

The NSDUH Report

January 30, 2004

Religious Beliefs and Substance Use among Youths

In Brief

- In 2002, about 8 million youths (33 percent) aged 12 to 17 attended religious services 25 times or more in the past year
- More than 78 percent of youths (19 million) reported that religious beliefs are a very important part of their lives, and 69 percent (17 million) reported that religious beliefs influence how they make decisions
- Youths aged 12 to 17 with higher levels of religiosity were less likely to have used cigarettes, alcohol, or illicit drugs in the past month than youths with lower levels of religiosity

Prior research suggests that religiosity serves as a protective factor for substance use and that higher levels of religiosity are associated with lower levels of substance use among youths.¹ The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), formerly the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse (NHSDA), includes questions about cigarette, alcohol, and illicit drug use during the 30 days prior to the survey interview. “Any illicit drug” refers to marijuana or hashish, cocaine (including crack), inhalants, hallucinogens, heroin, or prescription-type drugs used nonmedically. Youths also were asked to indicate how often they attended religious services, whether their religious beliefs are a very important part of their lives, and whether their religious beliefs influence how they make decisions.^{2,3} Responses were analyzed by gender and race/ethnicity.⁴

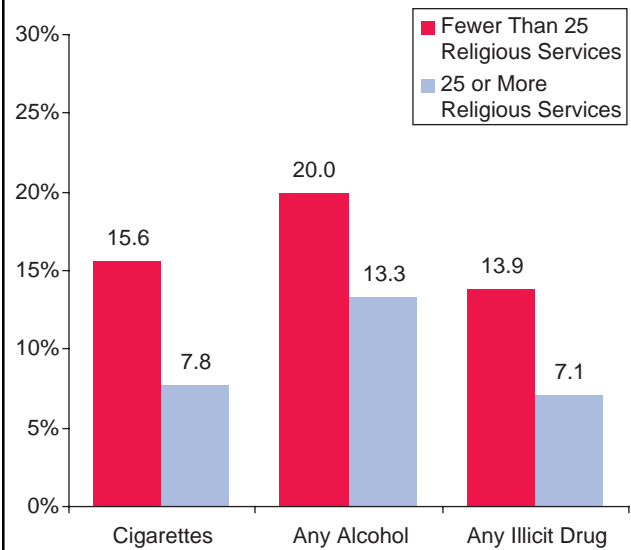
Religious Factors among Youths

In 2002, 33 percent of youths aged 12 to 17 (about 8 million) attended religious services 25 times or more in the past year (Table 1). Slightly more than 78 percent, or 19 million youths,

Table 1. Percentages and Standard Errors of Youths Aged 12 to 17 Reporting Religious Factors, by Gender and Race/Ethnicity: 2002

	Attended 25 or More Religious Services in the Past Year		Religious Beliefs Are a Very Important Part of Their Lives		Religious Beliefs Influence How They Make Decisions	
	%	SE	%	SE	%	SE
Total	33.0	0.44	78.2	0.36	69.0	0.41
Gender						
Male	31.3	0.58	74.4	0.54	66.3	0.55
Female	34.7	0.61	82.1	0.45	71.9	0.54
Race/Ethnicity						
White	36.9	0.52	76.4	0.43	67.1	0.51
Black	28.1	1.03	85.2	0.74	77.2	0.86
Hispanic	24.3	1.02	79.5	0.92	69.1	1.10

Figure 1. Percentages of Youths Aged 12 to 17 Reporting Past Month Substance Use, by Past Year Religious Service Attendance: 2002



reported that religious beliefs are a very important part of their lives. In addition, 69 percent, or 17 million youths, reported that religious beliefs influence how they make decisions.

Among youths, females were more likely than males to attend religious services, to report that religious beliefs are a very important part of their lives, and to indicate that religious beliefs influence how they make decisions (Table 1). White youths were more likely to attend religious services 25 times or more in the past year than black or Hispanic youths. However, black youths were more likely to report that religious beliefs are a very important part of their lives, and that religious beliefs influence how they make decisions compared with white and Hispanic youths.

Religious Service Attendance and Substance Use

In 2002, youths aged 12 to 17 who attended religious services 25 times or more in the past year were less likely to have used cigarettes, alcohol, or illicit drugs in the past month than youths who attended less than 25 religious services in the past year. For example, 7 percent of youths who attended religious services 25 times or more in the past year used illicit drugs in the past month compared with approximately 14 percent of youths who attended religious services less than 25 times in the past year (Figure 1).

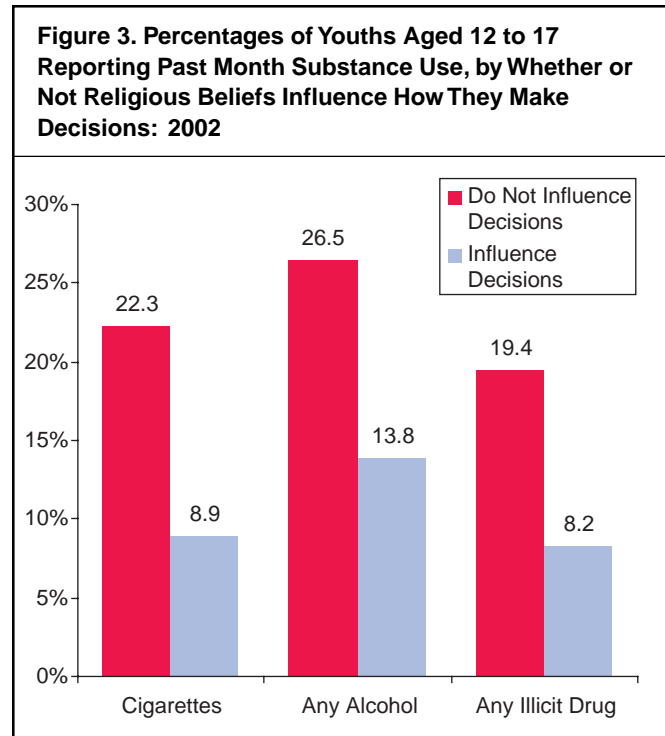
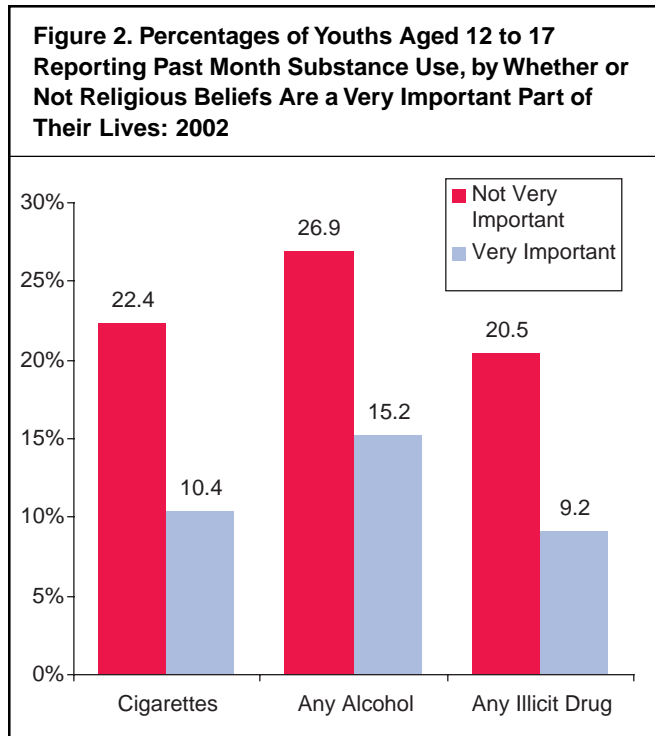
Importance of Religious Beliefs in Life and Substance Use

Youths aged 12 to 17 who reported that religious beliefs are a very important part of their lives were less

likely to have used cigarettes, alcohol, or illicit drugs in the past month than youths who reported that religious beliefs are not a very important part of their lives. For example, 15 percent of youths who reported that religious beliefs are a very important part of their lives used alcohol in the past month compared with 27 percent of youths who reported that religious beliefs are not a very important part of their lives (Figure 2).

Religious Beliefs' Influence on Decisions and Substance Use

Youths aged 12 to 17 who reported that religious beliefs influence how they make decisions also were less likely to have used cigarettes, alcohol, or illicit drugs in the past month than youths who reported that religious beliefs do not influence how they make decisions. For example, 9 percent of youths who reported that religious beliefs influence how



they make decisions used cigarettes in the past month compared with approximately 22 percent of youths who reported that religious beliefs do not influence how they make decisions (Figure 3).

End Notes

1. Petraitis, J., Flay, B. R., Miller, T. Q., Torpy, E. J., & Greiner, B. (1998). Illicit substance use among adolescents: A matrix of prospective predictors. *Substance Use & Misuse*, 33, 2561-2604.
2. Youths were asked to indicate how many times in the past 12 months they attended religious services, excluding special occasions, such as weddings or funerals. Response options were (a) 0 times, (b) 1 to 2 times, (c) 3 to 5 times, (d) 6 to 24 times, (e) 25 to 52 times, and (f) more than 52 times.
3. Youths were asked whether their religious beliefs are a very important part of their lives. They also were asked whether their religious beliefs influence how they make decisions in their lives. Response options for both questions were (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) agree, and (4) strongly agree. For this report, responses were coded as "not very important" (responses 1 and 2) and "very important" (responses 3 and 4) and as "do not influence" (responses 1 and 2) and "influence" (responses 3 and 4).
4. Non-Hispanic Asian, American Indian or Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander youths were excluded from the racial/ethnic comparisons due to small sample sizes.

Figure and Table Note

Source: SAMHSA 2002 NSDUH

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 23,645 youths 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 in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina.

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

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

Also available on-line: <http://www.DrugAbuseStatistics.samhsa.gov>.

Additional tables available upon request.

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



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