

Data Spotlight

National Survey on Drug Use and Health

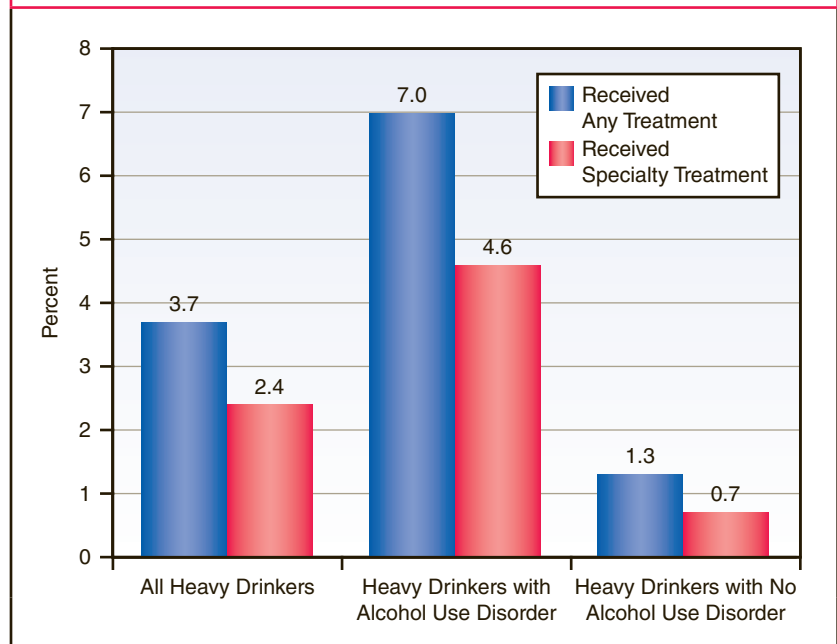
June 5, 2012

Heavy Drinkers Unlikely to Receive Treatment

Heavy drinkers are at elevated risk for experiencing physical and mental health problems.¹ Because of this, heavy drinkers may benefit from intervention, even if they do not meet the criteria for having an alcohol use disorder. According to data from the 2002 to 2010 National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUHs), an annual average of 16 million adults have engaged in heavy drinking (consuming five or more drinks on the same occasion on 5 or more days in the past month). More than half of heavy drinkers (57.4 percent) did not meet the criteria for a past year alcohol use disorder,² and less than 4 percent of all heavy drinkers received treatment for their alcohol use. Heavy drinkers who had a past year alcohol use disorder were more likely to have received treatment than heavy drinkers without a past year alcohol use disorder (Figure). Even among those with an alcohol use disorder, only 7 percent received any treatment, and only 4.6 percent received specialty treatment.³

Alcohol screening by health care providers offers an opportunity to identify problem drinking and prompt an intervention. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA's) Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) can be used to assess the severity of alcohol use, provide early intervention to those who would benefit from simply reducing their drinking, and refer those with more serious problems to specialty treatment. For more information on SBIRT, please visit <http://www.samhsa.gov/prevention/sbirt/>.

Receipt of Alcohol Treatment in the Past Year among Heavy Drinkers Aged 18 or Older, by Alcohol Use Disorder: 2002 to 2010



¹ Okoro, C. A., Brewer, R. D., Naimi, T. S., Moriarty, D. G., Giles, W. H., & Mokdad, A. H. (2004). Binge drinking and health-related quality of life: Do popular perceptions match reality? *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 26(3), 230-233.

² NSDUH defines alcohol use disorders (dependence or abuse) using criteria specified in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV), which includes such symptoms 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. American Psychiatric Association. (1994). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (DSM-IV) (4th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.

³ Any treatment includes substance use treatment received in the past year at any location, such as a hospital (inpatient or outpatient), rehabilitation facility (inpatient or outpatient), mental health center, emergency room, private doctor's office, self-help group, prison, or jail. Specialty treatment only includes treatment at a hospital (inpatient), a rehabilitation facility (inpatient or outpatient), or a mental health center.

Source: 2002 to 2010 National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUHs). NSDUH is an annual survey sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The survey collects data by administering questionnaires to a representative sample of the population through face-to-face interviews at their places of residence.

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