

The NSDUH Report

August 19, 2010

Violent Behaviors and Family Income among Adolescents

In Brief

- Combined 2004 to 2008 national data indicate that 22.6 percent of adolescents aged 12 to 17 participated in a serious fight at school or work in the past year, 16.1 percent participated in a group-against-group fight, and 7.6 percent attacked others with the intent to seriously hurt them; 30.9 percent, or an estimated 7.8 million youths, engaged in at least one of these violent behaviors
- An estimated 40.5 percent of adolescents in families with annual incomes of less than \$20,000 and 24.6 percent of those in families with incomes of \$75,000 or more participated in any of these violent behaviors
- The pattern of lower rates of violent behaviors with higher family income generally held among students with a “C” or better grade average, but among students with a “D” average or lower, those with higher family incomes were no less likely to participate in violent behaviors than those with lower incomes

The devastating effects of youth violence are felt in every community across the United States. Victims, perpetrators, families, and friends must deal with the physical, emotional, and economic impact of youth violence. Arrest and victimization data suggest that youth violence has been generally declining since the mid-1990s.^{1,2} However, youth self-report data suggest that participation in some violent behaviors—such as getting into fights—has changed little and remains a significant public health problem.³

Ongoing efforts to monitor youth violence, and to further examine characteristics that put youths at risk for violent behavior, can aid in developing and targeting effective prevention efforts. This issue of *The NSDUH Report* contributes to these efforts by examining past year violent behavior among

Table 1. Past Year Violent Behaviors among Adolescents, by Family Income: 2004 to 2008

Family Income	Got into a Serious Fight at School or Work (%)	Took Part in a Group-against-Group Fight (%)	Attacked Someone with the Intent to Hurt Them (%)	At Least One of Three Violent Behaviors (%)
Total	22.6	16.1	7.6	30.9
Family Income Less Than \$20,000	30.6	21.5	11.2	40.5
Family Income \$20,000 to \$49,999	24.9	17.9	8.8	33.8
Family Income \$50,000 to \$74,999	20.0	14.2	6.7	27.8
Family Income \$75,000 or More	17.4	12.6	5.1	24.6

Source: 2004 to 2008 SAMHSA National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUHs).

adolescents by several sociodemographic and school-related characteristics, such as family income, age, gender, and grades in school. The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) asks youths aged 12 to 17 (i.e., adolescents) to report on their involvement in three types of violent behaviors during the 12 months before the interview: getting into a serious fight at school or work, participating in a group-against-group fight, and attacking others with the intent to seriously hurt them. All findings are annual averages from combined 2004 to 2008 NSDUH data.

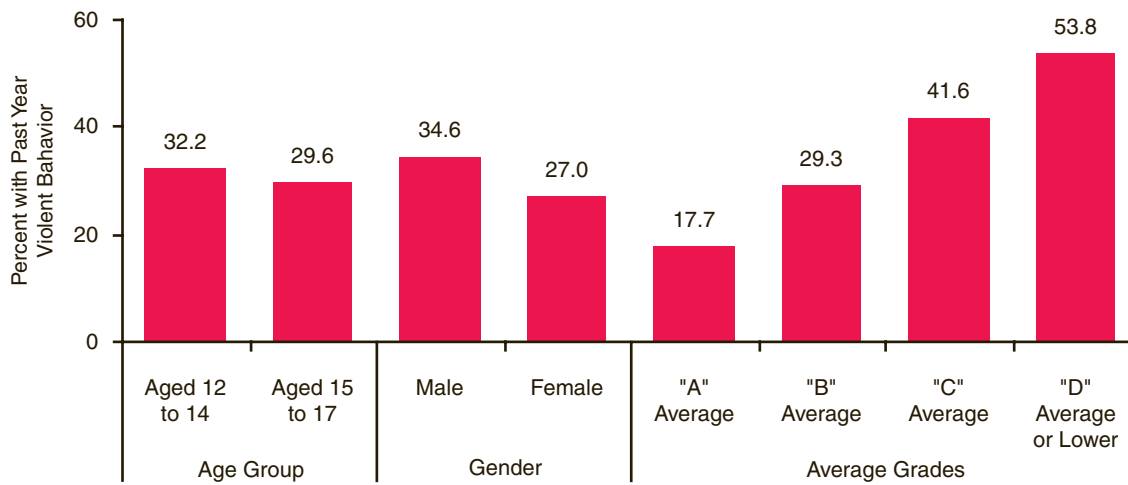
Participation in Violent Behaviors, by Family Income

About one fifth of adolescents aged 12 to 17 (22.6 percent) participated in a serious

fight at school or work in the past year, 16.1 percent participated in a group-against-group fight, and 7.6 percent attacked others with the intent to seriously hurt them (Table 1). Nearly one third (30.9 percent or an estimated 7.8 million youths) engaged in at least one of these three types of violent behaviors.

The prevalence of participation in violent behaviors was higher among adolescents from families with low income than those with high income.⁴ For example, two fifths of adolescents (40.5 percent) who lived in families with annual incomes of less than \$20,000 engaged in at least one of these three types of violent behaviors compared with 33.8 percent of those in families with annual incomes of \$20,000 to \$49,999, 27.8 percent of those in families with annual

Figure 1. Past Year Violent Behavior* among Adolescents, by Age Group, Gender, and Average Grades in School: 2004 to 2008



* Violent behavior is defined as getting into a serious fight at school or work, participating in a group-against-group fight, or attacking others with the intent to seriously hurt them.

Source: 2004 to 2008 SAMHSA National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUHs).

incomes of \$50,000 to \$74,999, and 24.6 percent of those in families with incomes of \$75,000 or more.

Violent Behaviors, by Demographic and School Characteristics

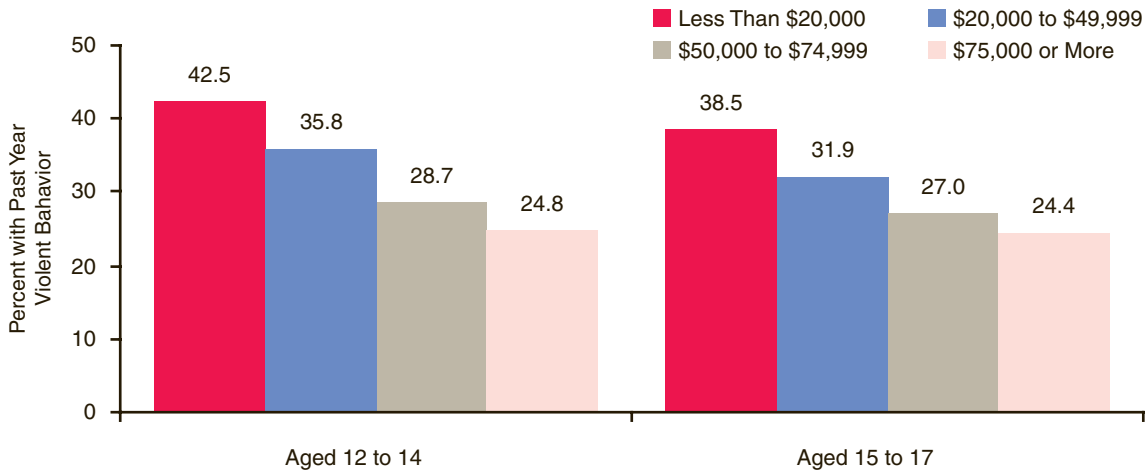
Among adolescents, males were more likely than females to have engaged in at least one of the three violent behaviors in the past year (34.6 vs. 27.0 percent), and those aged 12 to 14 were more likely to have done so than those aged 15 to 17 (32.2 vs. 29.6 percent) (Figure 1). Among adolescents aged 12 to 17 who attended school in the past year, students with an average of “D” or lower were three times more likely to engage in violent behaviors than those with an “A” average. An estimated 17.7 percent of students who reported an “A” average, 29.3

percent of those with a “B” average, 41.6 percent of those with a “C” average, and 53.8 percent of those with a “D” average or lower engaged in violent behaviors in the past year.⁵

Violent Behaviors, Family Income, and Demographic and School Characteristics

For both age groups and both genders, the prevalence of violent behaviors was higher among adolescents with lower family income than among those with higher family income (Figures 2 and 3). This pattern generally held among students who reported having an “A,” “B,” or “C” average (Figure 4). Among students with an average of “D” or lower, however, those with higher family incomes were as likely to participate in violent behaviors as those with lower incomes.

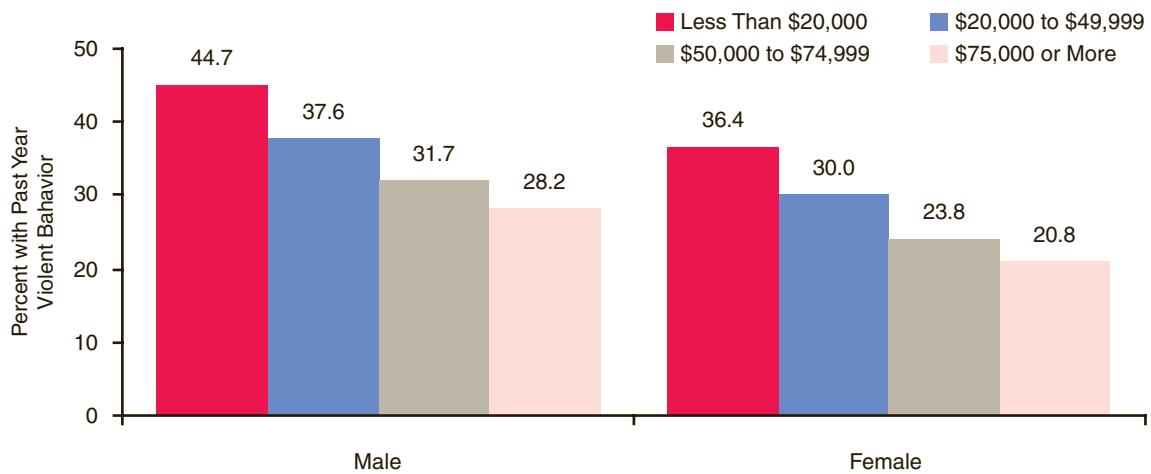
Figure 2. Past Year Violent Behavior* among Adolescents, by Family Income and Age Group: 2004 to 2008



* Violent behavior is defined as getting into a serious fight at school or work, participating in a group-against-group fight, or attacking others with the intent to seriously hurt them.

Source: 2004 to 2008 SAMHSA National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUHs).

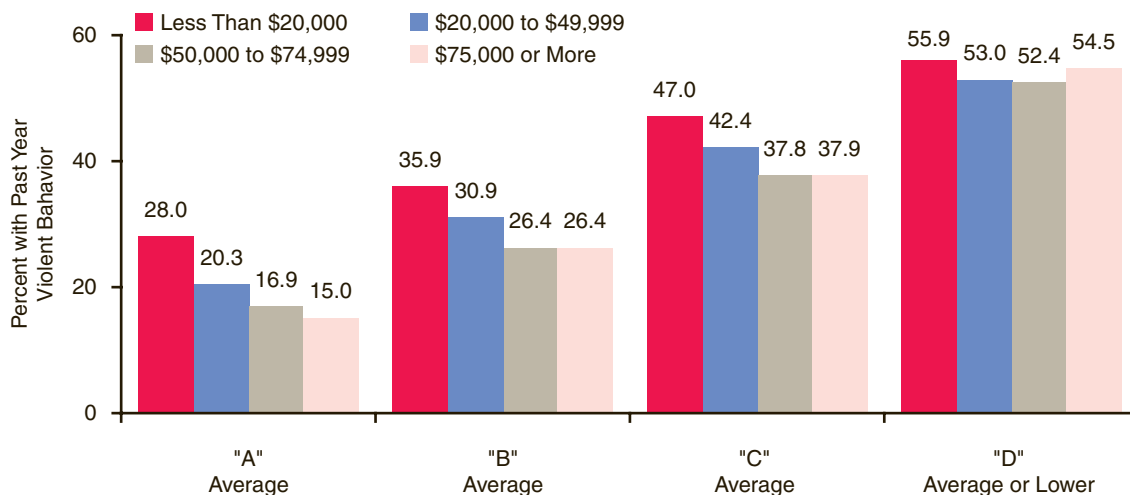
Figure 3. Past Year Violent Behavior* among Adolescents, by Family Income and Gender: 2004 to 2008



* Violent behavior is defined as getting into a serious fight at school or work, participating in a group-against-group fight, or attacking others with the intent to seriously hurt them.

Source: 2004 to 2008 SAMHSA National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUHs).

Figure 4. Past Year Violent Behavior* among Adolescents, by Family Income and Academic Grades: 2004 to 2008



* Violent behavior is defined as getting into a serious fight at school or work, participating in a group-against-group fight, or attacking others with the intent to seriously hurt them.

Source: 2004 to 2008 SAMHSA National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUHs).

Discussion

With nearly one in three youths engaging in at least one of the violent behaviors discussed in this report, it is clear that youth violence remains an ongoing public health problem. Violent behaviors occur among youths in all economic circumstances, but rates are highest among youths in families with lower incomes—regardless of age and gender. Having lower grades in school was strongly associated with higher rates of violence, and for those with a “D” average or lower, income made no difference in the percentage who engaged in violent behaviors. These findings suggest the importance of targeting effective violence prevention interventions toward youths from low-income households and those with poor grades.

End Notes

- 1 Puzzauchera, C. (2009, December). *Juvenile arrests 2008* (Juvenile Justice Bulletin, NCJ 228479). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. [Available as a PDF from <http://www.ncjrs.gov/App/Publications/abstract.aspx?ID=250498>]
- 2 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. (2010, March 4). *Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS™)*. Retrieved June 1, 2010, from <http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/index.html>
- 3 Eaton, D. K., Kann, L., Kinchen, S., Shanklin, S., Ross, J., Hawkins, J., Harris, W. A., Lowry, R., McManus, T., Chyen, D., Lim, C., Brener, N. D., & Wechsler, H. (2008). Youth risk behavioral surveillance—United States, 2007. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report CDC Surveillance Summaries*, 57(4), 1-131. [Available at <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss5704a1.htm>]
- 4 Family income includes annual income, before deductions, from Social Security, supplemental security income (SSI), or public assistance payments, as well as from savings, child support payments, wages, salaries, and other income sources.
- 5 Respondents with unknown grade data were excluded from the analysis.

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Findings from the SAMHSA 2004 to 2008 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). The 2004 to 2008 data used in this report are based on information obtained from 112,685 persons aged 12 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 the most recent NSDUH is available in the following publication:

Office of Applied Studies. (2009). *Results from the 2008 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National findings* (HHS Publication No. SMA 09-4434, NSDUH Series H-36). Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Also available online: <http://oas.samhsa.gov>.



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