

The NSDUH Report

October 29, 2004

Gender Differences in Substance Dependence and Abuse

In Brief

- In 2003, males aged 12 or older were twice as likely as females to be dependent on or abuse alcohol or an illicit drug in the past year
- Males had higher rates than females of dependence on or abuse of alcohol or an illicit drug for all age groups, with the exception of 12 to 17 year olds
- Males and females aged 18 to 49 who were married had lower rates of dependence on or abuse of alcohol or an illicit drug than males or females of other marital statuses

Males are more likely to use, abuse, and be dependent on alcohol or illicit drugs than females.¹ The 2003 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) asked questions of persons aged 12 or older to assess 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 substance dependence or abuse using criteria in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV),² which includes such symptoms as physical danger, trouble with the law due to substance use, increased tolerance to alcohol or other drugs, and interference in everyday life activities during the past year. This report looks at substance use, abuse, and dependence among females and males across age groups.

Figure 1. Percentages of Past Year Dependence on or Abuse of Alcohol or Any Illicit Drug among Persons Aged 12 or Older, by Gender: 2003

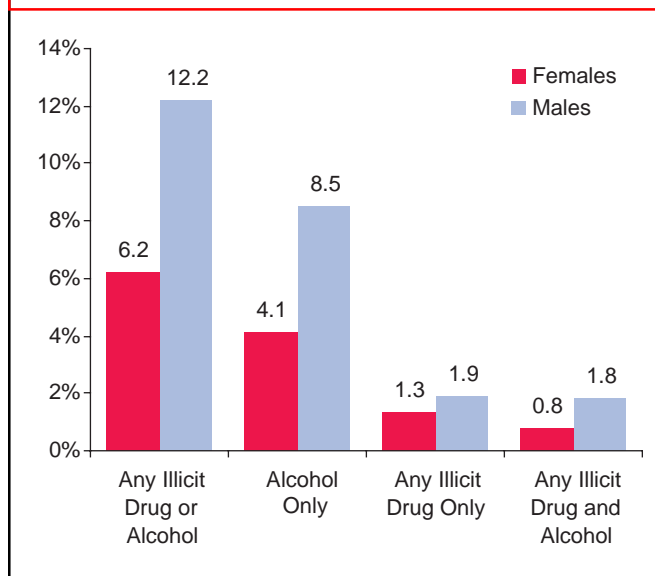
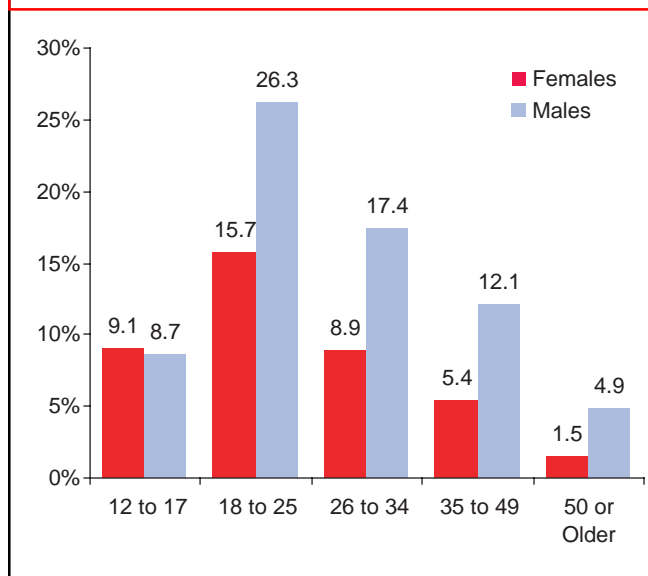


Figure 2. Percentages of Past Year Dependence on or Abuse of Alcohol or Any Illicit Drug, by Gender and Age: 2003



Prevalence of Past Year Substance Use

In 2003, 74.5 million (61 percent) females aged 12 or older used alcohol during the past year, and an estimated 15.2 million (12 percent) used an illicit drug during the past year. In contrast, in 2003, 80.0 million (70 percent) males aged 12 or older used alcohol during the past year, and 19.8 million (17 percent) used an illicit drug.

Prevalence of Substance Dependence or Abuse

In 2003, males aged 12 or older were twice as likely to be dependent on or abuse alcohol or an illicit drug in the past year as females aged 12 or older (12 vs. 6 percent) (Figure 1). Among females, approximately 4 percent were dependent on or abused alcohol only, 1 percent were dependent on or abused an illicit drug only, and less than 1 percent were dependent on or abused both alcohol and illicit drugs. In contrast, among males, 8.5 percent were dependent on or abused alcohol

only, 2 percent were dependent on or abused an illicit drug only, and 2 percent were dependent on or abused both alcohol and illicit drugs.

Age and Substance Dependence or Abuse

In 2003, 9 percent of both females and males aged 12 to 17 were dependent on or abusing alcohol or an illicit drug (Figure 2). Among older age groups, males were more likely than females to be dependent on or abusing alcohol or an illicit drug. Males aged 18 to 25 had a higher rate of dependence or abuse than females in the same age group, and males aged 26 or older were more than twice as likely to be dependent on or abusing alcohol or an illicit drug compared with females aged 26 or older.

Marital Status, Living with Children, and Employment

Both males and females 18 to 49 years old³ who were married at the time of the survey had a lower rate of

substance (alcohol or illicit drug) dependence or abuse than persons of other marital statuses.⁴ In 2003, approximately 4 percent of married females aged 18 to 49 were dependent on or abusing alcohol or an illicit drug compared with 11 percent of females who were divorced or separated and 16 percent of females who had never been married. Among males 18 to 49 years old, 10 percent of those who were married were dependent on or abusing alcohol or an illicit drug compared with 23 percent of divorced or separated males and 24 percent of males who had never been married. For each marital status category, females were less likely than males to be dependent on or abusing alcohol or an illicit drug.

Males aged 18 to 49 who reported living with one or more children⁵ were less likely to be dependent on or abuse substances (alcohol or an illicit drug) compared with males who did not live with any children (11 vs. 21 percent) (Figure 3). The same was true for females. In 2003, 5.5 percent of females 18 to 49 years old who reported living with one or more children were dependent on or abusing

Figure 3. Percentages of Past Year Dependence on or Abuse of Alcohol or Any Illicit Drug among Persons Aged 18 to 49, by Gender and Family Status: 2003

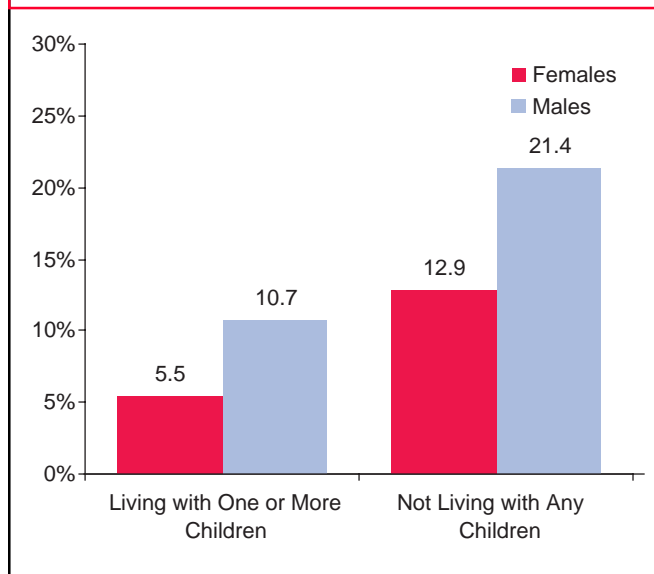
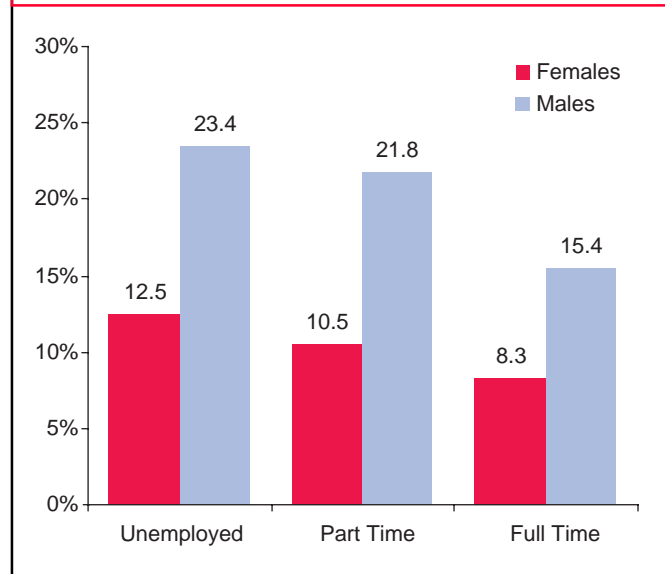


Figure 4. Percentages of Past Year Dependence on or Abuse of Alcohol or Any Illicit Drug among Persons Aged 18 to 49, by Gender and Employment Status: 2003



alcohol or an illicit drug compared with 13 percent of those who did not live with any children.

For both males and females, the likelihood of being dependent on or abusing alcohol or an illicit drug was higher among persons who were unemployed⁶ than among employed persons. In 2003, 12.5 percent of females aged 18 to 49 who were unemployed were dependent on or abused alcohol or an illicit drug compared with 8 percent of females employed full time (Figure 4). For males aged 18 to 49, 23 percent of those who were unemployed were dependent on or abused alcohol or an illicit drug compared with 15 percent of males employed full time.

End Notes

1. 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.
2. American Psychiatric Association. (1994). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (4th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.
3. Current marital status response options are (a) married, (b) widowed, (c) divorced or separated, and (d) have never married. For the purposes of this report, we focused on males and females aged 18 to 49.
4. Small sample sizes prevented comparative analysis with persons who were widowed.
5. "Living with children" refers to cohabiting with one or more biological, step, adoptive, or foster children under the age of 18.

6. "Unemployed" refers to respondents who reported no employment during the reference period, were available for work, except for temporary illness, and had made specific efforts to find employment some time during the reference period. Persons who were waiting to be recalled to a job from which they had been laid off need not have been looking for work to be classified as unemployed.

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. 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 publication and statistics:

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.

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Because of improvements and modifications to the 2002 NSDUH, estimates from the 2003 survey should not be compared with estimates from the 2001 or earlier versions of the survey to examine changes over time.

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