

The NSDUH Report

July 1, 2005

Driving Under the Influence among Adult Drivers

In Brief

- In 2002 and 2003, almost 16.6 percent of adult drivers aged 21 or older reported that they had driven while under the influence of alcohol or illicit drugs during the past year
- Male drivers aged 21 or older (22.0 percent) were nearly twice as likely as their female counterparts (11.4 percent) to have driven under the influence of alcohol or drugs during the past year
- More than one in three adult drivers aged 21 to 25 (33.8 percent) reported having driven under the influence of alcohol or drugs during the past year

According to a 2001 survey by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, most persons of driving age (62.0 percent) believed that they should not drive after having two or more drinks, and nearly all reported that they perceived drinking and driving to threaten their personal safety.¹ Nonetheless, in 2003, 10.9 percent of drivers/motorcyclists in fatal motor vehicle crashes were under the influence of alcohol, drugs, or medication.²

The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) asks persons aged 12 or older if they had driven a vehicle while under the influence of alcohol or illicit drugs in the past year.³ The survey also asks about the use of alcohol and any illicit drugs during the past year. NSDUH defines “illicit drugs” to include marijuana/hashish, cocaine (including crack), inhalants, hallucinogens, heroin, or prescription-type drugs used nonmedically. This report focuses on past year alcohol and illicit drug use and driving behaviors

of adult drivers aged 21 or older. All findings presented in this report are annual averages based on combined 2002 and 2003 NSDUH data.

Alcohol and Illicit Drug Use among Adult Drivers

In the Nation as a whole, 93.6 percent of persons aged 21 or older were classified as drivers.⁴ Among adult drivers aged 21 or older, 71.0 percent reported using alcohol during the 12 months prior to the survey, and 12.6 percent reported having used an illicit drug during the past year.

Driving Under the Influence of Alcohol or Drugs in the Past Year

In 2002 and 2003, 16.6 percent of adult drivers aged 21 or older (an estimated 30.7 million persons) reported that they had driven while under the influence of alcohol or illicit drugs during the past year. Among drivers of this age group, 15.7 percent had driven under the influence of alcohol during the past year, 4.3 percent had driven under the influence of illicit drugs, and 3.0 percent had driven under the combined influence of alcohol and drugs during the past year (Figure 1).

Demographic Characteristics

In 2002 and 2003, male drivers aged 21 or older (22.0 percent) were nearly twice as likely as their female counterparts (11.4 percent)

Figure 1. Percentages of Adult Drivers Aged 21 or Older Who Reported Driving a Vehicle Under the Influence of Alcohol and/or Illicit Drugs During the Past Year: 2002 and 2003

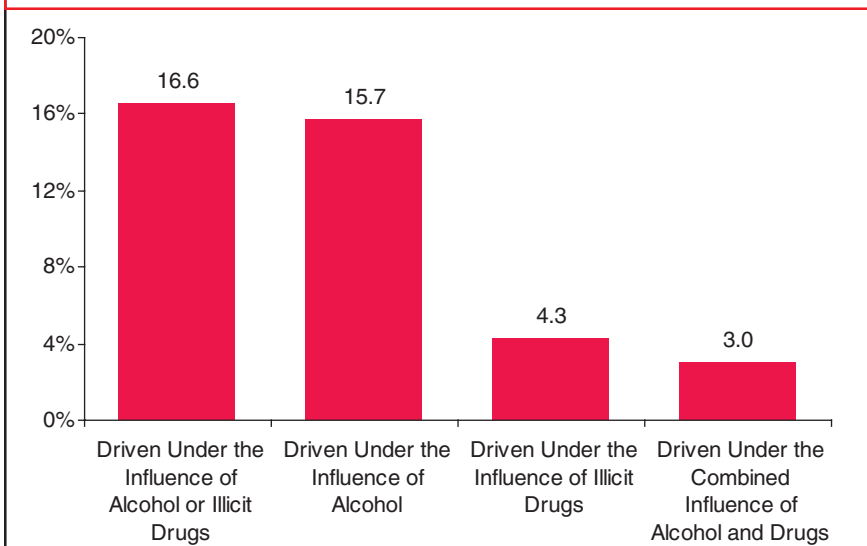
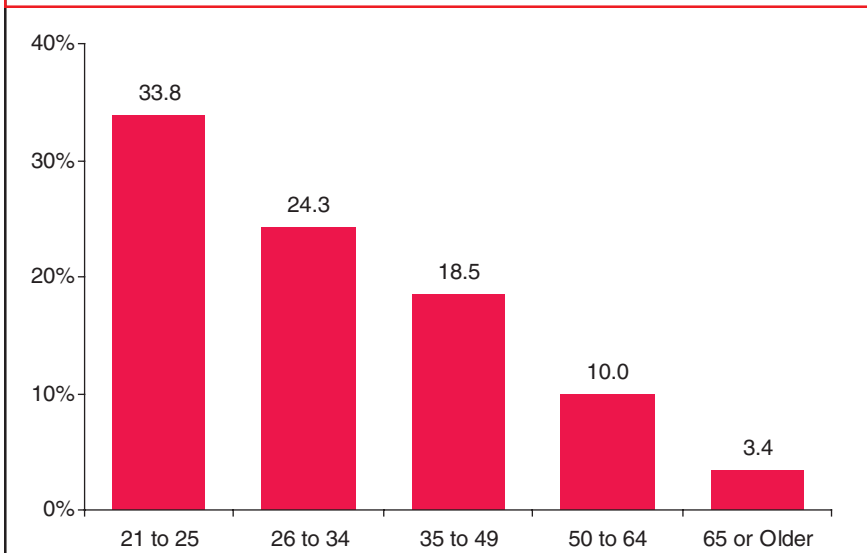


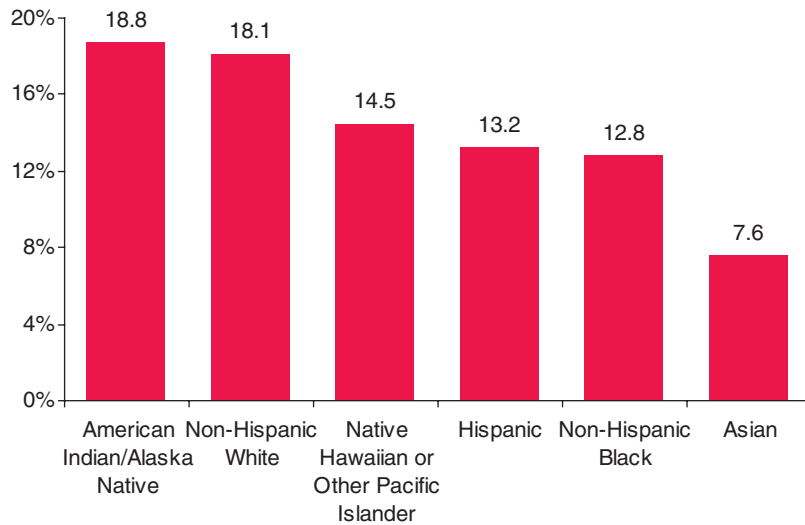
Figure 2. Percentages of Drivers Aged 21 or Older Who Reported Driving Under the Influence of Alcohol or Illicit Drugs During the Past Year, by Age Group: 2002 and 2003



to have driven under the influence of alcohol or drugs during the past year. Younger adult drivers were more likely to have driven under the influence of alcohol or illicit drugs than older adult drivers. For example, 33.8 percent of adult drivers aged 21 to 25 reported having driven

under the influence during the past year compared with 10.0 percent of drivers aged 50 to 64 and 3.4 percent of drivers aged 65 or older who reported having done so (Figure 2). Among racial/ethnic groups, American Indians/Alaska Natives and non-Hispanic whites (18.8 and 18.1 percent,

Figure 3. Percentages of Drivers Aged 21 or Older Who Reported Driving a Vehicle Under the Influence of Alcohol or Illicit Drugs During the Past Year, by Race/Ethnicity: 2002 and 2003



respectively) were generally more likely to have driven under the influence of alcohol or illicit drugs than were members of other racial and ethnic groups (Figure 3).

Geographic Differences

Rates of driving under the influence of alcohol or illicit drugs also differed among geographic regions of the country and among counties of different population density. Drivers aged 21 or older living in the Midwest (20.5 percent) were more likely to have driven under the influence of alcohol or illicit drugs in the past year than their counterparts living in the West

(17.1 percent), Northeast (15.6 percent), or the South (14.3 percent).⁵ Adult drivers in this age group residing in non-metropolitan counties (14.2 percent) were less likely to have driven under the influence of alcohol or illicit drugs during the past year than those residing in small metropolitan counties (17.2 percent) or large metropolitan counties (17.0 percent).⁶

End Notes

1. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. (2003, June). *National survey of drinking and driving attitudes and behaviors, 2001* (Traffic Tech No. 280, NHTSA Technology Transfer Series). Retrieved April 11, 2005, from <http://www.nhtsa.gov/people/injury/alcohol/traffic-tech2003/TT280.pdf>

2. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, National Center for Statistics and Analysis. (2005, January). Table 65: Related factors for drivers and motorcycle operators involved in fatal crashes. In *Traffic Safety Facts 2003: A compilation of motor vehicle crash data from the Fatality Analysis Reporting System and the General Estimates System* (p. 100, DOT HS 809 775). Washington, DC: Author. [Available in <http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/departments/nrd-30/nicsa/AvailInf.html>]
3. Respondents were asked, in three different questions, if during the past 12 months they had driven a vehicle while under the influence of (a) alcohol only, (b) illicit drugs only, or (c) a combination of alcohol and illicit drugs used together. Responses to these questions then were recoded to determine the prevalence of driving under the influence (DUI) involving (a) alcohol, (b) illicit drugs, (c) either alcohol or illicit drugs, or (d) both alcohol and illicit drugs.
4. Respondents were identified as drivers if they responded "never," "seldom," "sometimes," or "always" to a question about the frequency of their wearing a seatbelt when they drove. If a respondent indicated that he or she did not drive when asked the question about wearing a seatbelt while driving or did not give a response to that question, he or she was excluded from this analysis.
5. The Midwest has 12 States: IA, IL, IN, KS, MI, MN, MO, ND, NE, OH, SD, and WI. The South has 17 States: AL, AR, DC, DE, FL, GA, KY, LA, MD, MS, NC, OK, SC, TN, TX, VA, and WV. The Northeast has 9 States: CT, MA, ME, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, and VT. And the West has 13 States: AK, AZ, CA, CO, HI, ID, MT, NM, NV, OR, UT, WA, and WY.
6. Large metropolitan areas have a population of 1 million or more. Small metropolitan areas have a population of fewer than 1 million. Non-metropolitan areas are outside metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs), as defined by the Office of Management and Budget. See the U.S. Bureau of the Census. (2003, June 12). *About metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas*. Retrieved May 26, 2005, from <http://www.census.gov/population/www/estimates/aboutmetro.html>

Figure Note

Source: SAMHSA, 2002 and 2003 NSDUH.

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 2002 and 2003 data used in this report are based on information obtained from 71,648 persons aged 21 or older. 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 publications 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.

Office of Applied Studies. (2003). *Results from the 2002 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National findings* (DHHS Publication No. SMA

03-3836, NSDUH Series H-22). 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.

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