

The NSDUH Report

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Substance Use and Employment among Youths Aged 15 to 17

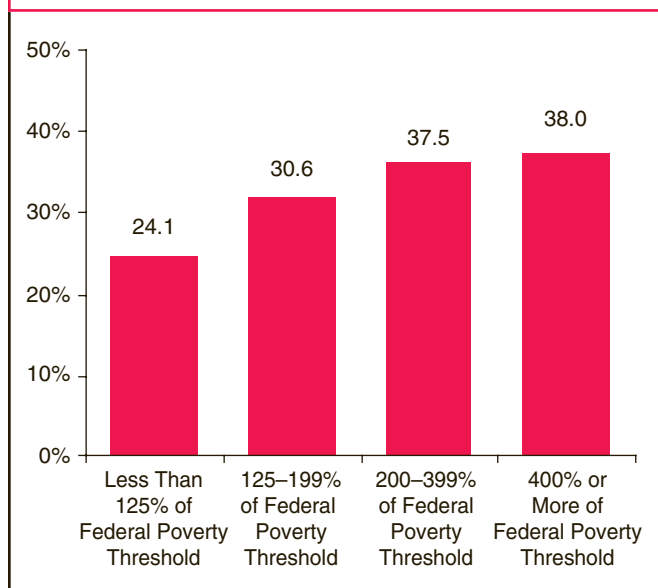
In Brief

- An estimated 33.7 percent of youths aged 15 to 17 were employed either part or full time during the past week
- Employed youths were more likely than youths who were not employed to have used alcohol (35.9 vs. 24.4 percent), to have engaged in binge alcohol use (24.6 vs. 15.2 percent), and to have used an illicit drug (19.4 vs. 15.6 percent) during the past month
- Youths working 20 or more hours per week were more likely than those working 19 or fewer hours per week to have drunk alcohol (41.1 vs. 33.8 percent), to have binged on alcohol (29.0 vs. 23.1 percent), and to have used any illicit drug (22.3 vs. 18.5 percent) during the past month

Research indicates that the more hours adolescents work, the more likely they are to smoke cigarettes, drink alcohol, and use marijuana.¹ The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) asks persons aged 15 or older about their employment status during the past week and, if they were employed, the number of hours they worked.² The survey also asks persons aged 12 or older questions related to their past month use of alcohol and illicit drugs. *Any illicit drug* refers to marijuana/hashish, cocaine (including crack), inhalants, hallucinogens, heroin, or prescription-type drugs used nonmedically.³ *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.

This report focuses on past week employment and any past month use of alcohol, past month binge alcohol use, and past month use of any illicit drug among youths aged 15 to 17.⁴ All findings presented in this report are annual averages based on combined 2002, 2003, and 2004 NSDUH data.

Figure 1. Percentages of Youths Aged 15 to 17 Employed in the Past Week, by Family Income Relative to Federal Poverty Threshold: 2002, 2003, and 2004



Employment among Youths Aged 15 to 17

Based on estimates from 2002 to 2004, 33.7 percent of youths aged 15 to 17 were employed either part or full time during the past week. Employment was more common among white youths (39.0 percent) than youths who were Hispanic (26.0 percent), black (23.2 percent), Asian (23.2 percent), or American Indian or Alaska Native (19.2 percent). Youths living in non-metropolitan areas were more likely to be employed than those living in metropolitan areas (38.2 vs. 32.7 percent). Additionally, youths who were not attending or enrolled in school at the time of the interview were more likely to be employed than those who were attending or enrolled in school (46.9 vs. 33.2 percent).⁵ Youths with family incomes less than 125 percent of the Federal poverty threshold were less likely to be employed in the past week than those with family incomes in higher categories relative to the poverty threshold (Figure 1).⁶

Employment and Substance Use

During the month prior to the interview, 28.3 percent of youths aged 15 to 17 used alcohol, and 18.4 percent engaged in binge alcohol use. Employed youths were more likely than youths who were not employed to have drunk alcohol (35.9 vs. 24.4 percent) and to have binged on alcohol in the past month (24.6 vs. 15.2 percent). These findings were consistent regardless of gender, county type, and family income relative to the Federal poverty threshold (Table 1).

Among youths aged 15 to 17, 16.8 percent used an illicit drug during the past month. Employed youths were more likely to have used an illicit drug in the past month than those who were not employed (19.4 vs. 15.6 percent). This finding was consistent for males and females. Among employed youths aged 15 to 17, the illicit drugs most frequently used in the past month were marijuana (15.8 percent), prescription drugs used nonmedically (6.0 percent), hallucinogens (1.7 percent), cocaine (1.2 percent), and inhalants (1.0 percent).

Hours Worked and Employer Drug Testing

Among employed youths aged 15 to 17, 58.0 percent worked 19 or fewer hours in the past week, and 42.0 percent worked 20 or more hours in the past week. Rates of past month alcohol use, binge alcohol use, and illicit drug use were higher among youths working 20 or more hours than among those working 19 or fewer hours in the past week (Figure 2).

Among employed youths aged 15 to 17, 21.6 percent were employed at a workplace that conducted drug testing, and 15.6 percent were employed at a workplace that conducted alcohol testing. An estimated 13.7 percent of employed youths aged 15 to 17 worked at a place that tested for drugs or alcohol as part of the hiring process. Past month alcohol use was higher among youths employed at a workplace that did not conduct alcohol testing than among youths

Table 1. Percentages of Youths Aged 15 to 17 Reporting Past Month Alcohol Use, by Employment Status and Demographic Characteristics: 2002, 2003, and 2004

Demographic	Any Alcohol Use		Binge Alcohol Use		Any Illicit Drug Use	
	Employed (Percent)	Not Employed (Percent)	Employed (Percent)	Not Employed (Percent)	Employed (Percent)	Not Employed (Percent)
Gender						
Male	35.1	24.6	25.9	16.5	20.0	16.3
Female	36.8	24.2	23.1	13.9	18.7	14.8
County Type						
Metropolitan	35.8	24.0	24.2	14.7	20.0	15.7
Non-metropolitan	36.5	26.6	26.0	18.3	17.0	15.0
School Status*						
Attending or enrolled	35.7	24.0	24.2	14.8	18.8	15.1
Not attending or enrolled	39.9	38.2	30.9	29.2	30.2	31.1
Family Income Relative to Poverty Threshold						
Less than 125 percent	30.0	20.0	20.2	12.5	20.5	15.9
125 to 199 percent	33.8	23.7	23.4	15.5	17.2	15.2
200 to 399 percent	35.8	25.7	23.5	16.5	17.9	16.0
400 percent or higher	39.5	27.1	28.0	16.1	21.3	15.0

employed at a workplace that conducted alcohol testing (37.2 vs. 32.8 percent). The rate of illicit drug use did not differ significantly between youths employed at workplaces that conducted drug testing and those employed at workplaces that did not conduct drug testing.

End Notes

- Bachman, J. G., Safron, D. J., Sy, S. R., & Schulenberg, J. E. (2003). Wishing to work: New perspectives on how adolescents' part-time work intensity is linked to educational disengagement, substance use, and other problem behaviors. *International Journal of Behavioral Development, 27*, 301-315.
- Respondents were asked to report whether they worked in the week prior to the interview, and if not, whether they had a job despite not working in the past week. If respondents had a job but did not work in the past week, they were classified as employed. Unpaid work is reportable as employment if it involved a family farm or business and totaled more than 15 hours. Volunteer work is not included.
- NSDUH measures the nonmedical use of prescription-type pain relievers, sedatives, stimulants, or tranquilizers. Nonmedical use is defined as the use of prescription-type drugs not prescribed for the respondent by a physician or used only for the experience or feeling they caused. Nonmedical use of any prescription-type pain reliever, sedative, stimulant, or tranquilizer does not include use of over-the-counter drugs.
- Analyses were based on all youths aged 15 to 17, including school drop-outs as well as youths attending or enrolled in school.
- Youths on summer vacation from school were considered to be attending or enrolled in school.
- The poverty threshold variable is based on the family income of the respondent expressed as a percentage of the Federal poverty threshold as published annually by the U.S. Census Bureau. It takes into account family size and the number of children in the household.

Figure 2. Percentages of Employed Youths Aged 15 to 17 Reporting Past Month Alcohol and Illicit Drug Use, by Number of Hours Worked: 2002, 2003, and 2004

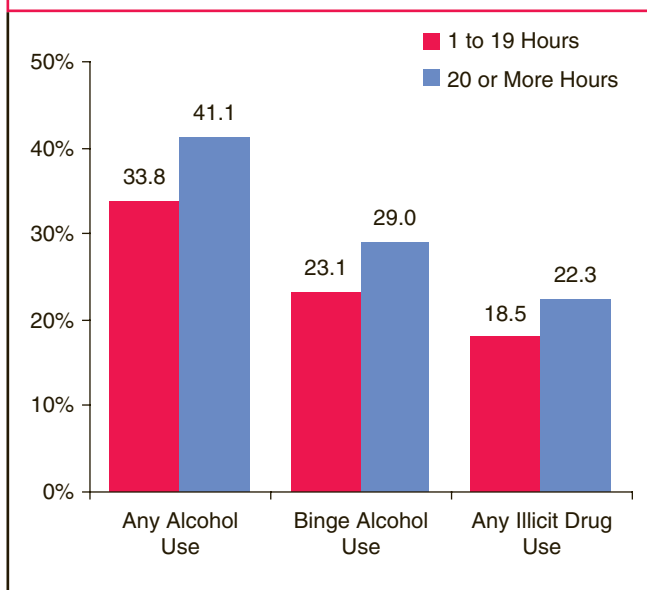


Figure and Table Notes

Source: SAMHSA, 2002, 2003, and 2004 NSDUHs.

* Youths with unknown or missing school enrollment status were excluded from this analysis.

Research findings from the SAMHSA 2002, 2003, and 2004 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). Prior to 2002, this survey was called the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse (NHSDA). The 2002, 2003, and 2004 data used in this report are based on information obtained from 33,520 youths aged 15 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 International in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina. (RTI International is a trade name of Research Triangle Institute.)

Information on NSDUH used in compiling data for this issue is available in the following publications:

Office of Applied Studies. (2005). *Results from the 2004 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National findings* (DHHS Publication No. SMA 05-4062, NSDUH Series H-28). Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

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, 2003, and 2004 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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