

The NSDUH Report

December 17, 2009

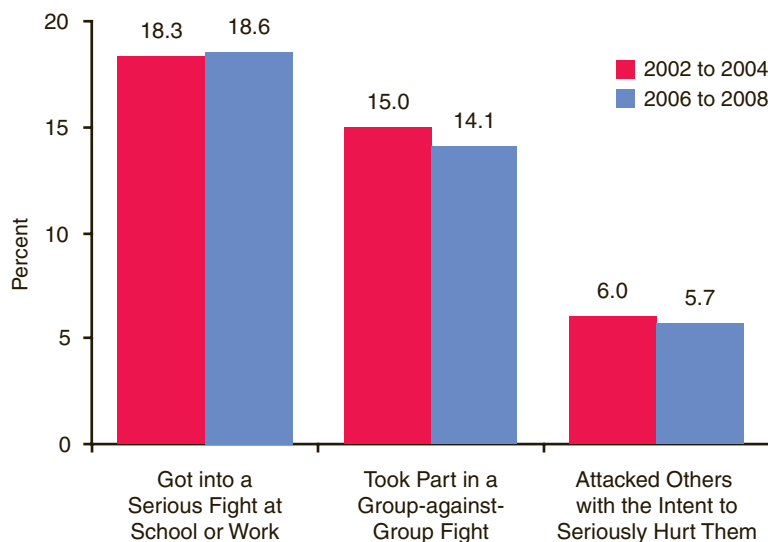
In Brief

- Combined 2006 to 2008 data indicate that 18.6 percent of adolescent females got into a serious fight at school or work in the past year, 14.1 percent participated in a group-against-group fight, and 5.7 percent attacked others with the intent to seriously hurt them; about one quarter (26.7 percent) of adolescent females engaged in at least one of these violent behaviors in the past year
- Adolescent females who engaged in at least one of these violent behaviors were more likely than those who did not to have indicated past month binge alcohol use (15.1 vs. 6.9 percent), marijuana use (11.4 vs. 4.1 percent), and use of illicit drugs other than marijuana (9.2 vs. 3.2 percent)
- The rate of substance use was higher the more types of violent behaviors the girls engaged in (e.g., binge drinking in the past month was reported by 6.9 percent of girls with none of the violent behaviors, 12.6 percent of those with one type of violent behavior, 17.3 percent of those with two types, and 27.2 percent of those with three types indicated)

Violent Behaviors among Adolescent Females

Recent accounts of violence among adolescents have refocused national attention on this devastating problem. In October 2009, Attorney General Eric Holder and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan conducted a joint news conference calling for “a national conversation on values to address youth violence.”¹ Adolescent boys and girls have historically exhibited different rates of violence, with girls reporting lower rates.² From 1991 to 2000, however, arrests of girls increased more rapidly than arrests of boys, and girls accounted for 30 percent of all juvenile arrests in 2004.³ Undetermined is whether these increases among girls

Figure 1. Past Year Violent Behaviors among Females Aged 12 to 17: 2002 to 2004 and 2006 to 2008



Source: 2002 to 2004 and 2006 to 2008 SAMHSA National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUHs).

represent a change in underlying violent behavior or changes in law enforcement policies. Disentangling potential explanations is difficult because of the scarcity of information about violence among girls and its correlates. Increased knowledge of the characteristics of adolescent females who engage in violence is needed to support the development of more effective gender-appropriate violence prevention programs.

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 survey 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. Adolescents also are asked about their use of alcohol and illicit drugs during the prior 12 months.⁴

This issue of *The NSDUH Report* examines past year violent behavior among females aged 12 to 17. To examine trends, annual average rates based on combined NSDUH data from 2002 to 2004 are compared with averages for 2006 to 2008; all other findings are annual averages from the 2006 to 2008 NSDUH data.

Violent Behavior Prevalence and Trends

Combined 2006 to 2008 data indicate that an annual average of 2.3 million adolescent females (18.6 percent) engaged in a serious fight at school or work, 1.7 million (14.1 percent) participated in a group-against-group fight, and 700,000 (5.7 percent) attacked others with the intent to seriously hurt them (Figure 1). Comparing the combined 2006 to 2008 data with the combined 2002 to 2004 data indicates that rates of violent behaviors among adolescent females have remained relatively stable. Participation in group-against-group fighting was lower in the combined 2006 to 2008 data than in the combined 2002 to 2004 data.

About one quarter (26.7 percent) of adolescent females engaged in at least one of these three types of violent behaviors, with most engaging in only one type (17.2 percent) (Table 1). Only 7.4 percent engaged in two types of violent behaviors, and 2.1 percent engaged in all three.

(For comparison, among adolescent males, combined 2006 to 2008 data indicate that 25.4 percent got into a serious fight at school or work in the past year, 17.0 percent participated in a group-against-group fight, and 9.3 percent attacked others with the intent

Table 1. Number of Types of Violent Behaviors in the Past Year among Females Aged 12 to 17: 2006 to 2008

Type of Violent Behavior	Percent
<i>At Least One Type of Violent Behavior</i>	26.7
<i>One Type of Violent Behavior</i>	17.2
Got into a Serious Fight at School or Work Only	9.6
Took Part in a Group-against-Group Fight Only	5.9
Attacked Others with the Intent to Seriously Hurt Them Only	1.7
<i>Two Types of Violent Behaviors</i>	7.4
Got into a Serious Fight at School or Work and Took Part in a Group-against-Group Fight	5.5
Got into a Serious Fight at School or Work and Attacked Others with the Intent to Seriously Hurt Them	1.3
Took Part in a Group-against-Group Fight and Attacked Others with the Intent to Seriously Hurt Them	0.6
<i>All Three Types of Violent Behaviors</i>	2.1

Source: 2006 to 2008 SAMHSA National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUHs).

to seriously hurt them; 33.6 percent of adolescent males engaged in at least one of these violent behaviors in the past year.)

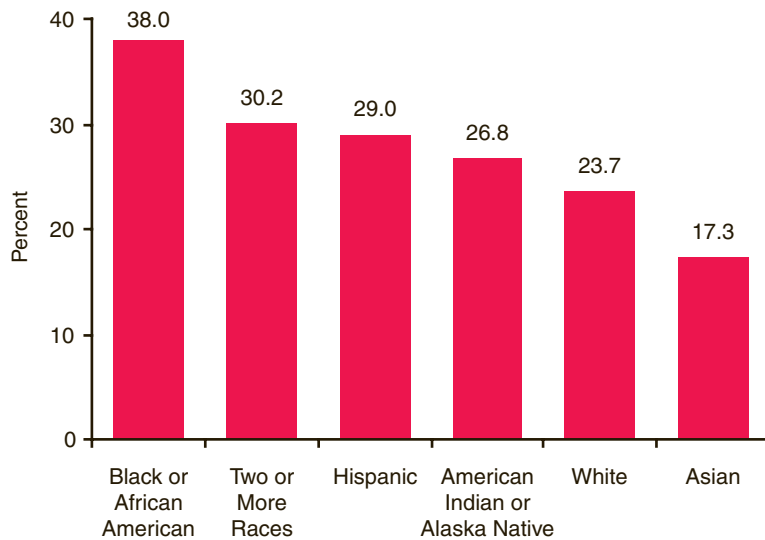
Violent Behaviors, by Demographic Characteristics

Adolescent females aged 14 or 15 were more likely to have engaged in a violent behavior in the past year (28.9 percent) than those aged 12 or 13 and those aged 16 or 17 (27.1 and 24.4 percent, respectively). Blacks were more likely to have engaged in a violent behavior than those in all other racial/ethnic groups (Figure 2).

The prevalence of violent behaviors decreased as annual family income increased.⁵ Violent behaviors were reported by 36.5 percent of adolescent females who lived in families with annual incomes of less than \$20,000, 30.5 percent of those in families with annual incomes of \$20,000 to \$49,999, 22.8 percent of those in families with annual incomes of \$50,000 to \$74,999, and 20.7 percent of those in families with annual incomes of \$75,000 or more.

There were no statistically significant differences in girls' rates of violent behaviors across regions of the country or between large metropolitan areas, small metropolitan areas, and non-metropolitan areas.

Figure 2. Past Year Violent Behaviors* among Females Aged 12 to 17, by Demographic Characteristics: 2006 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.

**Data for Native Hawaiians or Other Pacific Islanders are suppressed due to low precision.

Source: 2006 to 2008 SAMHSA National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUHs).

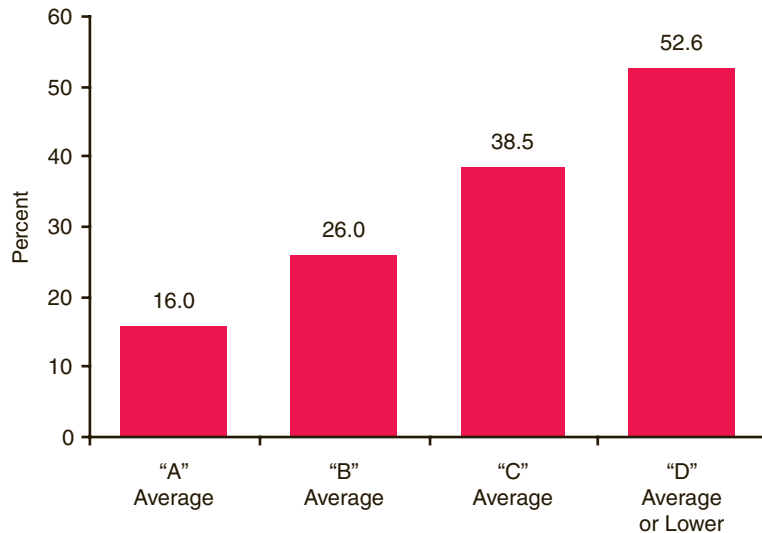
Violent Behaviors, by School-Related Characteristics

Adolescent females who were not currently enrolled in or attending school were more likely than those who were in school to have engaged in a past year violent behavior (34.3 vs. 26.7 percent). Among those who attended school in the past year, rates of violent behaviors increased as average grades decreased (Figure 3).⁶ About one sixth of females who reported having an “A” average (16.0 percent) engaged in a past year violent behavior compared with 26.0 percent of those with a “B” average, 38.5 percent of those with a “C” average, and 52.6 percent of those with a “D” average or lower.

Substance Use, by Violent Behaviors

Adolescent females who engaged in a violent behavior were more likely than those who did not to have reported binge drinking and illicit drug use (Table 2).⁷ For example, 15.1 percent of the females who engaged in a violent behavior in the past year indicated past month binge alcohol use compared with 6.9 percent of those who did not engage in any violent behavior. In addition, the rate of substance use increased steadily as the number of types of violent

Figure 3. Past Year Violent Behaviors* among Females Aged 12 to 17 Who Attended School in the Past 12 Months, by Academic Grades: 2006 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: 2006 to 2008 SAMHSA National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUHs).

Table 2. Past Month Substance Use among Females Aged 12 to 17, by Past Year Violent Behaviors: 2006 to 2008

Past Year Violent Behavior	Binge Alcohol Use* (%)	Marijuana Use (%)	Illicit Drugs Other than Marijuana** (%)
<i>Violent Behavior***</i>			
Yes	15.1	11.4	9.2
No	6.9	4.1	3.2
<i>Serious Fight at School or Work</i>			
Yes	16.6	12.1	10.5
No	7.4	4.7	3.5
<i>Group-against-Group Fight</i>			
Yes	15.6	12.1	10.1
No	8.0	5.1	4.0
<i>Attacked Others with Intent to Seriously Hurt Them</i>			
Yes	20.9	18.8	14.6
No	8.4	5.3	4.2

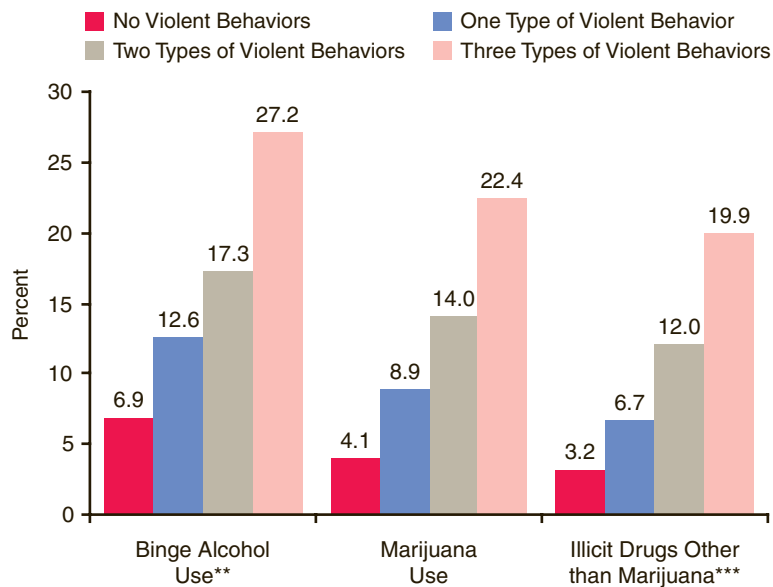
* Binge alcohol use is defined as drinking five or more drinks on the same occasion (i.e., at the same time or within a couple of hours of each other) on at least 1 day in the past 30 days.

** Includes cocaine (including crack), inhalants, hallucinogens, heroin, or prescription-type drugs used nonmedically.

*** 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: 2006 to 2008 SAMHSA National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUHs).

Figure 4. Past Month Substance Use among Females Aged 12 to 17, by Number of Types of Violent Behaviors*: 2006 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.

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Source: 2006 to 2008 SAMHSA National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUHs).

behaviors increased (Figure 4). For example, 6.9 percent of girls with no violent behavior indicated past month binge alcohol use compared with 12.6 percent of those with one type of violent behavior, 17.3 percent of those with two types, and 27.2 percent of those with three types.

Discussion

In the public mind, acts of teenage violence are most commonly associated with boys. Nevertheless, despite the small range of these acts

collected through NSDUH, it is clear that the problem is pervasive among girls as well. One in four adolescent girls has been the perpetrator of or has participated in a violent act in the past year. As with their male counterparts, for young girls, the correlates are many—poor school performance, alcohol and drug use, an impoverished family background, and other factors that are not captured in survey data. Treatment experts recommend that a thorough assessment of all adolescents include these issues and that an appropriate mix of therapeutic

interventions be used to address the intersection of substance use and abuse with acts of violence.⁸

End Notes

- U.S. Department of Justice Public Affairs. (2009, October 7). *Attorney General and Education Secretary call for national conversation on values and student violence*: U.S. Department of Justice to release study on children's exposure to violence; U.S. Department of Education to provide \$500,000 grant to help Fenger Community [Press Release]. Retrieved on November 6, 2009, from <http://www.ed.gov/news/pressreleases/2009/10/10072009.html>
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Office of Applied Studies. (November 8, 2002). *The NSDUH Report: Youth Violence and Substance Use: 2001 Update*. Rockville, MD.
- Zahn, M. A., Brumbaugh, S., Steffensmeier, D., Feld, B. C., Morash, M., Chesney-Lind, M., Miller, J., Payne, A. A., Gottfredson, D. C., & Kruttschnitt, C. (2008, May). *Violence by teenage girls: Trends and context* (OJJDP Juvenile Justice Bulletin, NCJ218905). 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/pdffiles1/ojjdp/218905.pdf>]
- NSDUH defines illicit drugs as marijuana/hashish, cocaine (including crack), inhalants, hallucinogens, heroin, or prescription-type drugs used nonmedically.
- Total 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.
- Respondents with unknown grade data were excluded from the analysis.
- Binge alcohol use is defined 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.
- Center for Substance Abuse Treatment. (2005). *Substance abuse treatment for persons with co-occurring disorders* (DHHS Publication No. SMA 05-3922, Treatment Improvement Protocol [TIP] Series 42). Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. [Available at <http://www.treatment.org/Externals/tips.html>]

Suggested Citation

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Findings from the SAMHSA 2002 to 2004 and 2006 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 2006 to 2008 data used in this report are based on information obtained from 33,091 female 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 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* (DHHS 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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