

The DASIS Report

February 22, 2002

Treatment Admissions for Alcohol Abuse, Alone and with a Drug Problem

In Brief

- Alcohol was reported as the primary substance of abuse by almost half of 1999 treatment admissions
- The average age at admission for alcohol with a secondary drug problem was 33 compared with 38 for alcohol-only admissions

In 1999, alcohol was the primary substance of abuse for almost half (46 percent) of the 1.6 million admissions to publicly funded substance abuse treatment facilities, according to the 1999 Treatment Episode Data Set (TEDS). While there were 420,000 admissions in 1999 for abuse of alcohol alone, there were another 320,000 for abuse of alcohol in conjunction with a secondary drug problem.

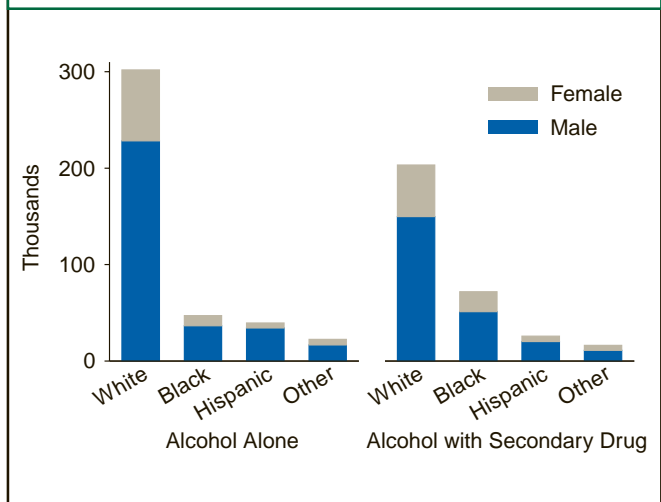
Marijuana was the most common secondary drug problem for alcohol admissions, but “hard drugs,” such as heroin and cocaine, were also reported to TEDS. For example, the secondary drug problems identified on admission records for persons with primary alcohol abuse included marijuana (62 percent), crack cocaine (26 percent), powder cocaine (20 percent), methamphetamine (9 percent), and heroin (7 percent).¹

TEDS permits comparison of persons admitted to treatment for abuse of alcohol alone with those who had a drug as well as alcohol problem. In TEDS, “admissions” represent treatment episodes during the year rather than the number of individuals seeking treatment.

Table 1. Primary Substance of Abuse at Admission: 1995-1999

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
All Admissions (in Thousands)	1,637	1,606	1,538	1,615	1,588
<i>Primary Substance</i>	<i>Percent</i>				
Alcohol Alone	29.2	28.9	27.2	26.7	26.3
Alcohol with Secondary Drug	21.3	21.5	21.1	20.5	20.1
Opiates	14.5	14.5	15.4	15.4	16.2
Cocaine	16.7	16.1	15.1	15.1	14.4
Marijuana	10.5	12.0	13.0	13.5	14.1
Stimulants	3.9	3.3	4.4	4.4	4.6
Other	4.0	3.7	3.8	4.4	4.3

Figure 1. Admissions for Alcohol Alone and Alcohol with a Secondary Drug Problem, by Race/Ethnicity and Sex: 1999



Source: 1999 SAMHSA Treatment Episode Data Set (TEDS).

Alcohol as a Primary Substance of Abuse

Alcohol was the most common primary substance among admissions to substance abuse treatment facilities between 1995 and 1999 (Table 1). During that time period, more than one quarter of admissions were for abuse of alcohol alone, and another one fifth were for abuse of alcohol with a secondary drug problem.

Race/Ethnicity and Sex

Of the 420,000 admissions for abuse of alcohol alone, approximately 230,000 (56 percent) were White males (Figure 1). Approximately 150,000 (47 percent) of the 320,000 admissions for alcohol with a secondary drug problem were also White males.

Age at Admission

Through age 38, a higher percentage of admissions were for people who abused alcohol and drugs than for people who abused alcohol alone (Figure 2). The average age at admission for alcohol with a secondary drug problem was 33 compared with 38 for alcohol-only admissions.

Substantial numbers of treatment admissions for primary alcohol abuse were younger than 21, the current legal drinking age. TEDS data show that 14 percent of admissions for alcohol with a secondary drug problem were younger than age 21 (some 45,000 in 1999), as were 6 percent of alcohol-only admissions (about 26,000 in 1999).

Persons older than 50 made up 13 percent of admissions for treatment of alcohol abuse alone compared with 3 percent of those admitted for treatment of alcohol

abuse with a secondary drug problem (data not shown).

Age at First Intoxication

Persons admitted to treatment began their use of alcohol early. The average age at first intoxication was younger than age 21. However, those admitted with a secondary drug problem became intoxicated 1 to 2 years earlier than did those admitted for alcohol abuse alone (Figure 3).

Source of Referral to Treatment and Age

The criminal justice system was the single most common source of referral to treatment for primary alcohol admissions, both for alcohol alone and for alcohol with a secondary drug problem (Figure 4). For those younger than

Figure 2. Age at Admission, Alcohol Alone and Alcohol with a Secondary Drug Problem: 1999

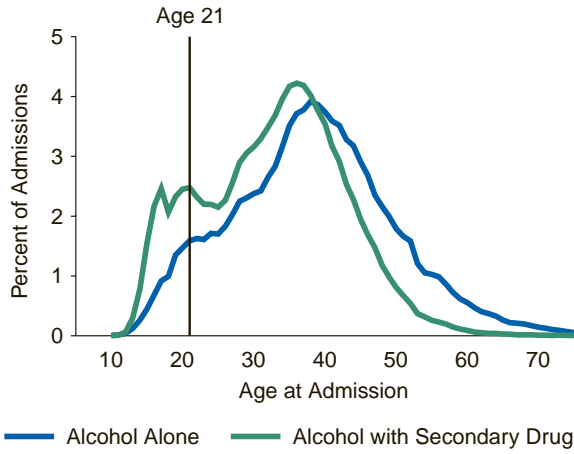
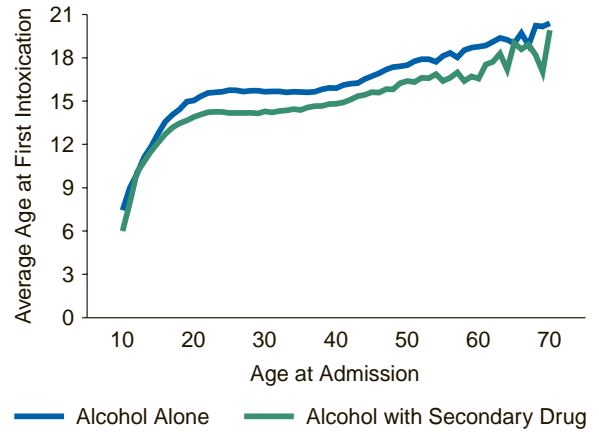


Figure 3. Age at First Intoxication, Alcohol Alone and Alcohol with a Secondary Drug Problem: 1999



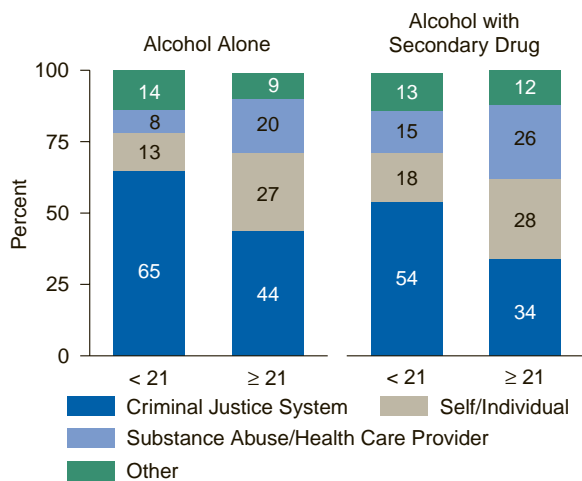
age 21, the majority of primary alcohol admissions were the result of a judicial process (65 percent of alcohol-only admissions and 54 percent of admissions for alcohol with a secondary drug problem).

Overall, those admitted for abuse of alcohol alone were more likely to enter treatment as the result of a judicial process (45 percent of alcohol-only admissions vs. 37 percent of admissions for alcohol with a secondary drug problem) (data not shown).

End Note

¹Percentages for secondary drugs sum to more than 100 because a person entering treatment could report up to three substance abuse problems.

Figure 4. Referral Source and Age, Alcohol Alone and Alcohol with a Secondary Drug Problem: 1999



The Drug and Alcohol Services Information System (DASIS) is an integrated data system maintained by the Office of Applied Studies, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). One component of DASIS is the Treatment Episode Data Set (TEDS), a national-level dataset comprising State administrative data from treatment facilities receiving public funds. The TEDS system includes records for some 1.6 million substance abuse treatment admissions annually. TEDS records represent admissions rather than individuals, as a person may be admitted to treatment more than once.

The DASIS Report is prepared by the Office of Applied Studies, SAMHSA; Synectics for Management Decisions, Inc., Arlington, Virginia; and RTI, Research Triangle Park, North Carolina.

Information and data for this issue are based on data reported to TEDS through April 16, 2001.

Access the latest TEDS reports at:
www.DrugAbuseStatistics.SAMHSA.gov

Access the latest TEDS public use files at:
www.icpsr.umich.edu/SAMHDA/teds.html