

Data Spotlight

National Survey on Drug Use and Health

June 19, 2012

Youths in Therapeutic Foster Care at Elevated Risk for Substance Use

Adolescents who are unable to live at home or in traditional foster care because of emotional, behavioral, or health-related problems (e.g., being medically fragile) may be placed in therapeutic foster care as an alternative to living in a juvenile detention facility, hospital, or other type of residential care setting.¹ In therapeutic foster care, youths live with foster parents who are specially trained to deal with emotional, behavioral, or health-related disorders.

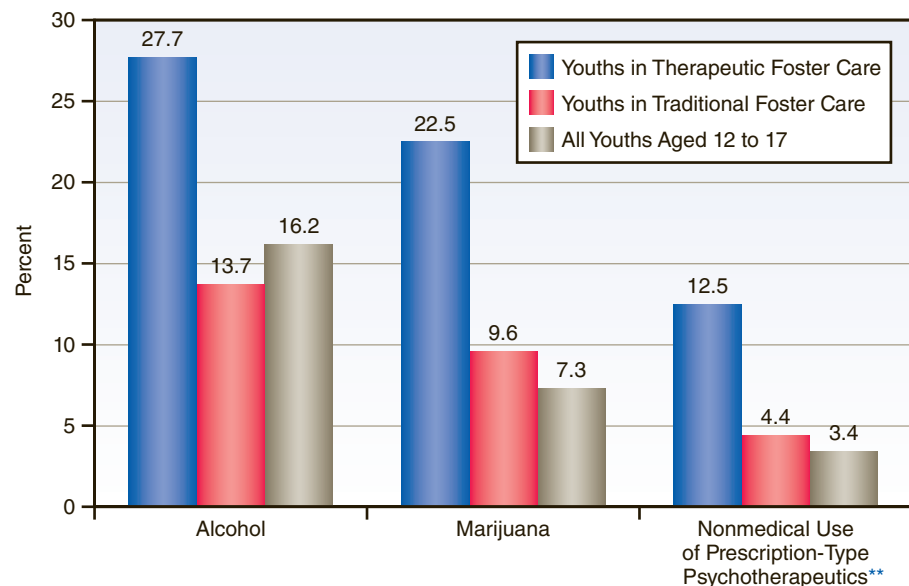
According to the 2002 to 2010 National Surveys on Drug Use and Health, an annual average of 133,000 youths aged 12 to 17 were in therapeutic foster care in the past year. Compared with the national average for same-aged youths, adolescents who had been in therapeutic foster care were more likely to have consumed alcohol, used marijuana, or engaged in the nonmedical use of prescription drugs in the past month (Figure). Youths who had been in therapeutic foster care in the past year were also more likely to have used substances than those currently living in traditional foster care.

These higher rates of substance use may be because children placed in therapeutic foster care tend to have backgrounds or characteristics that put them at overall higher risk for negative outcomes.² These results suggest that therapeutic foster care parents may benefit from the inclusion of substance abuse prevention and intervention as a component of their training curriculum.

¹ Hahn, R. A., Lowy, J., Bilukha, O., Snyder, S., Briss, P., Crosby, A., Fullilove, M. T., Tuma, F., Moscicki, E. K., Liberman, A., Schofield, A., & Corso, P. S. (2004). Therapeutic foster care for the prevention of violence: A report on recommendations of the Task Force on Community Preventive Services. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 53(RR10), 1-8. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5310a1.htm>

² Dorsey, S., Burns, B. J., Southerland, D. G., Cox, J. R., Wagner, H. R., & Farmer, E. M. Z. (2011). Prior trauma exposure for youth in treatment foster care. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*. Advance online publication. doi 10.1007/s10826-011-9542-4.

Past Month Substance Use among Youths Aged 12 to 17, by Foster Care Status*: 2002 to 2010



* Youths in therapeutic foster care include all youths who have been in therapeutic foster care in the past year. Youths in traditional foster care include youths who are currently living with foster parents and who have not been in therapeutic foster care in the past year.

** Nonmedical use of prescription-type psychotherapeutics includes the nonmedical use of pain relievers, tranquilizers, stimulants, or sedatives and does not include over-the-counter drugs. Estimates do not include data from methamphetamine items added in 2005 and 2006.

Source: The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) is an annual survey sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The survey collects data by administering questionnaires to a representative sample of the population through face-to-face interviews at their places of residence.

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