

3. Alcohol Use

The National Household Survey on Drug Abuse (NHSDA) includes a set of questions asking about the recency and frequency of the consumption of alcoholic beverages, such as beer, wine, whiskey, brandy, and mixed drinks. An extensive list of examples of the kinds of beverages covered is given to respondents prior to the question administration. A "drink" is defined as a can or bottle of beer, a glass of wine or a wine cooler, a shot of liquor, or a mixed drink with liquor in it. Times when the respondent only had a sip or two from a drink are not considered as consumption. For this report, estimates for the prevalence of alcohol use are reported primarily at three levels defined for both men and women and for all ages as follows:

Current use - At least one drink in the past 30 days (includes binge and heavy use).

Binge use - Five or more drinks on the same occasion at least once in the 30 days prior to survey (includes heavy use).

Heavy use - Five or more drinks on the same occasion on at least 5 different days in the past 30 days.

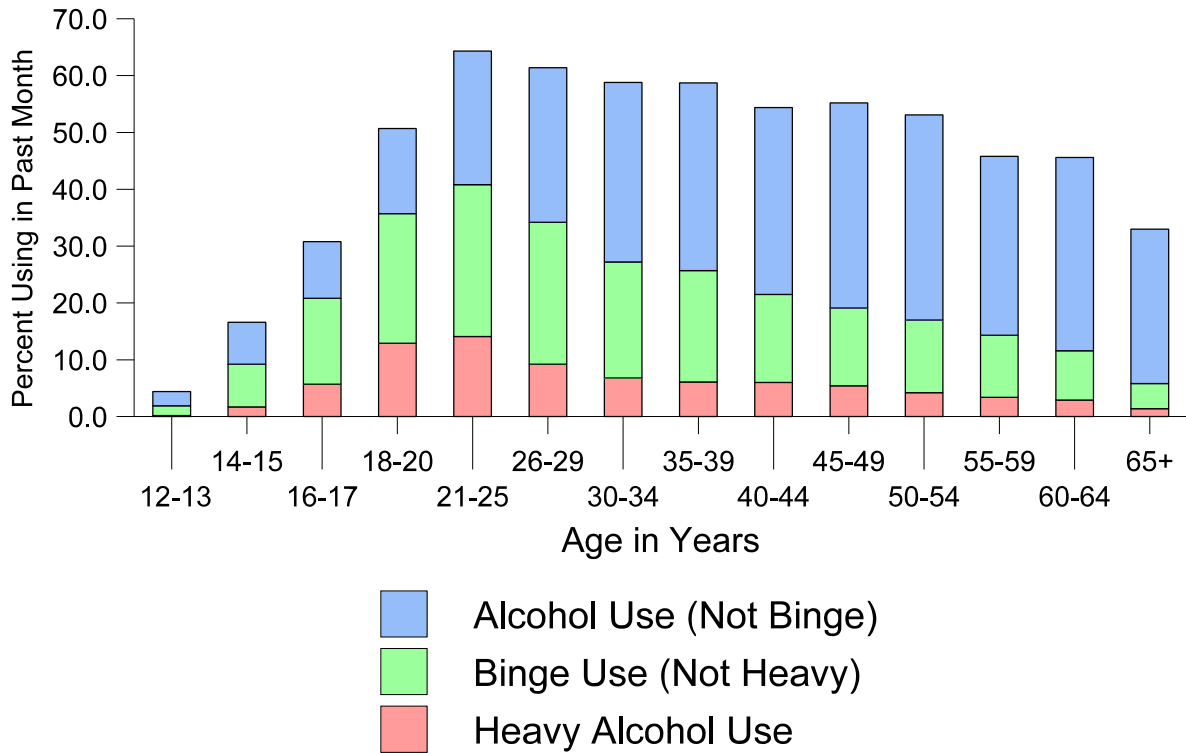
A summary of the findings from the 2001 NHSDA alcohol questions is given below:

- Almost half of Americans aged 12 or older reported being current drinkers of alcohol in the 2001 survey (48.3 percent). This translates to an estimated 109 million people. Both the rate of alcohol use and the number of drinkers increased from 2000, when 104 million, or 46.6 percent, of people aged 12 or older reported drinking in the past 30 days.
- Approximately one fifth (20.5 percent) of persons aged 12 or older participated in binge drinking at least once in the 30 days prior to the survey. Although the number of current drinkers increased between 2000 and 2001, the number of those reporting binge drinking did not change significantly.
- Heavy drinking was reported by 5.7 percent of the population aged 12 or older, or 12.9 million people. These 2001 estimates are similar to the 2000 estimates.

Age

- The prevalence of current alcohol use in 2001 increased with increasing age for youths, from 2.6 percent at age 12 to a peak of 67.5 percent for persons 21 years old. Unlike prevalence patterns observed for cigarettes and illicit drugs, current alcohol use remained steady among older age groups. For people aged 21 to 25 and those aged 26 to 34, the rates of current alcohol use in 2001 were 64.3 and 59.9 percent, respectively. The prevalence of alcohol use was slightly lower for persons in their 40s. Past month drinking was reported by 45.6 percent of respondents aged 60 to 64, and 33.0 percent of persons 65 or older (Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1 Past Month Alcohol Use, by Age: 2001

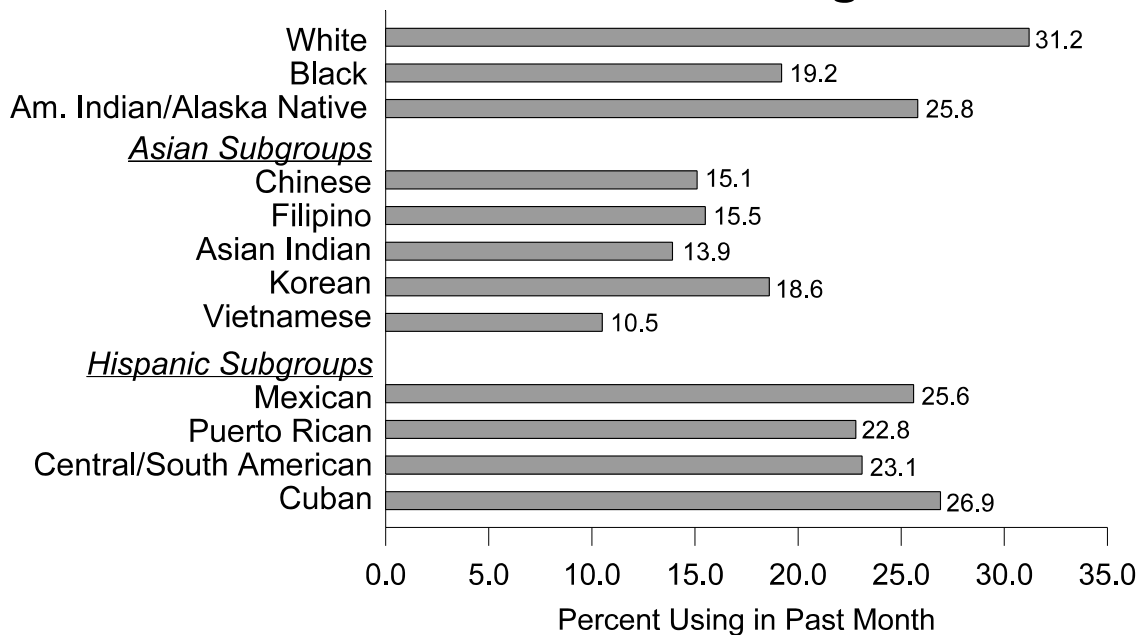


- The highest prevalence of both binge and heavy drinking in 2001 was for young adults aged 18 to 25, with the peak rate occurring at age 21. The rate of binge drinking was 38.7 percent for young adults and 48.2 percent at age 21. Heavy alcohol use was reported by 13.6 percent of persons aged 18 to 25, and by 17.8 percent of persons aged 21. Binge and heavy alcohol use rates decreased faster with increasing age than did rates of past month alcohol use. While 55.2 percent of the population aged 45 to 49 in 2001 were current drinkers, 19.1 percent of persons within this age range binge drank and 5.4 percent drank heavily (Figure 3.1). Binge and heavy drinking were relatively rare among people aged 65 or older, with reported rates of 5.8 and 1.4 percent, respectively.
- Among youths aged 12 to 17, an estimated 17.3 percent used alcohol in the month prior to the survey interview. This rate was higher than the rate of youth alcohol use reported in 2000 (16.4 percent). Of all youths, 10.6 percent were binge drinkers, and 2.5 percent were heavy drinkers. These are roughly the same percentages as those reported in 2000 (10.4 and 2.6 percent, respectively).

Underage Alcohol Use

- About 10.1 million persons aged 12 to 20 reported drinking alcohol in the month prior to the survey interview in 2001 (28.5 percent of this age group). Of these, nearly 6.8 million (19.0 percent) were binge drinkers and 2.1 million (6.0 percent) were heavy drinkers. All of these 2001 rates are similar to rates observed in 2000.
- Males aged 12 to 20 were more likely than their female peers to report binge drinking in 2001 (22.0 vs. 15.9 percent).
- Among people aged 12 to 20, past month alcohol use rates in 2001 ranged from 19.7 percent for Asians and 19.8 percent among blacks to 31.6 percent for whites. Binge drinking was reported by 21.7 percent of underage whites and 18.5 percent of underage American Indians or Alaska Natives, but only by 10.7 percent of underage Asians and 10.5 percent of underage blacks.
- Combined 2000 and 2001 data indicate variations in the rates of underage alcohol use across Asian subgroups. Rates of past month use ranged from 10.5 percent for Vietnamese to 15.5 percent for Filipinos (Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2 Past Month Alcohol Use among Youths Aged 12 to 20, by Race/Ethnicity: 2000-2001 Annual Averages



- Across geographic divisions in 2001, underage current alcohol use rates ranged from 24.2 percent in the East South Central division and 26.8 percent in the Pacific division to 35.0 percent in New England. Between 2000 and 2001, there was an increase in underage drinking in the West South Central division (from 27.5 to 30.4 percent).
- In 2001, underage current alcohol use rates were similar in large metropolitan areas (27.3 percent), small metropolitan areas (29.8 percent), and nonmetropolitan areas (29.3 percent). The rate in nonmetropolitan rural areas was 27.5 percent.

Gender

- Except among youths aged 12 to 17, males were more likely than females to report past month alcohol drinking. In 2001, 54.8 percent of males aged 12 or older were current drinkers compared with 42.3 percent of females.
- For the youngest age group (12 to 17), males and females had comparable rates of current alcohol use in 2001 (17.2 percent of males and 17.3 percent of females). However, rates of binge and heavy alcohol use were higher among male youths than female youths in both 2000 and 2001.

Pregnant Women

- Among pregnant women aged 15 to 44 years in 2000 and 2001 combined, 12.9 percent used alcohol and 4.6 percent were binge drinkers. These rates were significantly lower than the rates for nonpregnant women of that age (49.8 and 20.5 percent, respectively).

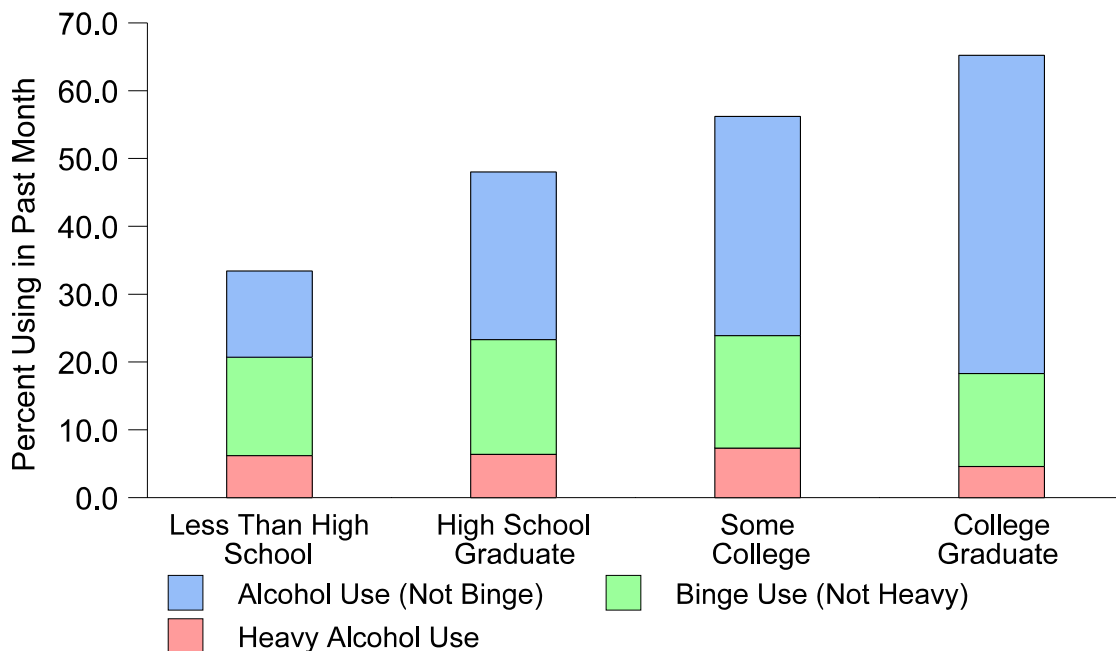
Race/Ethnicity

- Whites were more likely than any other racial/ethnic group to report current use of alcohol in 2001. An estimated 52.7 percent of whites reported past month use. The next highest rates were for persons reporting more than one race (43.2 percent). The lowest current drinking rate was observed for Asians (31.9 percent). The rate was 35.1 percent for blacks and 35.0 percent for American Indians/Alaska Natives.
- Binge alcohol use was least likely to be reported by Asians (10.1 percent) and most likely to be reported by American Indians/Alaska Natives (21.8 percent) and whites (21.5 percent).
- Among youths aged 12 to 17 in 2001, blacks and Asians were least likely to report past month alcohol use. Only 11.5 percent of Asian youths and 10.6 percent of black youths were current drinkers, while rates were above 15 percent for other racial/ethnic groups. However, the rates for Asian and black youths were significantly higher than the rates reported in 2000 (7.1 and 8.8 percent, for Asians and blacks, respectively).

Education

- The rate of past month alcohol use increased with increasing levels of education. Among adults aged 18 or older with less than a high school education, 33.4 percent were current drinkers in 2001, while 65.2 percent of college graduates were current drinkers. However, binge drinking and heavy drinking were least prevalent among college graduates (Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3 Past Month Alcohol Use among Adults Aged 18 or Older, by Educational Attainment: 2001



College Students

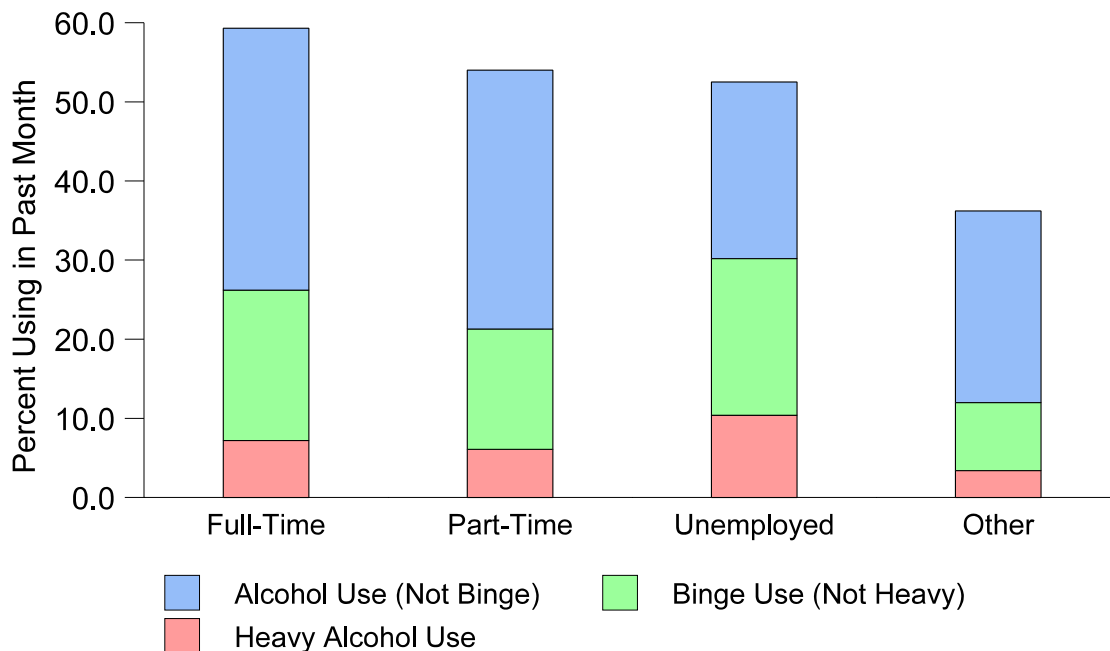
- Young adults aged 18 to 22 enrolled full time in college were more likely than their peers not enrolled full time (this category includes part-time college students and persons not enrolled in college) to report all three levels of drinking in 2001. Past month alcohol use was reported by 63.1 percent of full-time college students compared with 53.3 percent of their counterparts who were not currently enrolled full time. Binge and heavy use rates for college students were 42.5 and 18.2 percent, respectively, compared with 37.7 and 12.1 percent, respectively, for other persons aged 18 to 22.

- Among full-time college students 18 to 22 years of age, males were more likely than females to report all three levels of drinking in 2001. Of the full-time undergraduates, 67.5 percent of males and 59.2 percent of females reported current alcohol use. Among full-time male college students, 52.6 percent reported binge drinking and 25.5 percent reported heavy drinking. About one third (33.5 percent) of female full-time college students reported binge drinking in 2001 and 11.7 percent reported heavy alcohol use.

Employment

- Rates for current alcohol use were 59.3 percent for full-time employed adults aged 18 or older in 2001 compared with 52.5 percent of their unemployed peers. However, the patterns were different for binge and heavy alcohol use; rates were higher for unemployed persons (30.2 and 10.4 percent, respectively, for binge and heavy use) than for full-time employed persons (26.2 and 7.2 percent, respectively) (Figure 3.4).

Figure 3.4 Past Month Alcohol Use among Adults Aged 18 or Older, by Employment Status: 2001



- Most binge and heavy alcohol users are employed. Among the 43.9 million adult binge drinkers in 2001, 35.4 million (81 percent) were employed either full or part time. Similarly, 9.8 million (80 percent) of the 12.4 million adult heavy drinkers were employed.

Geographic Area

- The rate of past month alcohol use for people aged 12 or older in 2001 was lowest in the East South Central division (34.5 percent) and highest in New England (59.5 percent).
- Among all people aged 12 or older, the rate of alcohol use in 2001 in large metropolitan areas was 50.7 percent compared with 41.9 percent in nonmetropolitan areas. However, there was less variation across county types in rates of binge and heavy drinking. The rate of heavy alcohol use was 5.4 percent in large metropolitan areas and 5.9 percent in nonmetropolitan areas.
- Patterns of alcohol use across county type were different for youths and adults in 2001. Among youths aged 12 to 17, the rates of past month alcohol use and heavy alcohol use were higher in rural areas than in large metropolitan areas (for past month use, the difference was marginally significant, $p < .07$). Among adults, the rates of past month alcohol use were higher in large metropolitan areas than in rural areas, while there were no differences in heavy use rates across these county types (see Figures 3.5 and 3.6 on the next page).

Association with Illicit Drug and Tobacco Use

- As observed in prior years, the level of alcohol use was strongly associated with illicit drug use in 2001. Among the 12.9 million heavy drinkers aged 12 or older, 30.7 percent were current illicit drug users. For binge drinkers who were not heavy drinkers, 15.9 percent reported past month illicit drug use. Other drinkers (i.e., past month alcohol use but not binge drinking) had a rate of 5.4 percent for current illicit drug use, and persons who did not use alcohol in the past month were least likely to use illicit drugs (2.8 percent).
- Drinking levels also were associated with tobacco use. Among heavy alcohol users, 61.1 percent smoked cigarettes in the past month, while only 20.6 percent of non-binge current drinkers and 17.8 percent of nondrinkers were current smokers. Smokeless tobacco and cigar use also were more prevalent among heavy drinkers than among non-binge drinkers and nondrinkers.

Driving Under the Influence of Alcohol

- More than 1 in 10 Americans aged 12 or older in 2001 (25.1 million persons) drove under the influence of alcohol at least once in the 12 months prior to the interview. Between 2000 and 2001, the rate of driving under the influence of alcohol increased from 10.0 to 11.1 percent. Among young adults aged 18 to 25 years, 22.8 percent drove under the influence of alcohol.

Figure 3.5 Past Month Alcohol Use in Large Metropolitan and Rural Counties, by Age: 2001

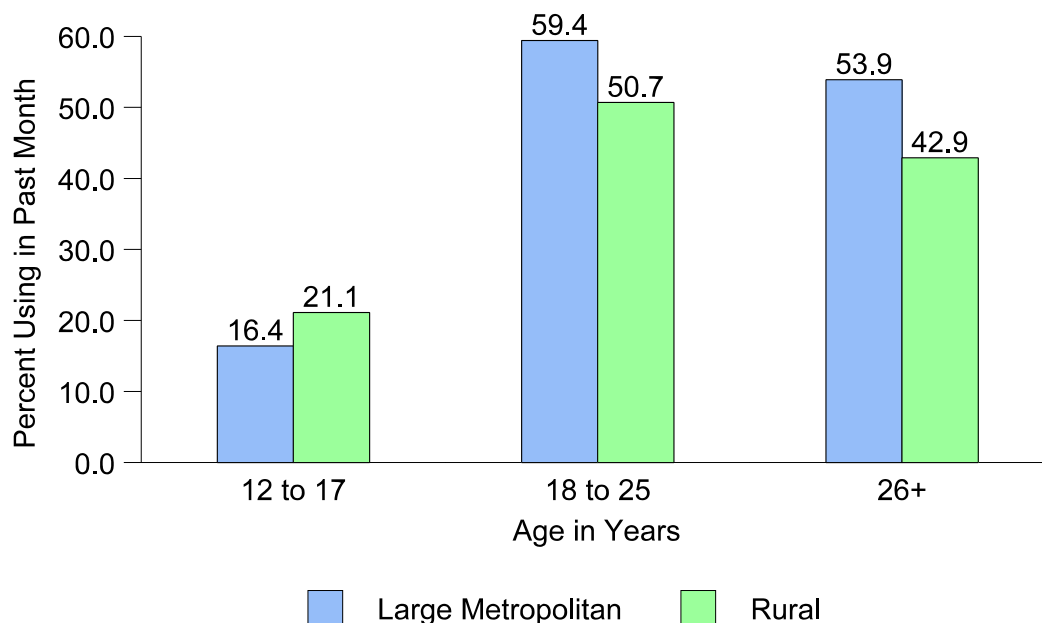


Figure 3.6 Heavy Alcohol Use in Large Metropolitan and Rural Counties, by Age: 2001

