

The NHSDA Report

November 2, 2001

Alcohol Use Among Veterans

In Brief

- In 2000, younger veterans were more likely than older veterans to report past month alcohol use, heavy drinking, and binge drinking
- Among males aged 18 to 25, veterans were more likely than nonveterans to report past month alcohol use
- Within older age categories, male veterans and nonveterans had similar rates of alcohol use

The 2000 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse (NHSDA) asked respondents to report alcohol use within the past month, as well as the frequency and quantity of use. “Binge” alcohol use is defined as drinking five or more drinks on the same occasion on at least 1 day in the past 30 days. “Occasion” means at the same time or within a couple of hours of each other. 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. Respondents were also asked about veteran status; a veteran is defined as an individual who has served in any of the U.S. Armed Forces (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps) but who is not currently serving.

The 2000 NHSDA estimated that there were approximately 27 million veterans aged 18 or older living in the United States, representing approximately 14 percent of the adult U.S. population.¹ Approximately 94 percent of veterans were males. About 54 percent were aged 55 or older, 44 percent were aged 26 to 54, and 2 percent were aged 18 to 25. An estimated 85 percent were white, 9 percent were black, 4 percent were Hispanic, and 1 percent were Asian.

Figure 1. Percentages of Veterans Reporting Past Month Alcohol Use, "Binge" Alcohol Use, and Heavy Alcohol Use, by Gender: 2000

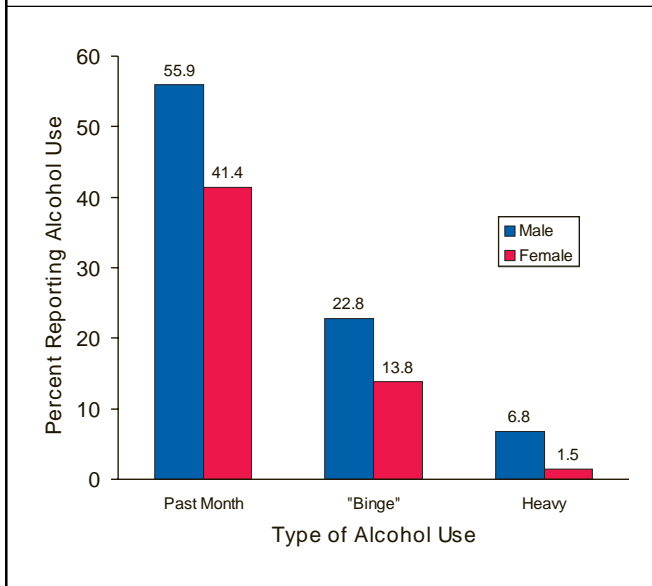
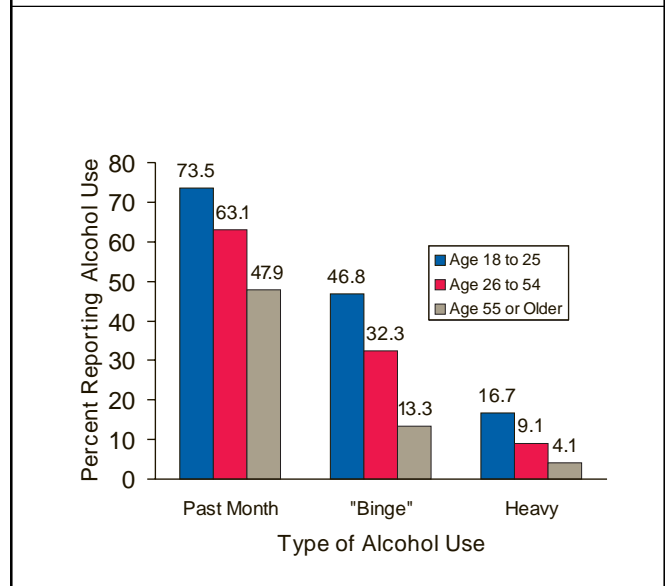


Figure 2. Percentages of Veterans Reporting Past Month Alcohol Use, "Binge" Alcohol Use, and Heavy Alcohol Use, by Age: 2000



Differences in Alcohol Use Among Veterans

Overall, 55 percent of veterans reported past month alcohol use, 22 percent reported binge alcohol use, and 7 percent reported heavy alcohol use. Male veterans were more likely than female veterans to report past month alcohol use, binge drinking, and heavy drinking (past month use: 56 percent of males vs. 41 percent of females; binge drinking: 23 percent of males vs. 14 percent of females; heavy drinking: 7 percent of males vs. 2 percent of females) (Figure 1). Younger veterans were more likely than older veterans to report all levels of use (Figure 2). Rates of past month alcohol use, binge drinking, and heavy drinking were similar between white

veterans and black veterans. Small sample sizes prevented comparisons between other racial/ethnic groups.

Differences in Alcohol Use Between Veterans and Nonveterans

Because the majority of veterans are males, comparisons between veterans and nonveterans were limited to males aged 18 or older. The overall rates for past month, binge, and heavy alcohol use were lower for male veterans than for male nonveterans (past month alcohol use: 56 percent of male veterans vs. 59 percent of male nonveterans; binge drinking: 23 percent of male veterans vs. 34 percent of male

nonveterans; heavy alcohol use: 7 percent of male veterans vs. 10 percent of male nonveterans). However, because veterans are on average older than nonveterans, comparisons within specific age groups may indicate a different pattern. Male veterans aged 18 to 25 (76 percent) were more likely than nonveterans from this age group (62 percent) to report past month alcohol use, but rates of binge drinking and heavy drinking were similar between veterans and nonveterans from this group (Figure 3). Rates of past month alcohol use, binge alcohol use, and heavy alcohol use were similar among male veterans and nonveterans aged 26 to 54 and aged 55 or older (Figures 4 and 5).

Figure 3. Percentages of Male Adults Aged 18 to 25 Reporting Past Month Alcohol Use, "Binge" Alcohol Use, and Heavy Alcohol Use, by Veteran Status: 2000

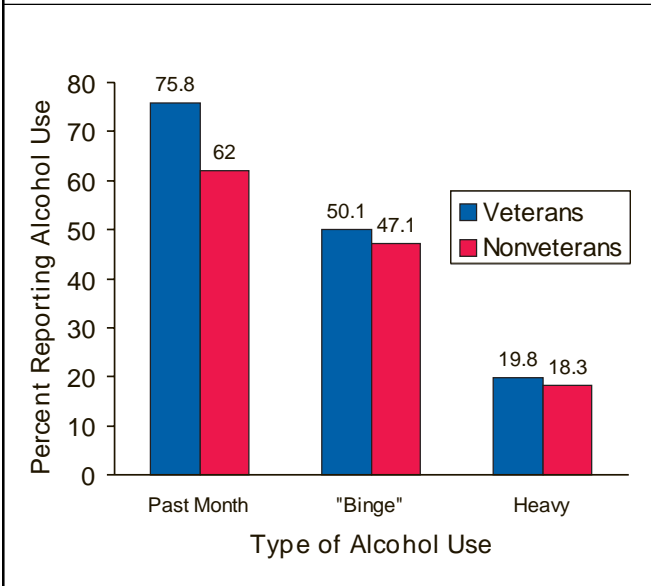


Figure 4. Percentages of Male Adults Aged 26 to 54 Reporting Past Month Alcohol Use, "Binge" Alcohol Use, and Heavy Alcohol Use, by Veteran Status: 2000

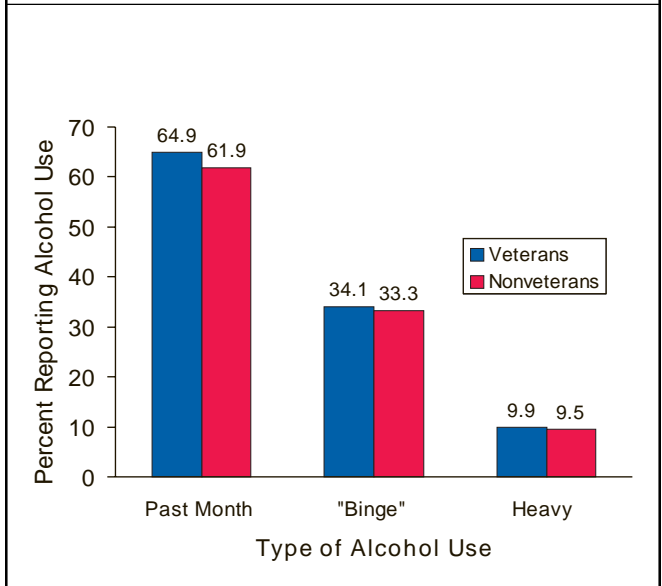
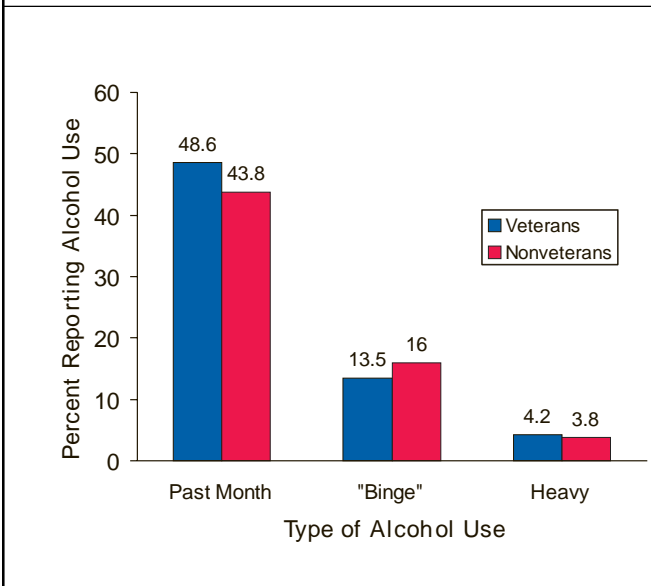


Figure 5. Percentages of Male Adults Aged 55 or Older Reporting Past Month Alcohol Use, "Binge" Alcohol Use, and Heavy Alcohol Use, by Veteran Status: 2000



End Note

¹This estimate is comparable with what was reported by the Department of Veterans Affairs, May 2001, *Facts about the Department of Veterans Affairs* (available at <http://va.gov/pressrel/vafact01.htm> and accessed on October 19, 2001).

Figure Notes

"Binge" Alcohol Use is defined as drinking five or more drinks on the same occasion on at least 1 day in the past 30 days. By "occasion" is meant at the same time or within a couple of hours of each other. 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.

Source (all figures): SAMHSA 2000 NHSDA.

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:

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2001). *Summary of findings from the 2000 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse* (NHSDA Series: H-13, DHHS Publication No. SMA 01-3549). Rockville, MD: Author.

Also available on-line: www.DrugAbuseStatistics.SAMHSA.gov

Additional tables available on request.