

The NHSDA Report

May 17, 2002

Substance Use among Pregnant Women During 1999 and 2000

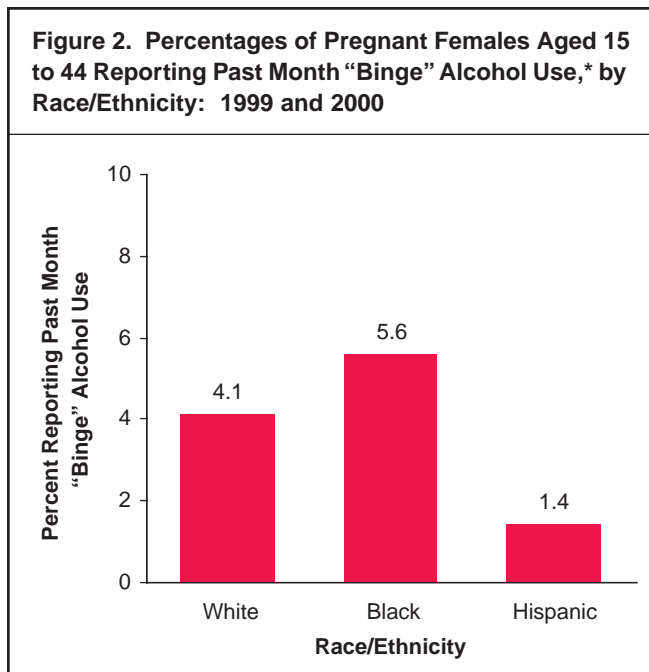
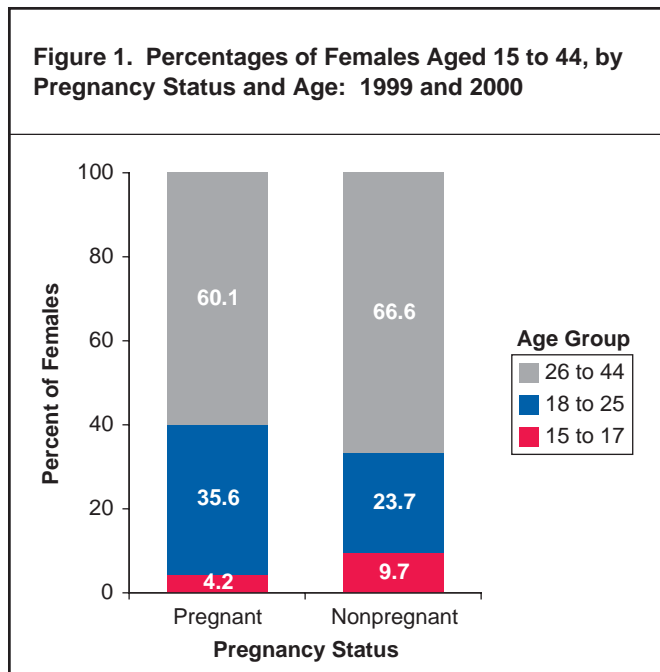
In Brief

- Pregnant Hispanic females were less likely than pregnant white or black females to report “binge” drinking
- Among adults, pregnant females were less likely to report past month illicit drug use than nonpregnant females, but rates of use were similar among pregnant and nonpregnant females aged 15 to 17
- Past month alcohol use was more likely during the first trimester of pregnancy than during the second or third trimesters

Use of alcohol or illicit drugs during pregnancy has been linked to adverse birth outcomes, such as low birthweight, preterm delivery, and fetal alcohol syndrome.¹ The National Household Survey on Drug Abuse (NHSDA) asks female respondents aged 15 to 44 about their pregnancy status and duration at the time of the interview. Respondents were also queried about their use of alcohol or any illicit drug during the past month, as well as the frequency and quantity of their alcohol use.² All findings presented in this short report are annual averages based on combined data from the 1999 and 2000 NHSDAs.

Characteristics of Pregnant Females

Among pregnant females, 64 percent were white, 15 percent were black, 14 percent were Hispanic, 3 percent were Asian, and less than 1 percent were American Indian/Alaska Native. Approximately 60 percent of pregnant females were aged 26 to 44, another 36 percent were 18 to 25 years old, and 4 percent were aged 15 to 17 (Figure 1).



Racial/Ethnic Differences in Substance Use among Pregnant Females³

An estimated 12 percent of pregnant females aged 15 to 44 used alcohol during the month prior to the interview, and 3 percent used an illicit drug during this time period.⁴ Pregnant white, black, and Hispanic females were less likely to report any past month alcohol use than nonpregnant females from these racial/ethnic groups (10 to 13 percent vs. 36 to 55 percent). Pregnant Hispanic females were less likely to report "binge" alcohol use than pregnant black or white females (Figure 2).

Pregnant white and Hispanic females were less likely to report illicit drug use during the past month than nonpregnant females from these racial/ethnic groups (2 to 3 percent vs. 6 to 8 percent). However, rates were similar among pregnant and nonpregnant black females (6 to 7 percent). Pregnant Hispanic females were less likely to report past month illicit drug use (2 percent) than pregnant black females (7 percent), although rates of use among pregnant white females were not significantly different from those among pregnant Hispanic or black females.

Pregnant Youths at Risk for Substance Use

Within all age groups, pregnant females were less likely than nonpregnant females to report past month alcohol use or "binge" alcohol use (Table 1). Among youths aged 15 to 17, the rate of heavy alcohol use was 2 percent among pregnant females and over 3 percent among nonpregnant females, although this difference was not statistically significant.

Although pregnant females aged 18 to 44 were less than half as likely to report past month illicit drug use as nonpregnant women from this age group, rates of use were similar among pregnant and nonpregnant females aged 15 to 17 (Figure 3). Furthermore, pregnant youths were more likely to report illicit drug use than pregnant adults.

Substance Use During Each Trimester

Past research has demonstrated that the harmful effects of alcohol or illicit drug use by a pregnant female on a developing fetus vary depending on the trimester in which these substances are used.⁵ For example, birth defects

related to prenatal alcohol exposure can occur in the first 3 to 8 weeks of pregnancy, before a woman may even know she is pregnant.⁶ Results from the 1999 and 2000 NHSDAs indicated that pregnant females in their first trimester were more likely to report alcohol use than females whose pregnancies were more advanced (Figure 4). Rates of past month illicit drug use were over 4 percent among females in their first trimester, 3 percent among those in their second trimester, and 2 percent among those in their third trimester, although these differences were not statistically significant.

End Notes

- Center for Substance Abuse Prevention. (1994). *Prevention primer: An encyclopedia of alcohol, tobacco, and other drug prevention terms* (DHHS Publication No. SMA 94-2060; also available at <http://www.health.org/govpubs/phd627/toc.htm>). Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.
- "Any illicit drug" refers to marijuana/hashish, cocaine (including crack), inhalants, hallucinogens, heroin, or prescription-type drugs used nonmedically. Binge alcohol use is defined as drinking five or more drinks on the same occasion on at least 1 day in the past 30 days. By "occasion" is meant at the same time or within a couple of hours of each other. Heavy alcohol use is defined as drinking five or more drinks on the same occasion on each of 5 or more

Figure 3. Percentages of Females Aged 15 to 44 Reporting Past Month Use of Any Illicit Drug, by Pregnancy Status and Age: 1999 and 2000**

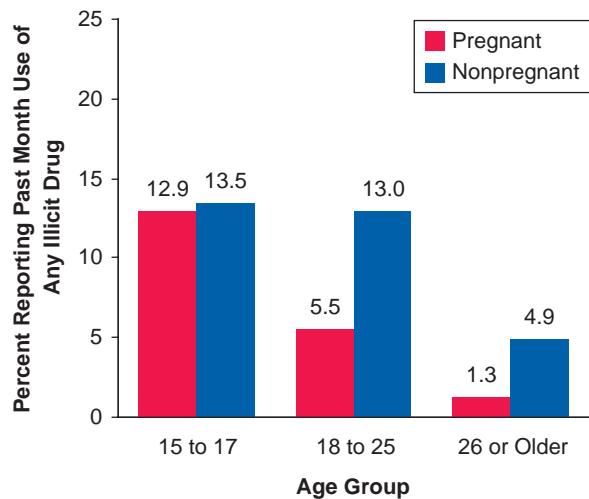
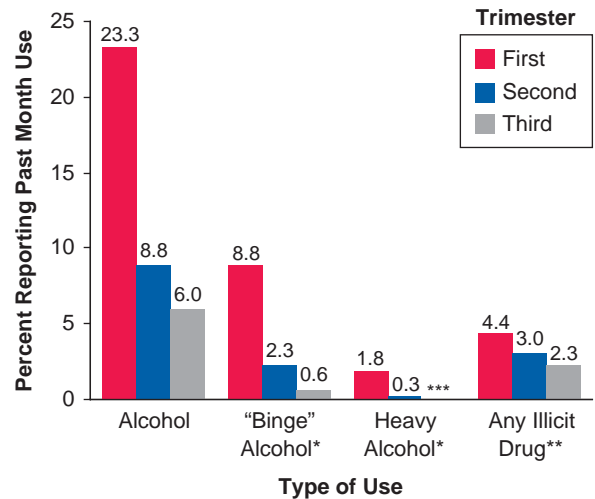


Figure 4. Percentages of Pregnant Females Aged 15 to 44 Reporting Past Month Alcohol or Illicit Drug Use, by Trimester: 1999 and 2000



days in the past 30 days; all heavy alcohol users are also "binge" alcohol users.

- Note that these are conservative estimates of alcohol and illicit drug use during pregnancy because they reflect use only in the past month, not during the entire pregnancy.
- Except for women who have been pregnant for less than 1 month, these measures of past month use indicate use during pregnancy.
- Cornelius, M.D., Goldshmidt, L., Taylor, P.M., & Day, N.L. (1999). Prenatal alcohol use among teenagers: Effects on neonatal outcomes. *Alcoholism, Clinical and Experimental Research*, 23, 1238-1244.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities. (2002, April). *Fetal alcohol syndrome: Alcohol consumption among women*. Retrieved April 29, 2002, from <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/fas/>

Figure and Table Notes

Source (Table and all Figures): SAMHSA 1999 and 2000 NHSDAs.

- * "Binge" alcohol use is defined as drinking five or more drinks on the same occasion on at least 1 day in the past 30 days. By "occasion" is meant at the same time or within a couple hours of each other. Heavy alcohol use is defined as drinking five or more drinks on the same occasion on each of 5 or more days in the past 30 days; all heavy alcohol users are also "binge" alcohol users.
- ** "Any illicit drug" refers to marijuana/hashish, cocaine (including crack), inhalants, hallucinogens, heroin, or prescription-type drugs used nonmedically.
- *** Small sample sizes prevented analyses of heavy alcohol use among pregnant females in their third trimester.

Table 1. Percentages of Females Aged 15 to 44 Reporting Past Month Use of Alcohol, by Pregnancy Status and Age: 1999 and 2000

Past Month Use	15 to 17		18 to 25		26 to 44	
	Pregnant	Non-pregnant	Pregnant	Non-pregnant	Pregnant	Non-pregnant
Alcohol	8.6	26.1	10.1	53.6	14.0	50.2
Binge Alcohol Use*	7.0	15.4	4.8	29.6	3.1	17.1
Heavy Alcohol Use*	2.0	3.3	0.9	7.5	0.5	3.0

The National Household Survey on Drug Abuse (NHSDA) is an annual survey sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The 1999 and 2000 data are based on information obtained from 138,470 persons aged 12 or older (about 70,000 each year), including 223 pregnant females aged 15 to 17, 1,495 pregnant women aged 18 to 25, and 669 pregnant women aged 26 to 44. 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 NHSDA Report is prepared by the Office of Applied Studies (OAS), SAMHSA, and by RTI in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina.

Information and data for this issue are based on the following publication and statistics:

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2000). *Summary of findings*

from the 1999 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse (NHSDA Series: H-12, DHHS Publication No. SMA 00-3466). Rockville, MD: Author.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2001). *Summary of findings from the 2000 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse* (NHSDA Series: H-13, DHHS Publication No. SMA 01-3549). Rockville, MD: Author.

Also available on-line: www.DrugAbuseStatistics.samhsa.gov.

Additional Tables 6.24B, 6.25B, 6.28B, 6.29B, and 6.30B from http://www.samhsa.gov/oas/nhsda/2kdetailedtabs/Vol_1_Part_4/V1P4a.htm and

Table 7.11A from http://www.samhsa.gov/oas/nhsda/2kdetailedtabs/Vol_1_Part_4/V1P4a.htm.

Additional tables available upon request.

