

The NSDUH Report

August 5, 2005

Substance Abuse and Dependence among Women

In Brief

- In 2003, an estimated 5.9 percent of women aged 18 or older met criteria for abuse of or dependence on alcohol or an illicit drug in the past year
- American Indian or Alaska Native women aged 18 or older had higher rates of abuse of or dependence on alcohol or an illicit drug than women aged 18 or older in other racial or ethnic groups
- Women aged 18 to 49 who were married had a lower rate of substance (alcohol or illicit drug) abuse or dependence than women of any other marital status

Women with substance use problems often have fewer resources (e.g., employment, education, and income) than men, are more likely to be living with a partner with a substance use problem, and are more likely than men to have responsibility for the care of dependent children.¹ The 2003 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) asked persons aged 12 or older to report on their use of alcohol and illicit drugs, as well as their symptoms of substance dependence or abuse during the past year. NSDUH defines *any illicit drug* as including marijuana/hashish, cocaine (including crack), inhalants, hallucinogens, heroin, or prescription-type drugs used nonmedically. NSDUH defines dependence on or abuse of illicit drugs or alcohol using criteria specified in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV)*,² including symptoms such as withdrawal, tolerance, use in dangerous situations, trouble with

Figure 1. Estimated Numbers (in Thousands) of Women Aged 18 or Older Who Abused or Were Dependent on Alcohol or Any Illicit Drug in the Past Year: 2003

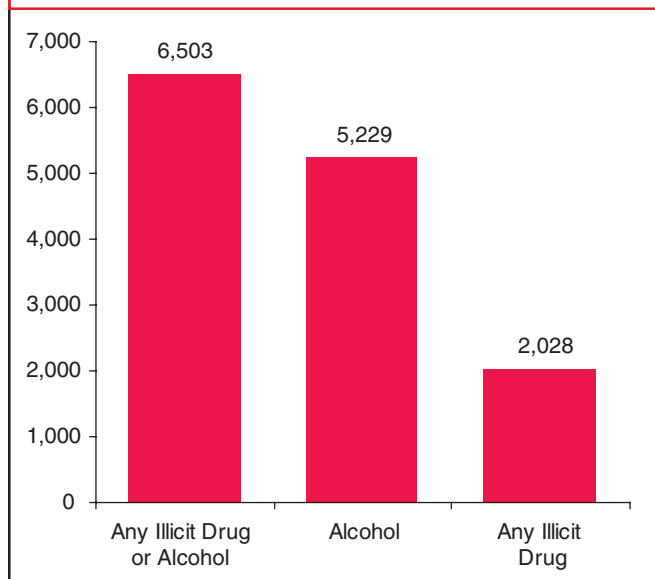
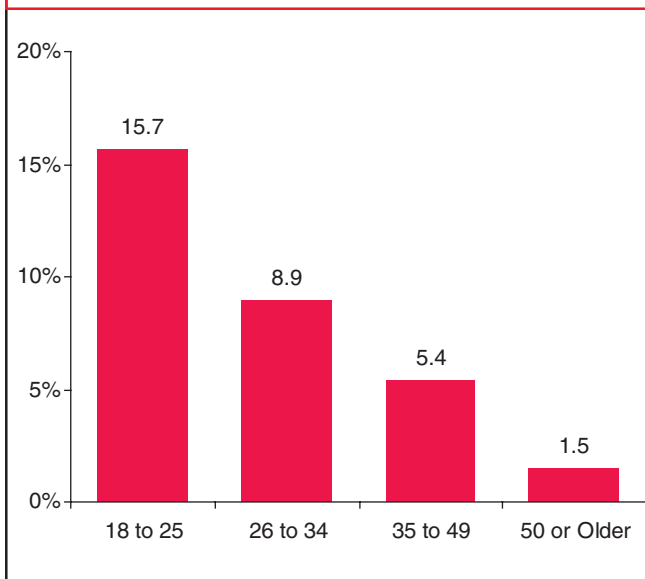


Figure 2. Percentages of Past Year Abuse of or Dependence on Alcohol or Any Illicit Drug among Women Aged 18 or Older, by Age Group: 2003



the law, and interference in major obligations at work, school, or home during the past year. This report focuses on substance use and substance abuse or dependence among women aged 18 or older.

Prevalence of Past Year Substance Use and Abuse or Dependence

In 2003, 70.1 million (63.4 percent) women aged 18 or older used alcohol during the past year, and an estimated 12.5 million (11.3 percent) used an illicit drug during the past year. Approximately 6.5 million (5.9 percent) women aged 18 or older met criteria for abuse of or dependence on alcohol or an illicit drug (Figure 1). Of these, an estimated 5.2 million (4.7 percent) abused or were dependent on alcohol, and 2 million (1.8 percent) abused or were dependent on an illicit drug.

Demographic Characteristics and Substance Abuse or Dependence

The rate of substance abuse or dependence among women aged 18 or older decreased with age. An estimated 15.7 percent of women aged 18 to 25 abused or were dependent on alcohol or an illicit drug in the past year compared with 8.9 percent of women aged 26 to 34, 5.4 percent of women aged 35 to 49, and 1.5 percent of those aged 50 or older (Figure 2). There was little change from 2002 to 2003 in the rate of abuse or dependence among women aged 18 or older overall or in any of these age groups.

Rates of abuse of or dependence on alcohol or illicit drugs among women aged 18 or older were highest among American Indians or Alaska Natives (19.9 percent), followed by whites (6.3

percent), blacks (4.5 percent), Hispanics (4.4 percent), and Asians (3.4 percent) (Figure 3).^{3,4} Among American Indian or Alaska Native women aged 18 or older, the estimated rate of alcohol or illicit drug abuse or dependence was higher in 2003 (19.9 percent) than in 2002 (10.2 percent). There was little difference between the 2002 and 2003 rates of abuse or dependence among women aged 18 or older in the other racial or ethnic groups.

Marital Status, Living with Children, and Substance Abuse or Dependence⁵

Women aged 18 to 49 who were married had a lower rate of substance (alcohol or illicit drug) abuse or dependence than women of any other marital status.⁶ In 2003, 4.1 percent of women aged 18 to 49 who were

Figure 3. Percentages of Past Year Abuse of or Dependence on Any Illicit Drug or Alcohol among Women Aged 18 or Older, by Race/Ethnicity: 2003

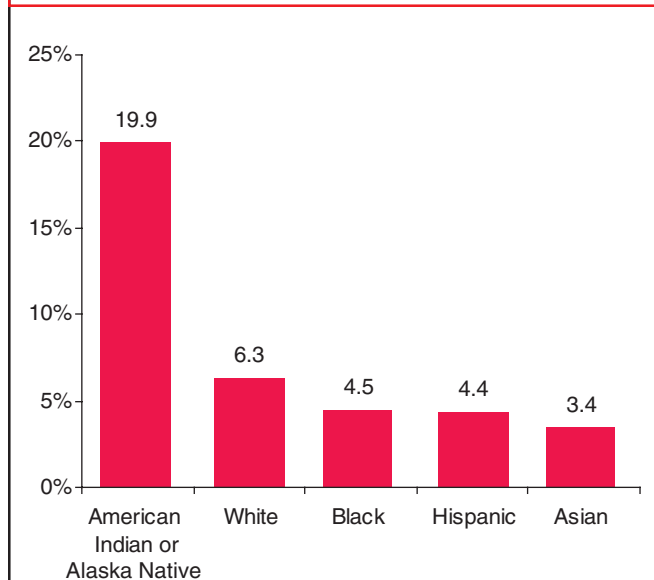
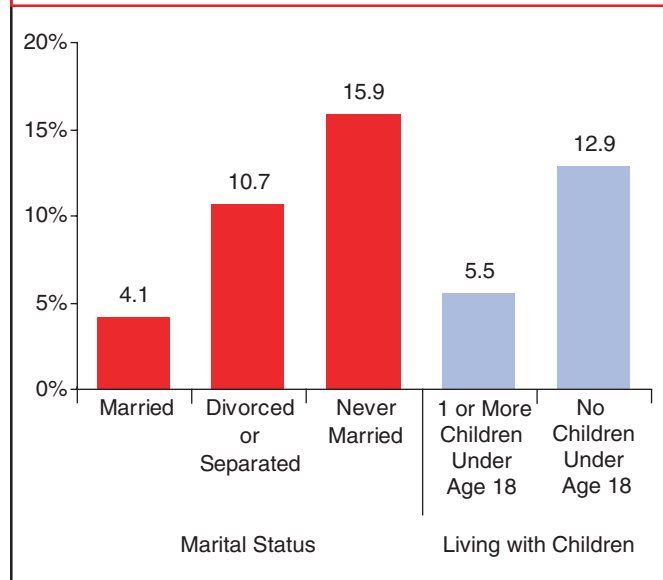


Figure 4. Percentages of Past Year Abuse of or Dependence on Any Illicit Drug or Alcohol among Women Aged 18 to 49, by Marital Status and Living with or without Children: 2003



married had abused or were dependent on alcohol or an illicit drug compared with 10.7 percent of women who were divorced or separated and 15.9 percent who were never married (Figure 4).

Women aged 18 to 49 who reported not living with any children under age 18 were more likely to have abused or been dependent on a substance (alcohol or an illicit drug) than women who reported living with one or more children (12.9 vs. 5.5 percent).⁷

End Notes

1. United Nations, Office of Drugs and Crimes. (2004). *Substance abuse treatment care for women: Case studies and lessons learned*. Retrieved June 14, 2005, from http://www.unodc.org/pdf/report_2004-08-30_1.pdf
2. American Psychiatric Association. (1994). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (4th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.
3. Small sample sizes prevented the presentation of estimates for women aged 18 or older who were Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander.
4. Race/ethnicity categories are determined by combining the responses from separate race and ethnicity questions. For this report, respondents identifying themselves as Hispanic were assigned to the Hispanic group regardless of their racial identification. Respondents identifying themselves as non-Hispanic were grouped according to their racial identification. Thus, "white" refers to those identifying themselves as non-Hispanic and white.
5. For the purposes of this report, analyses of marital status and "living with children" were limited to women aged 18 to 49.
6. Small sample sizes prevented the presentation of estimates for women aged 18 to 49 who were widowed.
7. "Living with children" refers to cohabiting with one or more biological, step, adoptive, or foster children under the age of 18.

Figure Note

Source: SAMHSA, 2003 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 2003 data are based on information obtained from 67,784 persons aged 12 or older, including 24,145 women 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.

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

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.

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.

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.

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