

# The NSDUH Report

April 1, 2005

## Alcohol Use and Delinquent Behaviors among Youths

Alcohol use by youths has been linked to delinquent behaviors, such as stealing, illicit drug use, and problems in school.<sup>1,2</sup> Research also indicates that early drinkers are more likely than nondrinkers to engage in delinquent behaviors.<sup>2</sup> The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) asks persons aged 12 or older to report their alcohol use in

their lifetime, the past year, and the past 30 days, as well as binge drinking in the past 30 days. NSDUH defines binge alcohol use as drinking five or more drinks on the same occasion (i.e., at the same time or within a couple of hours of each other) on at least 1 day in the past 30 days. 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.

NSDUH also asks youths aged 12 to 17 how often they engaged in the following delinquent behaviors during the past year: (a) getting into a serious fight at school or work, (b) taking part in a fight where a group of friends fought against another group, (c) attacking someone with the intent to seriously hurt them, (d) stealing or trying to steal anything worth more than \$50, (e) selling illegal drugs, and (f) carrying a handgun.<sup>3</sup> This report examines alcohol use and delinquent behaviors among youths aged 12 to 17.

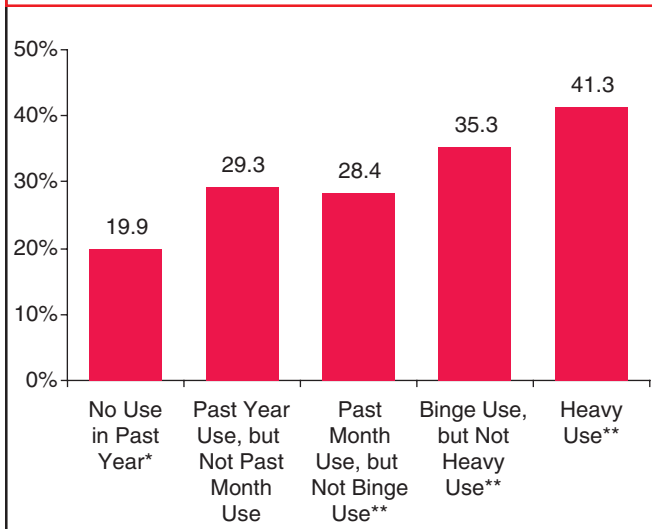
### In Brief

- In 2003, almost 8.6 million (34.3 percent) youths aged 12 to 17 had used alcohol in the past year
- An estimated 9 million (36.1 percent) youths aged 12 to 17 had engaged in at least one delinquent behavior in the past year
- Youths aged 12 to 17 who reported heavy alcohol use in the past month were the most likely to have participated in any delinquent behavior

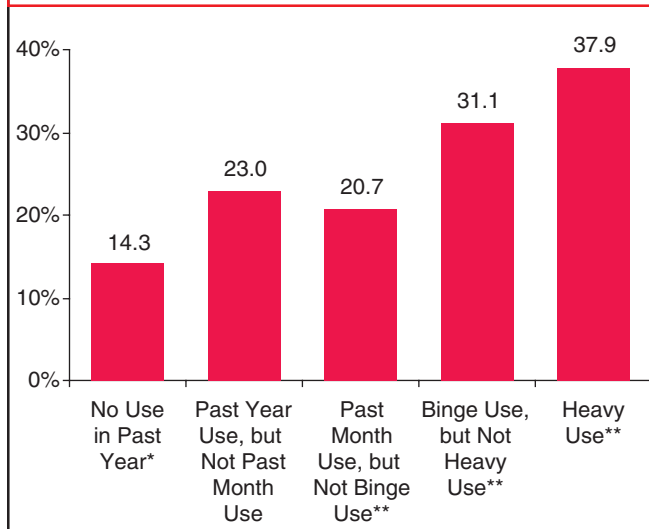
### Level of Alcohol Use among Youths

In 2003, almost 16.4 million (65.7 percent) youths aged 12 to 17 reported no use of alcohol during the past year. About 4.1 million (16.6 percent) youths reported alcohol use during the

**Figure 1. Percentages of Youths Aged 12 to 17 Who Took Part in Serious Fighting at School or Work in the Past Year, by Level of Alcohol Use: 2003**



**Figure 2. Percentages of Youths Aged 12 to 17 Who Took Part in Group-Against-Group Fight in the Past Year, by Level of Alcohol Use: 2003**



past year, but no alcohol use during the past month. Almost 1.8 million (7.1 percent) youths reported alcohol use during the past month, but not binge alcohol use. Nearly 2 million (8.0 percent) youths reported binge alcohol use, but not heavy alcohol use. More than 650,000 (2.6 percent) youths reported heavy alcohol use.

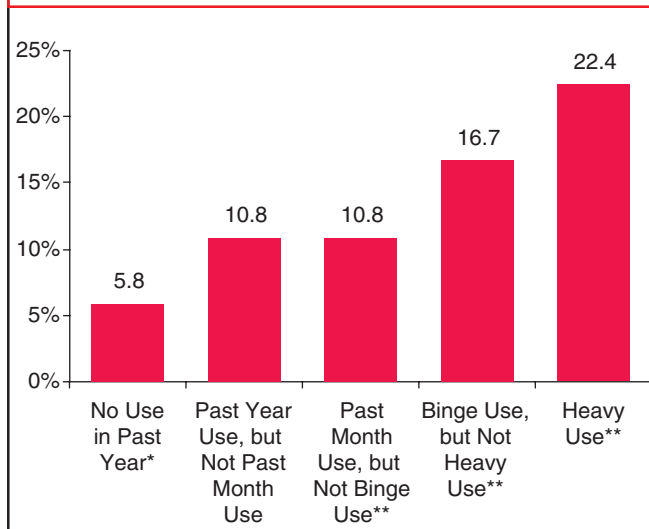
### Prevalence of Delinquent Behaviors among Youths

In 2003, nearly 9 million (36.1 percent) youths aged 12 to 17 had engaged in at least one delinquent behavior during the past year. Almost 6 million (23.8 percent) youths took part in a serious fight at school or work, 4.5 million (18.1 percent) youths took part in a group-against-group fight, 2.1 million (8.3 percent) youths attacked someone with the intent to seriously hurt them, 1.1 million (4.5 percent) youths stole or tried to steal anything worth more than \$50, more than 900,000 (3.6 percent) youths sold illegal drugs, and more than 900,000 (3.6 percent) youths carried a handgun during the past year.

### Delinquent Behaviors and Level of Alcohol Use<sup>4</sup>

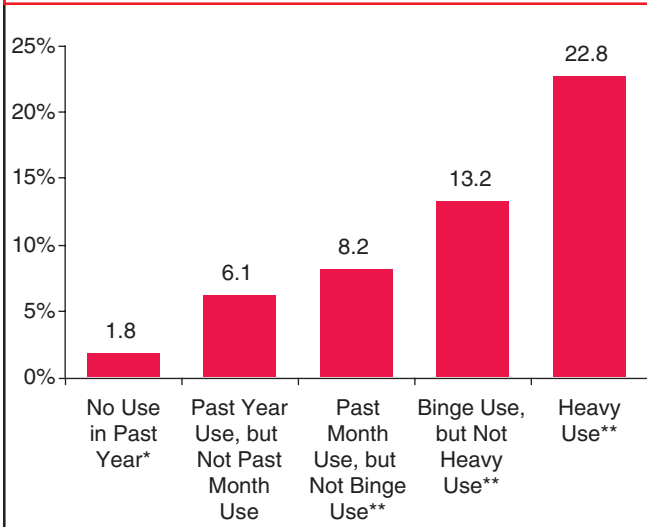
In 2003, the percentage of youths who engaged in any of the six delinquent behaviors during the past year was highest for youths who reported heavy

**Figure 3. Percentages of Youths Aged 12 to 17 Who Attacked Someone with the Intent to Seriously Hurt Them in the Past Year, by Level of Alcohol Use: 2003**

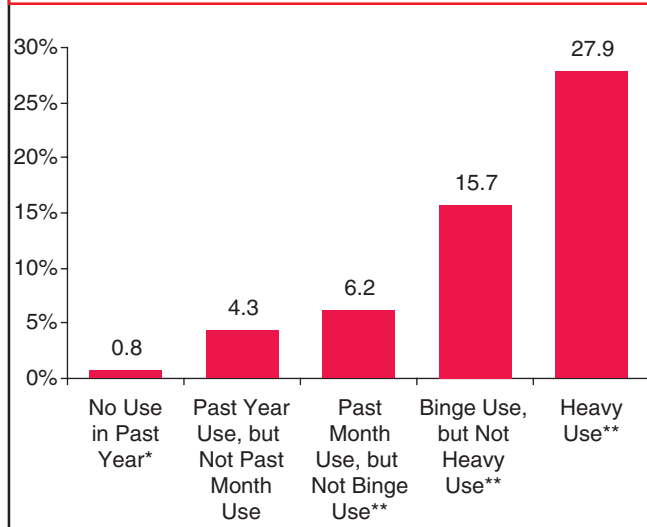


alcohol use (65.9 percent); compared with youths who reported binge alcohol use, but not heavy alcohol use (56.8 percent); past month alcohol use, but not binge alcohol use (43.7 percent); past year alcohol use, but not past month alcohol use (43.7 percent); and no alcohol use in the past year (29.7 percent). In general, for each of the six past-year delinquent behaviors examined, the percentage of youths who engaged in the behavior increased significantly with the level of past year alcohol use (Figures 1 to 6).

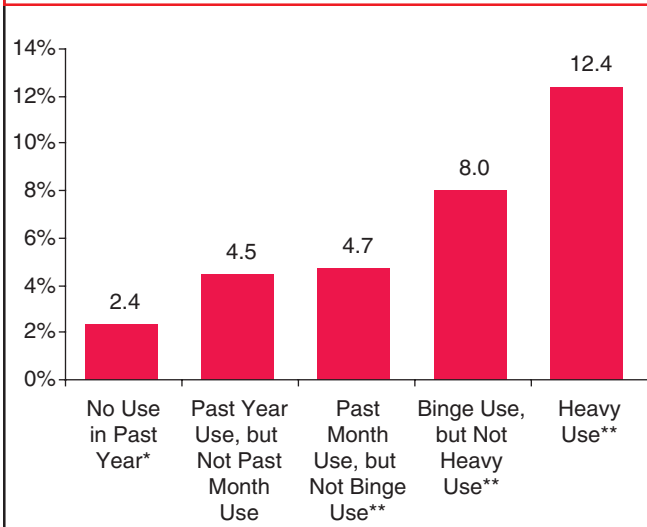
**Figure 4. Percentages of Youths Aged 12 to 17 Who Stole or Tried to Steal Anything Worth More Than \$50 in the Past Year, by Level of Alcohol Use: 2003**



**Figure 5. Percentages of Youths Aged 12 to 17 Who Sold Illegal Drugs in the Past Year, by Level of Alcohol Use: 2003**



**Figure 6. Percentages of Youths Aged 12 to 17 Who Carried a Handgun in the Past Year, by Level of Alcohol Use: 2003**



**Figure Notes**

Source: SAMHSA, 2003 NSDUH.

\* "No Use in Past Year" refers to youths who have never used alcohol in their lifetime and lifetime users who used alcohol more than 12 months ago.

\*\* NSDUH defines binge alcohol use as drinking five or more drinks on the same occasion (i.e., at the same time or within a couple of hours of each other) on at least 1 day in the past 30 days. 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.

**End Notes**

1. Prinz, R. J., & Kerns, S. E. (2003). Early substance use by juvenile offenders. *Child Psychiatry and Human Development*, 33, 263-277.
2. Ellickson, P. L., Tucker, J. S., & Klein, D. J. (2003). Ten-year prospective study of public health problems associated with early drinking. *Pediatrics*, 111, 949-955.
3. Youths were asked how many times in the past year they had participated in each delinquent behavior. The response options are (a) 0 times, (b) 1 or 2 times, (c) 3 to 5 times, (d) 6 to 9 times, and (e) 10 or more times in the past year. For this report, youths were counted as engaging in the behavior if they reported participating one or more times.
4. Other factors, such as use of illicit drugs, are highly correlated with both level of alcohol use and delinquent behaviors, which may suggest a competing explanation for the observed association.

The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) is an annual survey sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Prior to 2002, this survey was called the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse (NHSDA). The 2003 data are based on information obtained from 67,784 persons aged 12 or older, including 22,665 youths 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 and data for this issue are based on the following publication and statistics:

Office of Applied Studies. (2004). *Results from the 2003 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National findings* (DHHS Publication No. SMA 04-3964, NSDUH Series H-25). Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

Also available online: <http://www.oas.samhsa.gov>

Because of improvements and modifications to the 2002 NSDUH, estimates from the 2002 and 2003 surveys should not be compared with estimates from the 2001 or earlier versions of the survey to examine changes over time.

