in the continuum of mental health care.¹ The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) gathers information that can help provide a better understanding of the extent to which these groups are used, the characteristics of the people who use them, and the relationship between the more traditional modes of mental health treatment and mental health support or self-help groups.

This issue of *The NSDUH Report* examines the characteristics of adults (i.e., persons aged 18 or older) who received treatment, counseling, or support for emotions, nerves, or mental health in the past year from an in-person support or a self-help group (support and self-help groups hereafter are referred to collectively as self-help groups). All findings presented in this report are annual averages based on combined 2005 to 2008 NSDUH data.

Mental Health Self-Help Groups

An annual average of 2.4 million adults aged 18 or older (1.1 percent of the population in that age group) received support from a mental health self-help group in the past year. The majority were

female (61.2 percent)—a proportion higher than expected based on the proportion of females in the total population (Table 1).

Of the adults who received support from a mental health self-help group, 10.6 percent were aged 18 to 25, 55.3 percent were aged 26 to 49, and 34.1 percent were aged 50 or older. The proportion of adults aged 26 to 49 was higher among persons using mental health self-help groups than among the general adult population. Three fourths (75.2 percent) of those who received support from a mental health self-help group were white, and fewer than half (46.8 percent) were employed full time; these proportions also differed from the expected proportions.

Traditional Mental Health Treatment and Mental Health Self-Help Groups

An average of 28.8 million adults received traditional types of mental health treatment (i.e., inpatient care, outpatient care, or prescription medication) in the past year.

Of the 2.4 million adults who received support from a mental health self-help group in the past year, 1.6 million, or 65.6 percent, also received traditional mental health treatment (Figure 1). This number includes 186,000 (7.7 percent of self-help group users) who also received inpatient care, 1.2 million (51.0 percent) who also received outpatient care, and 1.3 million (53.2 percent) who also received prescription medication. An estimated 829,000 users of self-help groups (34.4 percent) did not receive traditional mental health treatment in the past year.

Mental Health Self-Help Group Use among Recipients of Traditional Treatment

About 5.5 percent of adults who received any traditional type of mental health treatment in the past year also received support from a mental health self-help group in that time period.

Table 1. Percent Distribution of Adults Aged 18 or Older Who Received Support from a Mental Health Self-Help Group in the Past Year and of the Total Adult Population, by Demographic Characteristics: 2005 to 2008

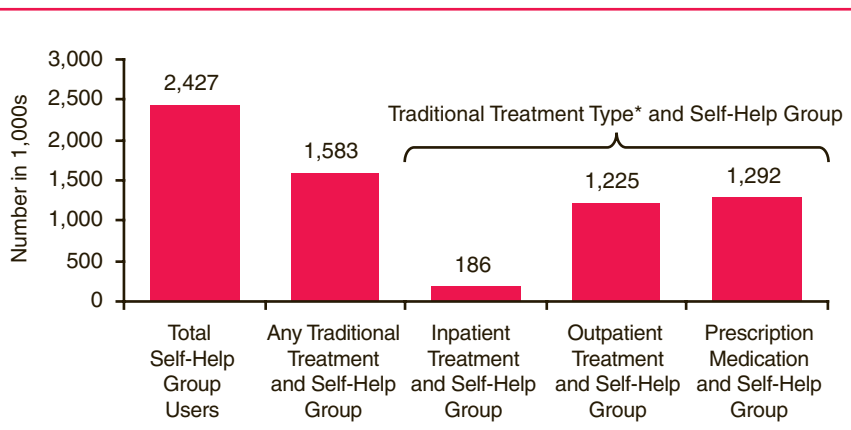
Demographic Characteristic	Percent of Self-Help Group Attendees	Percent of Total* Population
Total	100.0	100.0
Male	38.8	48.2
Female	61.2	51.8
18 to 25	10.6	14.8
26 to 49	55.3	45.2
50 or Older	34.1	40.0
White	75.2	69.3
Black or African American	10.2	11.4
Hispanic or Latino	11.4	13.2
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.9	0.5
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0.1	0.3
Asian	1.1	4.3
Two or More Races	1.1	1.0
Employed Full Time	46.8	54.8
Employed Part Time	16.6	13.2
Unemployed	6.1	3.5
Other**	30.5	28.5

* Due to rounding, percentages do not total 100.

** Retired persons, disabled persons, homemakers, students, or other persons not in the labor force are included in the "Other" employment category.

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

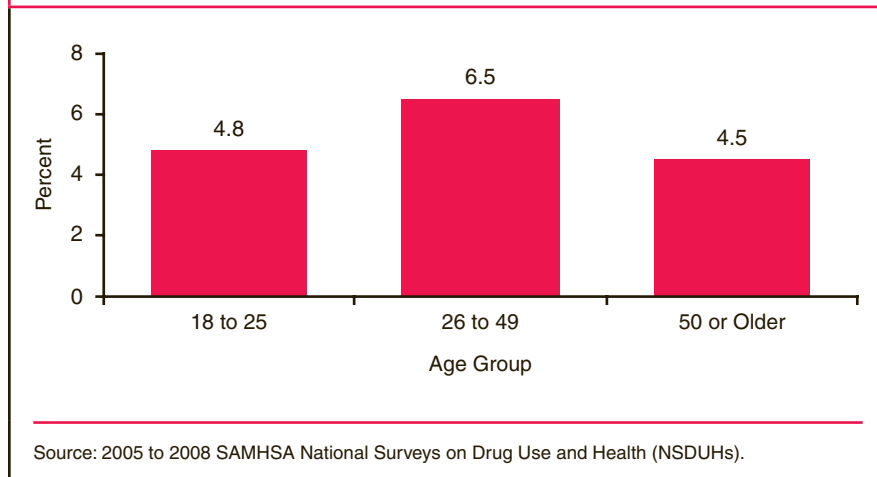
Figure 1. Estimated Numbers (in 1,000s) of Adults Aged 18 or Older Who Received Support from Mental Health Self-Help Groups in the Past Year and Who Received Past Year Traditional Mental Health Treatment: 2005 to 2008



* Multiple types of traditional treatment could be reported.

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

Figure 2. Received Support from a Mental Health Self-Help Group in the Past Year among Adults Aged 18 or Older Who Received Past Year Traditional Mental Health Treatment, by Age Group: 2005 to 2008

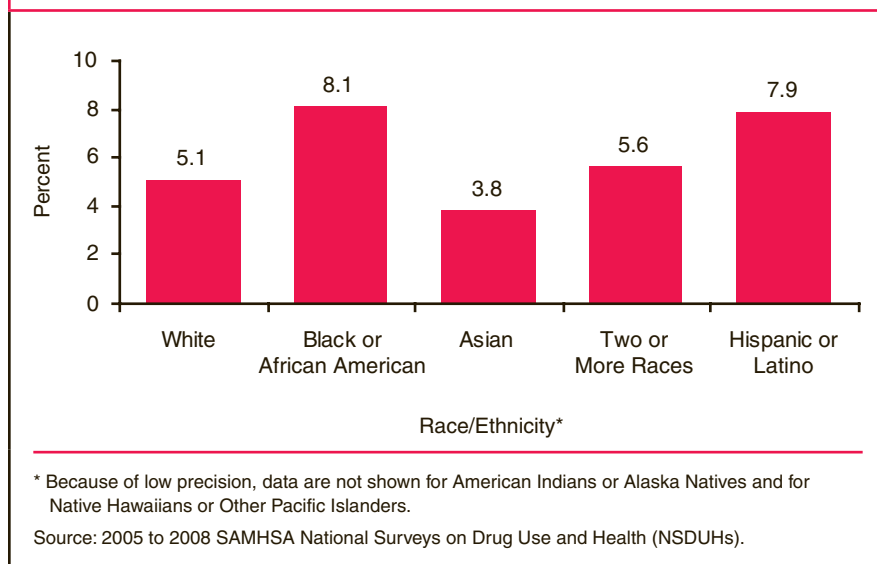


treatment, those aged 26 to 49 were more likely than those aged 18 to 25 or 50 or older to have also received support from a mental health self-help group (Figure 2). Receipt of support from a mental health self-help group by those who received past year traditional mental health treatment ranged from a low of 3.8 percent among Asians to a high of 8.1 percent among blacks or African Americans (Figure 3). Among persons who received traditional mental health treatment in the past year, similar percentages of females and males also received support from a mental health self-help group (5.2 and 6.1 percent, respectively).

Discussion

A continuum of services and supports is important for recovery from mental health problems. For many people, mental health support and self-help groups complement treatment in the traditional mental health sector; two thirds (65.6 percent) of the people who received support for mental health problems from self-help groups also received traditional mental health services (inpatient care, outpatient care, and prescription medication). What was once viewed as an alternative can now be considered an element of mainstream services and supports, especially as even newer “alternatives” to traditional treatment emerge through such avenues as consumer-operated services providing a range of community-based services, wellness programs, peer-provided Medicaid-reimbursable services, Internet support groups, and peer-run crisis alternatives.

Figure 3. Received Support from a Mental Health Self-Help Group in the Past Year among Adults Aged 18 or Older Who Received Past Year Traditional Mental Health Treatment, by Race/Ethnicity: 2005 to 2008



Use of self-help groups was reported by 9.8 percent of those who received inpatient mental health care in the past year, 8.2 percent of those who got outpatient care, and 5.3 percent of those treated with prescription medications. The proportion using self-help groups was 8.8 percent among adults who received two or more of these traditional types of mental health

care and 14.2 percent among those who received all three types.

Demographic Differences in Use of Self-Help Groups among Treatment Recipients

Among adults who received any traditional type of mental health

End Note

¹ Goldstrom, I. D., Campbell, J., Rogers, J. A., Lambert, D. B., Blacklow, B., Henderson, M. J., & Manderscheid, R. W. (2006). National estimates for mental health mutual support groups, self-help organizations, and consumer-operated services. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health, 33*, 92-103.

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Findings from the SAMHSA 2005 to 2008 National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUHs)

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- About 5.5 percent of the 28.8 million adults who received any traditional type of mental health treatment in the past year also received support from a mental health self-help group in that time period

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 combined 2005 to 2008 data used in this report are based on information obtained from 182,332 persons aged 18 or older. 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). Also available online: <http://oas.samhsa.gov>.



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