

The NSDUH Report

June 18, 2009

Fathers' Alcohol Use and Substance Use among Adolescents

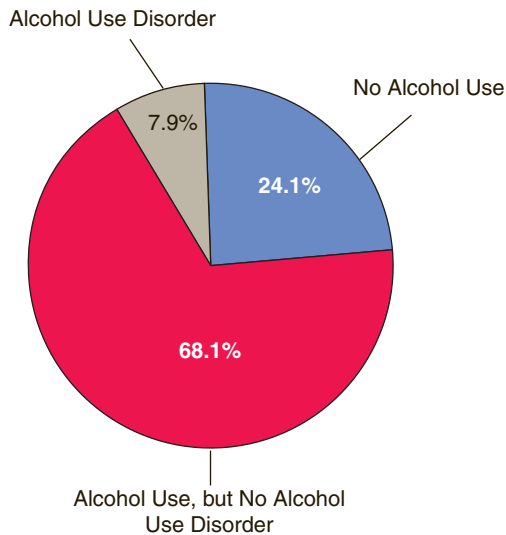
In Brief

- Almost one in twelve (7.9 percent) fathers living with adolescents aged 12 to 17 had an alcohol use disorder, while 68.1 percent used alcohol in the past year but did not have an alcohol use disorder; 24.1 percent did not use alcohol in the past year
- The rate of past year alcohol use among adolescents was lower for those who lived with a father who did not use alcohol in the past year than for those who lived with a father who used alcohol but did not have an alcohol use disorder and for those who lived with a father with an alcohol use disorder (21.1 vs. 33.2 and 38.8 percent, respectively)
- The percentage of adolescents using illicit drugs in the past year increased with the level of paternal alcohol use, with illicit drug use reported by 14.0 percent of adolescents who lived with a father who did not use alcohol in the past year, 18.4 percent of those who lived with a father who used alcohol but did not have an alcohol use disorder, and 24.2 percent of those who lived with a father with an alcohol use disorder

Alcohol dependence or abuse—and even moderate alcohol use—among fathers living with adolescents (i.e., youths aged 12 to 17) may increase the risk of substance use among those children. Increasing public awareness of the association between paternal alcohol use and adolescent substance use may help to focus attention on providing treatment for affected fathers and support for their children to prevent or reduce adolescent substance use. The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) gathers information that can help to provide a better understanding of the relationship between paternal alcohol use and adolescent substance use.

The NSDUH sample includes a subsample of parents and children who live in the same household. The survey annually collects data on the use of alcohol and illicit drugs,¹ including questions about symptoms of dependence or abuse. Dependence or abuse is defined using criteria specified in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV)*,² which include symptoms such 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.

Figure 1. Level of Past Year Alcohol Use among Fathers Living with Adolescents*: 2002 to 2007



* Percentages do not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: 2002 to 2007 SAMHSA National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUHs).

This issue of *The NSDUH Report* examines rates of adolescent substance use and substance use disorders (i.e., dependence on or abuse of alcohol or illicit drugs) by level of alcohol use in the past year among fathers (i.e., no alcohol use, alcohol use but no alcohol use disorder, and alcohol use disorder). It focuses on biological, step-, adoptive, and foster children aged 12 to 17 who were living with their fathers at the time of the survey interview.³ All findings are based on annual averages from combined 2002 to 2007 NSDUH data.

Fathers' Alcohol Use

Almost one in twelve (7.9 percent) fathers living with adolescents aged 12 to 17 had an alcohol use disorder, while 68.1 percent used alcohol in the past year but did not have an alcohol use disorder; 24.1 percent did not use alcohol in the past year (Figure 1). Nearly one third (31.2 percent) of fathers living with adolescents indicated binge alcohol use in the past month.⁴

Adolescent Alcohol Use and Alcohol Use Disorder

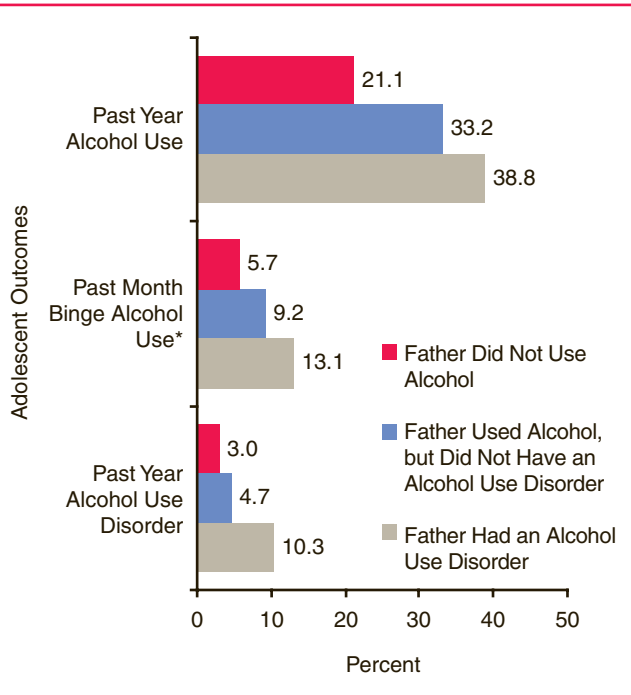
The rate of past year alcohol use among adolescents was lower for those who lived with a father who did not use alcohol in the past year than for those who lived with a father who used alcohol but did not have an alcohol use disorder and for those who lived with a father with an alcohol use disorder (21.1 vs. 33.2 and 38.8 percent, respectively) (Figure 2). Adolescents' past year alcohol use rates did not differ significantly between those who lived with fathers who had an alcohol use disorder and those who lived with fathers who used alcohol but who did not have an alcohol use disorder.

The rates of past month binge alcohol use and past year alcohol use disorder among adolescents increased with the level of paternal alcohol use. For example, the rate of alcohol use disorder among adolescents who lived with a father who did not use alcohol in the past year was lower than the rate among those who lived with a father who used alcohol in the past year but did not have an alcohol use disorder (3.0 vs. 4.7 percent), which in turn was lower than the rate among those who lived with a father with an alcohol use disorder (10.3 percent).

Adolescent Illicit Drug Use and Drug Use Disorder

Paternal alcohol use also was related to adolescent illicit drug use. The percentage of adolescents using illicit drugs in the past year increased with the level of paternal alcohol use, with illicit drug use reported by 14.0 percent of adolescents who lived with a father who did not use alcohol in the past year, 18.4 percent of those who lived with a father who used alcohol but did not have an alcohol use disorder, and 24.2 percent of those who lived with a father with an alcohol use disorder (Figure 3). The rate of past year illicit drug use disorder among adolescents was 2.6 percent among those who lived with a father who did not use alcohol in the past year, 3.9 percent among those who lived with a father who used alcohol but did not have an alcohol use disorder, and 4.2 percent among those who lived with a father with an alcohol use disorder.

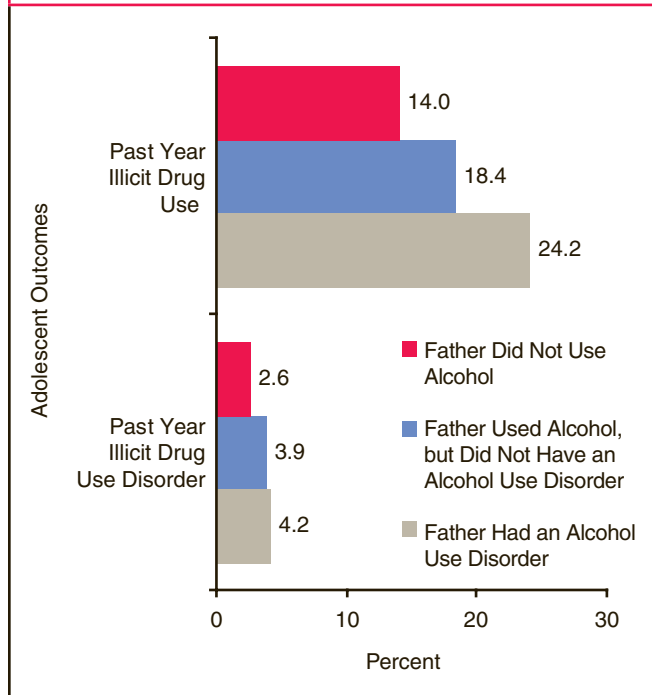
Figure 2. Alcohol Use and Alcohol Use Disorder among Adolescents (Living with a Father), by the Father's Level of Alcohol Use in the Past Year: 2002 to 2007



* 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.

Source: 2002 to 2007 SAMHSA National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUHs).

Figure 3. Illicit Drug Use and Drug Use Disorder among Adolescents (Living with a Father), by the Father's Level of Alcohol Use in the Past Year: 2002 to 2007



Source: 2002 to 2007 SAMHSA National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUHs).

Discussion

Alcohol use among fathers, even at levels not sufficient to warrant a diagnosis of an alcohol use disorder, is associated with several substance use behaviors and disorders among the adolescent children who live with them. These findings highlight the continuing need to educate fathers, mothers, and family support systems professionals about the potential impact of paternal alcohol use on adolescent substance use. In addition, these findings suggest the importance of providing treatment for fathers with alcohol use disorders and family support services for children of these fathers.

End Notes

- 1 NSDUH defines illicit drugs as marijuana/hashish, cocaine (including crack), inhalants, hallucinogens, heroin, or prescription-type drugs used nonmedically.
- 2 American Psychiatric Association. (1994). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (4th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.
- 3 An estimated 72.4 percent of adolescents aged 12 to 17 lived with a father. See U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, Fertility & Family Statistics Branch. (2008, August 27). *America's families and living arrangements: 2004. Table C2. Household relationships and living arrangements of children under 18 years, by age, sex, race, and Hispanic origin: 2004*. Retrieved April 14, 2009, from <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hh-fam/cps2004.html>
- 4 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.

Suggested Citation

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Office of Applied Studies. (June 18, 2009). *The NSDUH Report: Fathers' Alcohol Use and Substance Use among Adolescents*. Rockville, MD.

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Research findings from the SAMHSA 2002 to 2007 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 2002 to 2007 data used in this report are based on information obtained from 11,056 fathers who responded and 9,537 father-child respondent pairs. 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.)

The most recent information on NSDUH is available in the following publication:

Office of Applied Studies. (2008). *Results from the 2007 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National findings* (DHHS Publication No. SMA 08-4343, NSDUH Series H-34). Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Also available online: <http://oas.samhsa.gov>.



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