

The NSDUH Report

November 28, 2003

Substance Use among School Dropouts

The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) includes questions about past and current school enrollment status. Two school enrollment categories were developed from these questions: school dropouts and non-dropouts. School dropouts completed less than the 12th grade,

were not currently enrolled in school, and had not received either a high school diploma or a GED (general educational development) diploma. Non-dropouts included current high school students, high school graduates, college students, and college graduates.¹

The survey also asks individuals about their use of cigarettes, alcohol, or illicit drugs during the month prior to the survey interview. 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. Heavy alcohol use is defined as drinking five or more drinks on the same occasion on 5 or more days in the past 30 days; all heavy alcohol users also are binge alcohol users. Any illicit drug refers to marijuana/hashish, cocaine (including crack), inhalants, hallucinogens, heroin, or prescription-type drugs used nonmedically.

In Brief

- In 2002, approximately 3.2 million 18 to 24 year olds were considered to be school dropouts
- More than half of school dropouts smoked cigarettes during the past month
- School dropouts were less likely to have used alcohol during the past month than non-dropouts, but rates of illicit drug use were similar among the two groups

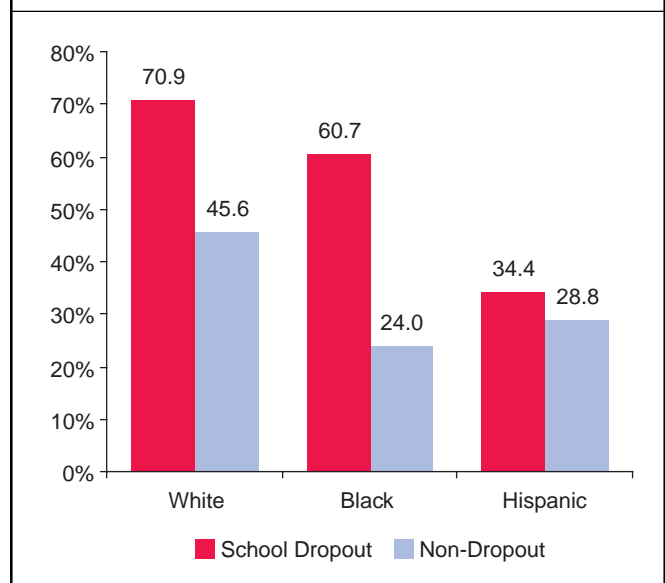
Dropout Rates

According to the 2002 NSDUH, almost 3.2 million Americans aged 18 to 24 (12 percent) were considered to be school dropouts. Males were more likely to have dropped out than females (Table 1). The dropout rate was higher among Hispanics (28 percent) than among

Table 1. School Dropout Rates among Young Adults Aged 18 to 24, by Demographic Characteristics: 2002

Demographic Characteristic	Percentages Who Are School Dropouts
Total	11.5
Gender	
Male	12.9
Female	10.1
Race/Ethnicity	
White	7.7
Black	10.4
American Indian/Alaska Native	13.6
Asian	2.3
Hispanic	27.9
Age Group	
18 to 20	10.9
21 to 24	12.0

Figure 1. Percentages of Young Adults Aged 18 to 24 Reporting Past Month Cigarette Use, by Race/Ethnicity and School Enrollment Category: 2002



American Indians or Alaska Natives (14 percent), blacks (10 percent), whites (8 percent), or Asians (2 percent).² The dropout rate was similar among persons aged 18 to 20 and those aged 21 to 24.

Cigarette Use

Among young adults aged 18 to 24, a larger proportion of school dropouts smoked cigarettes in the past month (54 percent) than non-dropouts (39 percent). A similar pattern was observed among males and females, and among persons aged 18 to 20 and those aged 21 to 24. Likewise, among whites and blacks, the rate of cigarette use was higher among school dropouts than non-dropouts (Figure 1). Among Hispanics, the rate of cigarette use also was higher among dropouts (34 percent) than among non-dropouts (29 percent), but the difference was not statistically significant.

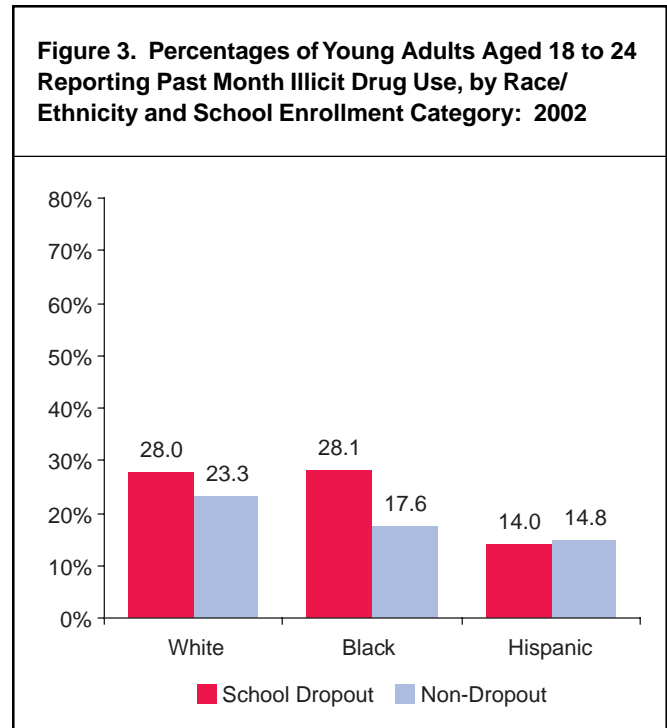
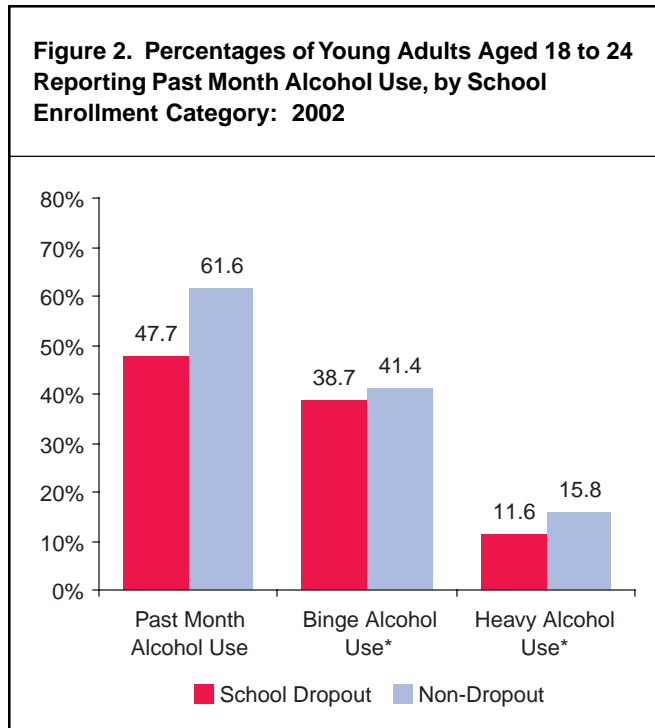
Alcohol Use

School dropouts were less likely to have used alcohol during the past month than non-dropouts (Figure 2). Findings were similar for males and females. This pattern was also observed among whites (54 vs. 67 percent) and Hispanics (42 vs. 53 percent). However, among blacks, the rate of past month alcohol use was similar among school dropouts (50 percent) and non-dropouts (47 percent).

Rates of binge alcohol use were similar among school dropouts (41 percent) and non-dropouts (39 percent). Among males, the binge drinking rate for school dropouts was the same as the rate for non-dropouts. However, among females, the rate of binge alcohol use was lower for school dropouts (24 percent) than non-dropouts (33 percent). Among blacks, school dropouts (39 percent) were more likely than non-dropouts (24 percent) to be binge alcohol users; however, among whites (45 vs. 47 percent) and Hispanics (33

vs. 36 percent), the rates of binge alcohol use were similar for school dropouts and non-dropouts. There was no difference in binge drinking among dropouts (35 percent) and non-dropouts (37 percent) aged 18 to 20. However, among those aged 21 to 24, dropouts were less likely to be binge alcohol users (41 percent) than non-dropouts (46 percent).

Overall, the rate of heavy alcohol use was lower among school dropouts compared with non-dropouts. Findings were similar for males and females. Among whites, school dropouts (16 percent) were less likely than non-dropouts (20 percent) to be heavy alcohol users, but there was no difference between school dropouts and non-dropouts among blacks. Among Hispanics, the rate of heavy alcohol use was 7 percent among school dropouts and 10 percent among non-dropouts, but this difference was not statistically significant. Although rates of heavy alcohol use were similar for school dropouts (12 percent) and non-dropouts (14 percent) aged 18 to 20,



school dropouts aged 21 to 24 (12 percent) were less likely to be heavy alcohol users than same aged non-dropouts (18 percent).

2. Rates for Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islanders were excluded from all racial/ethnic comparisons due to small sample sizes.

Illicit Drug Use

Among persons aged 18 to 24, the prevalence of past month illicit drug use was similar among school dropouts (22 percent) and non-dropouts (21 percent). For whites and blacks, school dropouts were more likely to have used illicit drugs than non-dropouts, but there was no difference between school dropouts and non-dropouts among Hispanics (Figure 3). Among persons aged 18 to 20, the rate of illicit drug use was higher among school dropouts (27 percent) than it was among non-dropouts (22 percent), but the rates were similar among those aged 21 to 24 (19 percent for school dropouts and 20 percent for non-dropouts). Among both males and females, the rates of illicit drug use were similar for school dropouts and non-dropouts.

Table and Figure Notes

* 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. Heavy alcohol use is defined as drinking five or more drinks on the same occasion on 5 or more days in the past 30 days; all heavy alcohol users are also binge alcohol users.

Source (table and all figures): SAMHSA 2002 NSDUH.

End Notes

1. High school students completed fewer than 12 grades of high school and reported that they were enrolled in grade 12 or lower, were enrolled in school but not at the college level, or did not have a job because of school but did not report having a GED or a high school diploma. High school graduates completed 12th grade or high school, obtained a GED or high school diploma and were not currently enrolled in any school, or did not indicate completion of education higher than 12th grade. College students completed 12th grade and were enrolled in some college-level class. College graduates completed any education higher than 12th grade.

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 data are based on information obtained from 68,126 persons aged 12 or older, including 20,478 adults aged 18 to 24. Of these, 2,165 were school dropouts. 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 in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina.

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

Office of Applied Studies. (2003). *Results from the 2002 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National findings* (DHHS Publication No. SMA 03-3836, NHSDA Series H-22). 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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