

The NHSDA Report

June 2, 2003

Children Living with Substance-Abusing or Substance-Dependent Parents

In Brief

- In 2001, more than 6 million children lived with at least one parent who abused or was dependent on alcohol or an illicit drug during the past year
- Past year substance abuse or dependence by parents involved approximately 10 percent of children aged 5 or younger
- Among parents who lived with one or more children, fathers were more likely than mothers to abuse or be dependent on alcohol or an illicit drug

The National Household Survey on Drug Abuse (NHSDA) asks respondents aged 12 or older to report on their alcohol or illicit drug use, as well as their symptoms of substance abuse or dependence during the past year. Illicit drugs include marijuana/hashish, cocaine (including crack), inhalants, hallucinogens, heroin, or prescription-type drugs used nonmedically. The NHSDA defines abuse and dependence using criteria in the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV), which includes such symptoms as physical danger, trouble with the law due to substance use, increased tolerance, and interference in everyday life during the past year (Table 1).¹

The NHSDA sample includes representative subsamples of mothers and fathers, as well as mother-father pairs who live in the same household. The survey obtains information about children living in the household, including age and relationship to the respondent. This report focuses on

biological, step, adoptive, and foster children younger than 18 years of age who were living with one or both parents at the time of the survey interview. (The 2000 Current Population Survey estimated that 96 percent of children younger than 18 years of age lived with at least one parent).²

Numbers of Children

The 2001 NHSDA estimated that almost 70 million children younger than 18 years of age lived with at least one parent. Over 6 million (9 percent) lived with at least one parent who abused or was dependent on alcohol or an illicit drug during the past year.³ Of these children, more than 4 million lived with a parent who abused or was dependent on alcohol only, almost 1 million lived with a parent who abused or was dependent only on an illicit drug, and more than 0.5 million lived with a parent who abused or was dependent on both alcohol and an illicit drug (Figure 1).

Children's Ages

Table 2 shows the percentages of children who lived with at least one substance-abusing or substance-dependent parent, by children's age. Past year substance abuse or dependence by parents involved approximately 10 percent of children aged 5 or younger compared with 8 percent of children aged 6 to 11 and 9 percent of youths aged 12 to 17.

Substance-Abusing or Substance-Dependent Fathers and Mothers

Among parents living with their children, fathers (8 percent) were more likely than mothers (4 percent) to abuse or be dependent on alcohol or an illicit drug during the past year (Figure 2). Compared with other adults of the same general age range, parents were less likely to have abused or been dependent on substances. For example, overall rates of substance abuse or dependence among persons aged 18 to 50 in 2001 were 14 percent for males and 6 percent for females.⁴

End Notes

1. American Psychiatric Association. (1994). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (4th ed.). Washington, DC: Author
2. U.S. Bureau of the Census, Fertility and Family Statistics Branch. (2001, June 29). *Living arrangements of children under 18 years old: 1960 to present*. Retrieved April 7, 2003, at <http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/hh-fam/tabCH-1.xls>
3. To calculate an unduplicated estimate of children living with at least one parent who met the criteria for substance abuse or dependence, the

Table 1. DSM-IV Diagnosis of Substance Abuse or Dependence

A Person is defined with abuse of a substance if he or she is not dependent on that substance and reports one or more of the following symptoms in the past year.

1. Recurrent use resulting in failure to fulfill major obligations at work, school, or home
2. Recurrent use in situations in which it is physically hazardous (e.g., driving an automobile)
3. Recurrent substance-related legal problems
4. Continued use despite having persistent or recurrent social or interpersonal problems

A person is defined as being dependent on a substance if he or she reports three or more of the following symptoms in the past year.

1. Tolerance — discovering less effective with same amount (needing more to become intoxicated)
2. Withdrawal (characteristic withdrawal associated with type of drug)
3. Using more or for longer periods than intended
4. Desire to or unsuccessful efforts to cut down or control substance use
5. Considerable time spent in obtaining or using the substance or recovering from its effects
6. Important social, work, or recreational activities given up or reduced because of use
7. Continued use despite knowledge of problems caused by aggravated use

estimated number of children living with two substance-abusing or substance-dependent parents (mother-father pairs) was subtracted from the sum of the estimated number of children living with a substance-abusing or substance-dependent father and the estimated number of children living with a substance-abusing or substance-dependent mother. To correct problems with analysis weights for the mother-father pair sample, a special adjustment was applied to ensure the age distribution of children in two-parent households and the total number of children in these households were consistent with those obtained from the standard person level analytic weights.

4. In 2001, 96 percent of parents living with a child were aged 18 to 50.

Figure and Table Notes

Source (Table 1): American Psychiatric Association. (1994). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (4th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.

Source (Table 2 and All Figures): SAMHSA 2001 NHSDA

Note: Abuse or dependence is based on the definition found in the 4th ed. of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV).

*Children include biological, step, adoptive, or foster.

**Children aged 17 or younger who were not living with one or more parents for most of the quarter of the NHSDA interview are excluded from the present analysis. According to the 2000 Current Population Survey, this amounts to approximately 3 million or 4 percent of children aged 17 or younger.

****"Any Illicit Drug" refers to marijuana/hashish, cocaine (including crack), inhalants, hallucinogens, heroin, or prescription-type drugs used nonmedically.

Figure 1. Estimated Numbers (in Thousands) of Children* Aged 17 or Younger Living with One or More Parents with Past Year Substance Abuse of or Dependence: 2001**

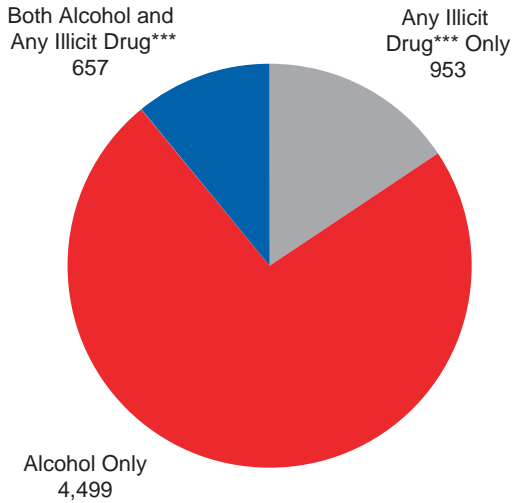
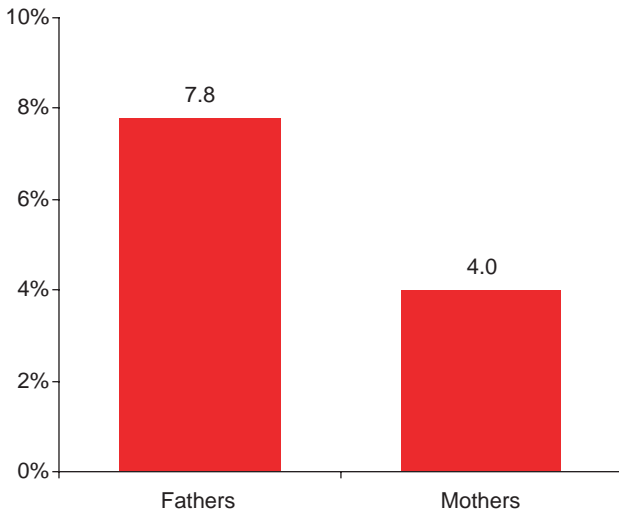


Table 2. Estimated Numbers (in Thousands) and Percentages of Children* Aged 17 or Younger Living with One or More Parents with Past Year Substance Abuse or Dependence: 2001**

Ages of Children (Years)	Estimated Numbers (in Thousands)	Percentage	Standard Error
Younger than 3	1,078	9.8	0.81
3 to 5	1,115	9.8	1.10
6 to 11	1,816	7.5	1.28
12 to 17	2,100	9.2	0.81

Figure 2. Percentages of Fathers and Mothers (Living with One or More Children* Aged 17 or Younger) Reporting Past Year Substance Abuse or Dependence : 2001



The National Household Survey on Drug Abuse (NHSDA) is an annual survey sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The 2001 data are based on information obtained from 68,929 persons aged 12 or older, including 9,646 mothers living with a child younger than 18 years of age, 5,524 fathers living with a child younger than 18 years of age, and 1,088 mother-father pairs living in the same household with a child younger than 18 years of age. 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 NHSDA Report is prepared by the Office of Applied Studies (OAS), SAMHSA, and by RTI in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina.

Information and data for this issue are based on the following publication and statistics:

Office of Applied Studies. (2002). *Results from the 2001 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse: Volume I. Summary of national findings* (DHHS Publication No. SMA 02-3758, NHSDA Series H-17). Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

Also available on-line: <http://www.DrugAbuseStatistics.samhsa.gov>.

Additional tables available upon request.



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