

The NSDUH Report

July 22, 2010

Substance Use and Treatment Need among Women Employed Full Time

The recent economic downturn has focused attention on the increasing importance of women as wage earners. With men losing 7 of every 10 jobs lost, more families are relying on the jobs of women for economic support.¹ Women currently make up nearly half of the U.S. labor

force, and many represent the primary or sole breadwinner in their families.^{1,2} As more families rely on the income of women, meeting the substance use and other behavioral health needs of this population will be increasingly important to the well-being of both women and their families.

The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) collects information on past month alcohol use, binge alcohol use, and illicit drug use,^{3,4} as well as on the need for and receipt of substance use treatment. Persons are classified as needing treatment for a substance use problem if they meet the criteria for dependence on or abuse of a substance or if they received substance use treatment at a specialty facility in the past year.^{5,6}

This issue of *The NSDUH Report* examines substance use and treatment need among women employed full time in the week prior to the interview. Women who indicated that they usually worked 35 hours or more per week are categorized as full-time employees. All findings are annual averages from combined 2004 to 2008 NSDUH data.

In Brief

- Combined data from 2004 to 2008 indicate that 19.8 percent of women aged 18 to 64 who were employed full time engaged in binge alcohol use and 6.4 percent used illicit drugs in the past month; this translates into 9.9 million bingeing on alcohol and 3.2 million using illicit drugs
- Among women employed full time, the rates of past month binge alcohol use and illicit drug use decreased with age; for example, 37.3 percent of women aged 18 to 25 reported past month binge alcohol use compared with 25.9 percent of those aged 26 to 34, 18.1 percent of those aged 35 to 49, and 9.3 percent of those aged 50 to 64
- About 3.6 million women employed full time (7.2 percent) were classified as being in need of treatment for an alcohol or drug use problem in the past year; of those, only 5.8 percent received treatment at a specialty facility

Employment among Women

Almost 50 million women aged 18 to 64 (53.4 percent of women in that age group) were employed full time during the week before the survey interview (Table 1). Full-time employment varied by age, race/ethnicity, marital status, and whether or not women lived with a child aged 17 or younger.

Table 1. Full-Time Employment among Women Aged 18 to 64, by Demographic and Family Characteristics: 2004 to 2008

Characteristic	Number Employed Full Time (in 1,000s)	Percent of Population
Total	49,948	53.4
Aged 18 to 25	6,560	40.5
Aged 26 to 34	10,100	57.2
Aged 35 to 49	19,844	60.1
Aged 50 to 64	13,444	50.3
White	33,544	53.5
Black or African American	7,055	58.5
American Indian or Alaska Native	241	48.2
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	183	54.6
Asian	2,294	52.7
Two or More Races	530	50.8
Hispanic or Latino	6,101	48.3
Married	27,018	52.0
Widowed	1,221	44.9
Divorced/Separated	9,233	63.9
Never Married	12,476	50.9
Living with a Child Aged 17 or Younger*	20,494	51.5
Not Living with a Child Aged 17 or Younger	29,397	54.8

* Respondents with missing data on the number of children have been excluded from the analysis.

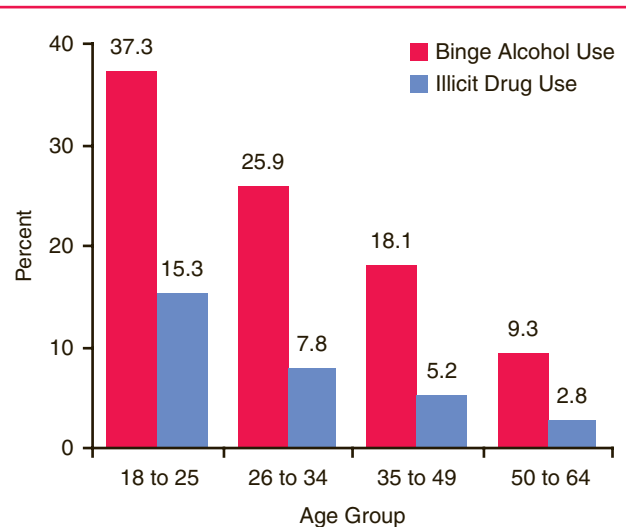
Source: 2004 to 2008 SAMHSA National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUHs).

Substance Use, by Demographic Characteristics

Combined data from 2004 to 2008 indicate that 19.8 percent of women aged 18 to 64 who were employed full time engaged in binge alcohol use and 6.4 percent used illicit drugs in the past month; this translates into 9.9 million bingeing on alcohol and 3.2 million using illicit drugs.⁷ However, rates of substance use varied by demographic characteristics.

The rates of past month binge alcohol use and illicit drug use among women employed full time decreased with age (Figure 1). For example, nearly two fifths (37.3 percent) of women aged 18 to 25 who were employed full time reported past month binge alcohol use compared with 25.9 percent of those aged 26 to 34, 18.1 percent of those aged 35 to 49, and 9.3 percent of those aged 50 to 64.

Rates of substance use also varied by race/ethnicity (Figure 2). Among women employed full time, the rate of binge alcohol use ranged from 28.2 percent among American Indians or Alaska Natives to 8.0 percent among Asians. The rate of past month illicit drug use ranged from 10.4 percent

Figure 1. Past Month Binge Alcohol Use and Illicit Drug Use among Full-Time Employed Women Aged 18 to 64, by Age Group: 2004 to 2008

Source: 2004 to 2008 SAMHSA National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUHs).

among women of two or more races who were employed full time to 2.5 percent of their Asian counterparts.

Substance Use, by Family Characteristics

Rates of substance use among women employed full time varied by marital status, with those who were never married having the highest rates (Figure 3). For example, 31.5 percent of those who were never married indicated past month binge alcohol use compared with 20.6 percent of those who were divorced or separated, 14.5 percent of those who were married, and 12.4 percent of those who were widowed. In assessing these differences, it should be noted that marital status varies by age. For example, among full-time employed women, most of those who were never married (69.9 percent) were aged 18 to 34, while most of those who were married (76.3 percent) were aged 35 to 64.

Among women employed full time, those who lived with at least one child aged 17 or younger were slightly less likely than those who did not to have bingeed on alcohol in the past month (18.3 vs. 21.0 percent) or to have used illicit drugs in the past month (5.2 vs. 7.2 percent).

Need for and Treatment Receipt among Women Employed Full Time

About 3.6 million women employed full time (7.2 percent) were classified as being in need of treatment for an alcohol or drug use problem in the past year. Of those in need of

Figure 2. Past Month Binge Alcohol Use and Illicit Drug Use among Full-Time Employed Women Aged 18 to 64, by Race/Ethnicity: 2004 to 2008

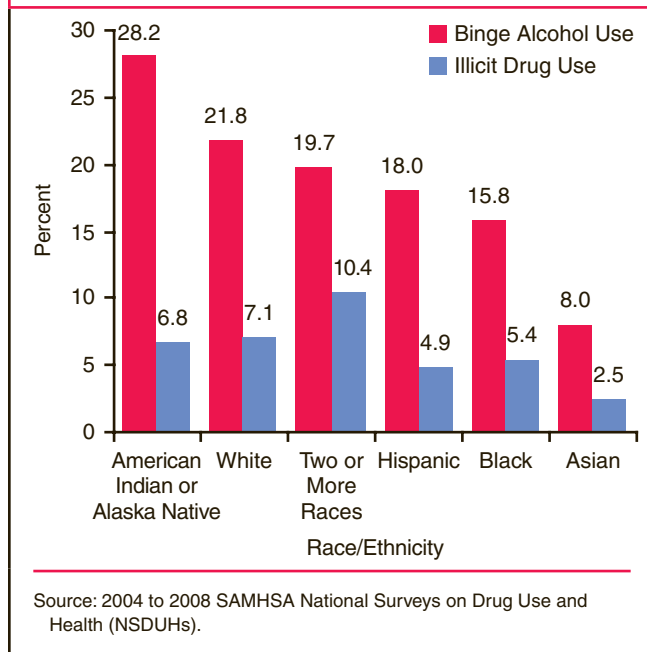
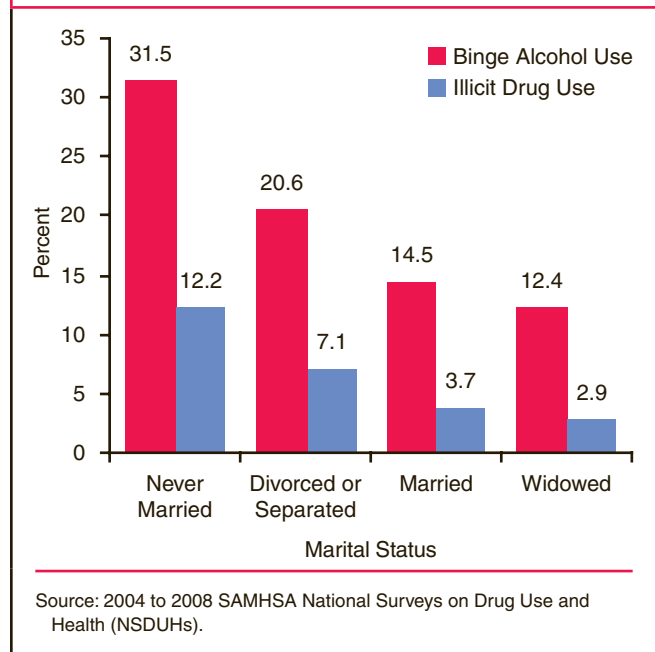


Figure 3. Past Month Binge Alcohol Use and Illicit Drug Use among Full-Time Employed Women Aged 18 to 64, by Marital Status: 2004 to 2008



treatment, 5.8 percent received it at a specialty facility in the past year.

Discussion

Although working women may be at lower risk for substance use than their male counterparts,⁸ this report shows that they are not immune from these problems. Nearly 4 million working women were in need of substance use treatment, with only around 6 percent of those actually receiving specialty services. Given the potential economic and health consequences of untreated substance use disorders, in addition to their effects on families, working women need access to effective and targeted substance use prevention and treatment services. Addressing the service needs of working women with gender and family-sensitive strategies that are coordinated and integrated with primary health care may result in improved health outcomes, lower medical costs, increased productivity, and increased economic security.

End Notes

- U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2010, March). *Employment & Earnings Online*, 57(3). [Available as a PDF at <http://www.bls.gov/opub/ee/>]
- Boushey, H., & Chapman, J. (2009). Table 1: Bringing home the bacon [Analysis of M. King, S. Ruggles, T. Alexander, D. Leicach, & M. Sobek. *Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, Current Population Survey (Version 2.0)* [Machine-readable database]. Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota Population Center]. In H. Boushey & A. O'Leary (Eds.), *The Shriver Report: A woman's nation changes everything*. Retrieved from <http://www.awomansnation.com/economy.php>

- 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.
- NSDUH defines illicit drugs as marijuana/hashish, cocaine (including crack), inhalants, hallucinogens, heroin, or prescription-type drugs used nonmedically. Nonmedical use is defined as use of prescription-type pain relievers, sedatives, stimulants, or tranquilizers not prescribed for the respondent by a physician or used only for the experience or feeling they caused. Nonmedical use of prescription-type drugs does not include over-the-counter drugs; nonmedical use of stimulants includes methamphetamine use.
- NSDUH defines dependence on or abuse of alcohol and illicit drugs using criteria in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV)*, which 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 American Psychiatric Association. (1994). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (4th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.
- Substance use treatment at a specialty facility is defined as treatment received at drug or alcohol rehabilitation facilities (inpatient or outpatient), hospitals (inpatient services only), and mental health centers; it excludes treatment in an emergency room, private doctor's office, self-help group, prison or jail, or hospital as an outpatient.
- This includes an estimated 1.6 million full-time employed women who both engaged in binge drinking and used illicit drugs in the past month.
- Larson, S. L., Eyerman, J., Foster, M. S., & Groerer, J. C. (2007). *Worker substance use and workplace policies and programs* (DHHS Publication No. SMA 07-4273, Analytic Series A-29). Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Office of Applied Studies. [Available at <http://oas.samhsa.gov/analytic.htm>]

Suggested Citation

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Office of Applied Studies. (July 22, 2010). *The NSDUH Report: Substance Use and Treatment Need among Women Employed Full Time*. Rockville, MD.

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Findings from the SAMHSA 2004 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 2004 to 2008 data used in this report are based on information obtained from 114,183 women aged 18 to 64, including 55,992 who were working full time in the week prior to the interview. 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* (HHS 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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