

# The NHSDA Report

April 19, 2002

## Substance Use Among Persons in Families Receiving Government Assistance

### In Brief

- An estimated 27 million persons aged 12 to 64 lived in families that received government assistance in the year prior to the interview
- Prevalence of past month heavy alcohol use was lower in assisted families than in unassisted families among persons aged 18 to 25, but higher among persons aged 35 to 49
- Past month illicit drug use was higher in assisted families than in unassisted families among persons aged 12 to 64

While some individuals may be able to make the transition from welfare to work by participating in employment training programs and receiving government assistance in the form of transportation and child care, others among the assisted population have problems with substance use and may require additional assistance to overcome their problem. The National Household Survey on Drug Abuse (NHSDA) provides information on the extent and nature of this problem.

Annually, the NHSDA asks respondents if family members receive Food Stamps, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), cash assistance (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families), and non-cash assistance (such as housing, child care, job training or placement, transportation). In addition, the survey asks if respondents receive Medicaid.<sup>1</sup> In this report, an *assisted family* is a family in which at least one member benefited from an assistance program in the calendar year prior to the interview. The estimates of the prevalence of illicit drug use and heavy alcohol use in the past 30 days for individuals

aged 12 to 64 who live in assisted families have been developed by combining data from the 1999 and 2000 NHSDA.<sup>2</sup> Estimates of prevalence are annual averages.

### Characteristics of Persons in Families Receiving Assistance

On average, approximately 14 percent of persons aged 12 to 64 (or 27 million persons) lived in assisted families (Table 1). Fifty-one percent of these persons received Medicaid; 40 percent were in families receiving Supplemental Security Income; 45 percent were in families receiving Food Stamps; 26 percent were in families receiving cash assistance; and 23 percent were in families receiving non-cash assistance. Sixty-one percent of persons aged 12 to 64 in assisted families were female, compared with 50 percent in families that receive no government assistance. Thirty-six percent of persons aged 12 to 64 in assisted families were aged 12 to 25; 44 percent were aged 26 to 49; and, 20 percent were aged 50 to 64. By comparison, 26 percent of persons aged 12 to 64 in families receiving no government assistance were aged 12 to 25; 52 percent were aged 26 to 49; and, 22 percent aged 50 to 64. Age characteristics of persons in assisted families also differed across assistance programs – the median age of persons aged 12 to 64 in assisted families receiving Medicaid, cash assistance, non-cash assistance or Food Stamps was about 10 years younger than the median age of persons aged 12 to 64 in families receiving Supplemental Security Income. Because of these gender and age differences, rates of substance use are presented by these demographic characteristics.

**Table 1: Characteristics and Percentages Reporting Past Month Substance Use, by Family Assistance Status — Annual Averages for Persons Aged 12 to 64: 1999 and 2000**

Person's Family Status	Estimated Population	Median Age	Percent Female	Percent of Persons Reporting Past Month Use	
				Heavy Alcohol Use	Illicit Drug Use
All persons	190,332,755	37	51.3	6.4	7.2
Persons in assisted family	27,395,310	33	60.5	5.9	9.6 [a]
Persons in unassisted family	162,937,445	37	49.7	6.4	6.8 [a]
Person or family receiving:					
Medicaid	13,925,491	30	63.2	5.0 [b]	10.1 [c]
Supplemental Security Income	10,931,240	40	57.3	5.9	8.0
Cash assistance	7,118,349	29	65.1	5.6	11.5 [d]
Non-cash assistance	6,216,797	29	64.9	6.7	10.6 [e]
Food Stamps	12,213,555	31	63.6	5.7	10.6 [f]

### Patterns of Past Month Substance Use

#### *Past month heavy alcohol use.*

Among all persons aged 12 to 64, 6.4 percent report past month heavy alcohol use. The prevalence of past month heavy alcohol use among persons in assisted families is 5.9 percent, not significantly different from the rate of 6.4 percent among persons living in families benefiting from no government assistance (Table 1). The prevalence of 9.5 percent among males in assisted families is not significantly different from the prevalence of 9.9 percent among males in unassisted families (Figure 1). The prevalence is also similar among females in assisted and unassisted families, but is lower than the rate among males. For both males and females aged 18 to 25, the prevalence among persons in assisted families is lower than the prevalence for persons in families receiving no government assistance. However, for both males and females aged 35 to 49, the prevalence of heavy alcohol use among persons in

assisted families is higher than the rate for persons in families receiving no government assistance.

#### *Past month illicit drug use.*

Among all persons aged 12 to 64, 7.2 percent report past month illicit drug use. The prevalence among persons in assisted families (9.6 percent) is higher than among persons in families receiving no government assistance (6.8 percent). For both males and females, and across all age groups, the prevalence of past month illicit drug use in assisted families is about the same or greater than the prevalence among families receiving no government assistance (Figure 2).

**Substance use by type of assistance program.** Prevalence of past month heavy alcohol use among persons aged 12 to 64 receiving Medicaid is lower than among persons not receiving Medicaid (Table 1). The prevalence of past month illicit drug use among persons in families receiving Medicaid, cash assistance, non-cash assistance, or Food Stamps is higher than among persons in families who do not benefit from any of these types of assistance.

**End Notes**

1. A family could consist of only one member (i.e. just the respondent).
2. Any *illicit drug use* refers to marijuana, cocaine, heroin, hallucinogens, and inhalants and non-medical use of prescription-type pain relievers, tranquilizers, stimulants, and sedatives. *Heavy alcohol use* is defined as five or more drinks on the same occasion, on at least 5 different days, in the past 30 days.

**Table and Figure Notes**

Table 1 — *Unassisted families* are families who do not benefit from any of the government assistance programs considered in this report. An assisted family may receive more than one type of government assistance.

[a] The prevalence of illicit drug use among persons aged 12 to 64 in assisted families is significantly higher than among persons in unassisted families (p-value of less than or equal to 0.05); but no significant difference was found between the two groups in the prevalence of heavy alcohol use.

[b] Heavy alcohol use among persons receiving Medicaid is significantly lower than among persons not receiving Medicaid (6.5 percent).

[c] Illicit drug use is significantly higher among persons receiving Medicaid, than among persons not receiving Medicaid (7.0).

[d] Illicit drug use is significantly higher among persons in families receiving cash assistance than among persons in families not receiving cash assistance (7.1 percent).

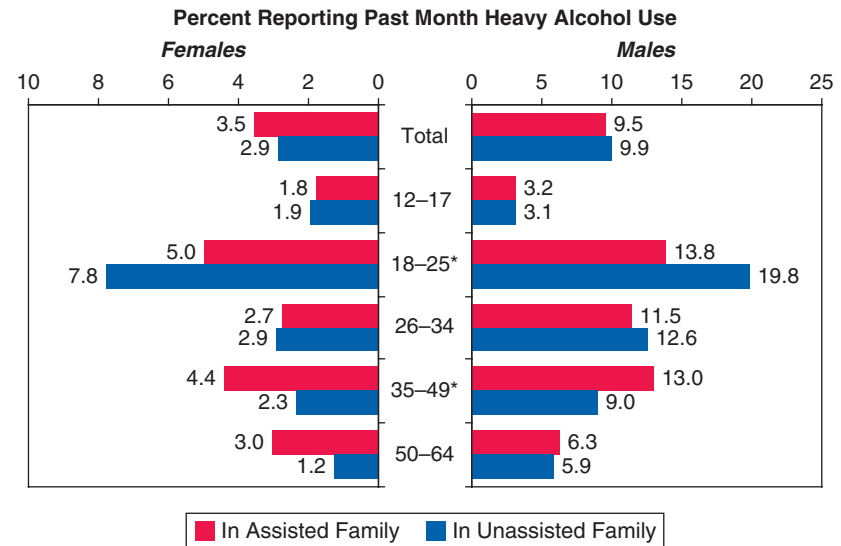
[e] Illicit drug use is significantly higher among persons in families receiving non-cash assistance than among persons in families not receiving non-cash assistance (7.2 percent).

[f] Illicit drug use is significantly higher among persons in families receiving Food Stamps than among persons in families not receiving Food Stamps (7.0 percent).

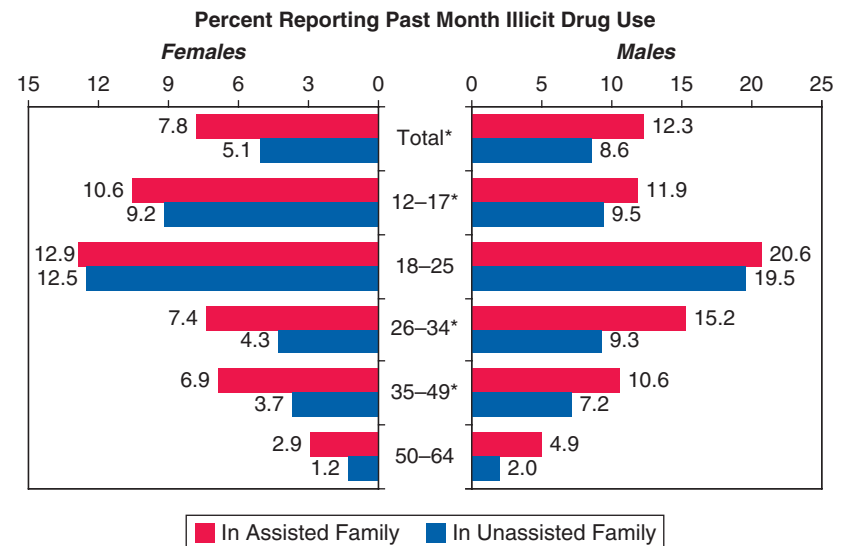
\* Denotes a p-value of less than or equal to 0.05 for a statistical test of differences between percent reporting by persons from assisted families and persons in unassisted families.

Source (table and all figures): SAMHSA 1999 and 2000 NHSDAs.

**Figure 1. Persons Aged 12 to 64: Prevalence of Past Month Heavy Alcohol Use by Age and Family Assistance Status: 1999–2000**



**Figure 2. Persons Aged 12 to 64: Prevalence of Past Month Illicit Drug Use by Age and Family Assistance Status: 1999–2000**



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 were based on information from 133,125 persons aged 12 to 64, of whom 23,807 persons lived in assisted families. Among the persons aged 12 to 64 living in assisted families (who could be benefiting from more than one government assistance program), 13,491 benefited from Medicaid, 7,242 persons lived in families benefiting from Supplemental Security Income, 6,841 persons lived in families benefiting from cash assistance, 6,127 persons lived in families benefiting from non-cash assistance, and 11,238 persons lived in families benefiting from Food Stamps.

The *NHSDA Report* is prepared by the Office of Applied Studies (OAS), SAMHSA, and by RTI in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina.

Also available on-line: [www.DrugAbuseStatistics.samhsa.gov](http://www.DrugAbuseStatistics.samhsa.gov).

Additional tables available upon request.



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