

The NSDUH Report

August 2, 2007

Gender Differences in Alcohol Use and Alcohol Dependence or Abuse: 2004 and 2005

In Brief

- In 2004 and 2005, males aged 12 or older were more likely than females to report past month alcohol use (57.5 vs. 45.0 percent), past month binge alcohol use (30.8 vs. 15.1 percent), and past month heavy alcohol use (10.5 vs. 3.3 percent)
- Males were twice as likely as females to have met the criteria for alcohol dependence or abuse in the past year (10.5 vs. 5.1 percent); these findings were generally consistent across demographic groups
- Among past month heavy alcohol users aged 12 or older, males and females had similar rates of past year alcohol dependence or abuse; for all other levels of current alcohol use, males were more likely to meet the criteria for past year alcohol dependence or abuse than females

Recent research indicates that rates of alcohol use and alcohol dependence or abuse are higher among males than females,¹ and males account for more treatment admissions for alcohol abuse than do females, according to the Treatment Episode Data Set.² Prior research has attempted to determine the extent to which higher rates of dependence reflect higher rates of use versus differences in the vulnerability to dependence among users.³

The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) asks persons aged 12 or older to report on their frequency and quantity of alcohol use during the 30 days prior to the survey. NSDUH defines *binge alcohol use* 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 each of 5 or more days in the past 30 days. (All heavy alcohol users are also binge alcohol users.) NSDUH also asks questions to assess symptoms of alcohol dependence or abuse during the past year.

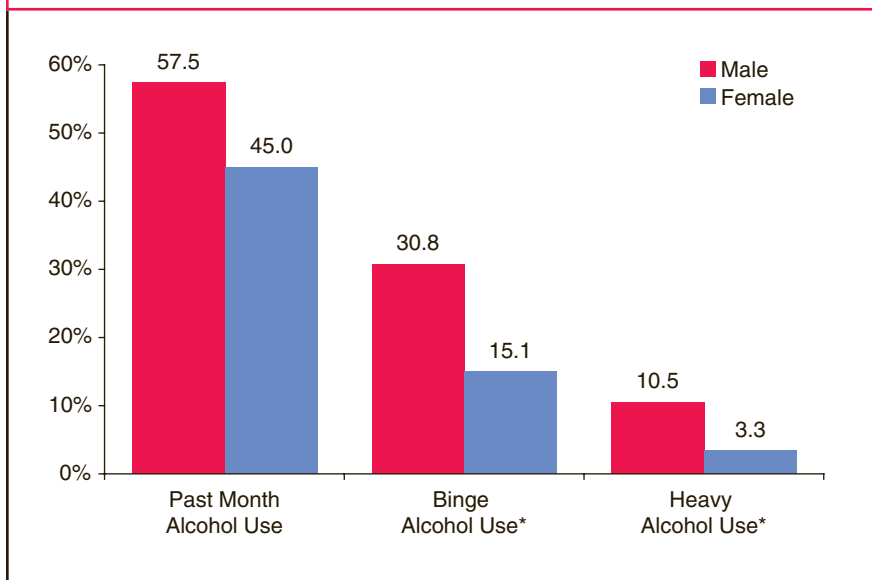
NSDUH defines dependence on or abuse of alcohol using criteria specified in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV)*.⁴ Alcohol dependence or abuse includes such symptoms as withdrawal, tolerance, use in dangerous situations, trouble with the law, and interference in major obligations at work, school, or home during the past year.

This report examines gender differences in past month alcohol use and past year alcohol dependence or abuse. All findings presented in this report are annual averages based on combined 2004 and 2005 NSDUH data.

Past Month Alcohol Use, by Gender

Combined data from 2004 and 2005 indicate that in the past month, 51.1 percent of persons aged 12 or older

Figure 1. Percentages of Past Month Alcohol Use among Persons Aged 12 or Older, by Gender: 2004 and 2005



Source: SAMHSA, 2004 and 2005 NSDUHs.

Table 1. Percentages of Past Year Alcohol Dependence or Abuse among Persons Aged 12 or Older, by Gender and Demographic Characteristics: 2004-2005

Demographic Characteristic	Male		Female	
	Percent	Standard Error	Percent	Standard Error
<i>Age Group</i>				
12 to 17	5.5	0.19	6.0	0.21
18 to 25***	22.0	0.38	12.9	0.30
26 to 49***	12.4	0.33	5.4	0.21
50 or Older***	5.0	0.34	1.6	0.19
<i>Race/Ethnicity**</i>				
White***	10.6	0.22	5.6	0.15
Black or African American***	9.7	0.62	3.5	0.27
American Indian or Alaska Native	19.5	3.83	13.7	2.52
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	12.8	3.76	5.7	2.08
Asian***	5.4	0.70	2.3	0.44
Two or More Races	9.9	1.28	7.7	1.27
Hispanic or Latino***	12.1	0.59	3.8	0.27
<i>Family Income</i>				
Less Than \$20,000***	14.0	0.52	6.0	0.25
\$20,000-\$49,000***	10.3	0.32	4.6	0.19
\$50,000-\$74,999***	9.3	0.42	4.6	0.29
\$75,000 or More***	9.7	0.37	5.2	0.27

Source: SAMHSA, 2004 and 2005 NSDUHs.

used alcohol, 22.7 percent reported binge alcohol use, and 6.8 percent indicated heavy alcohol use. Males were more likely than females to report past month alcohol use, binge alcohol use, and heavy alcohol use (Figure 1). These gender differences were generally consistent across demographic characteristics (i.e., age group, race/ethnicity, and family income).

Alcohol Dependence or Abuse, by Gender

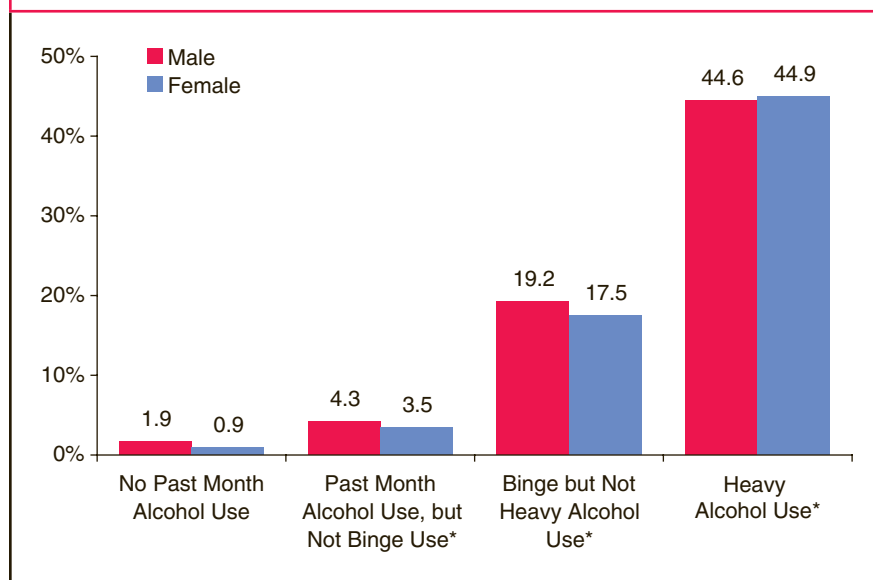
Combined data from 2004 and 2005 indicate that 7.7 percent of persons aged 12 or older (an estimated 18.7 million annually) were dependent on or abused alcohol in the past year. Males were twice as likely as females to have met the criteria for alcohol dependence or abuse in the past year (10.5 vs. 5.1 percent). Although gender differences in alcohol dependence or abuse were generally consistent across demographic groups, there were some exceptions (Table 1). For example, females aged 12 to 17 were equally likely to have met the criteria for alcohol dependence or abuse as their male counterparts (6.0 and 5.5 percent, respectively).

Alcohol Dependence or Abuse, by Gender and Level of Alcohol Use

The rate of past year alcohol dependence or abuse varied by level of alcohol use. Nearly half of the past month heavy alcohol users aged 12 or older (44.7 percent) met the criteria for past year alcohol dependence or abuse, compared with 18.5 percent of those who were binge drinkers but not heavy alcohol users, 3.8 percent who were past month alcohol users but not binge drinkers, and 1.3 percent who were not past month alcohol users.

As noted earlier, males aged 12 or older were more likely than their female counterparts to be heavy drinkers; however, among past month heavy alcohol users, there was no difference in the rate of past year alcohol

Figure 2. Percentages Reporting Past Year Alcohol Dependence or Abuse among Persons Aged 12 or Older, by Gender and Level of Current Alcohol Use: 2004 and 2005



Source: SAMHSA, 2004 and 2005 NSDUHs.

dependence or abuse between males and females (Figure 2). For all other levels of past month alcohol use, males were more likely to have met the criteria for past year alcohol dependence or abuse than females. For example, 19.2 percent of males who were binge drinkers but not heavy alcohol users met the criteria for past year alcohol dependence or abuse compared with 17.5 percent of females.

End Notes

- Office of Applied Studies. (2006). *Results from the 2005 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National findings* (DHHS Publication No. SMA 06-4194, NSDUH Series H-30). Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.
- Office of Applied Studies. (2006). *Treatment Episode Data Set (TEDS) highlights - 2004: National admissions to substance abuse treatment services* (DHHS Publication No. SMA 06-4140, Drug and Alcohol Services Information System Series S-31). Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. [Available at <http://www.oas.samhsa.gov/dasis.htm#teds3>]
- Anthony, J. C., Warner, L. A., & Kessler, R. C. (1994). Comparative epidemiology of dependence on tobacco, alcohol, controlled substances, and inhalants: Basic findings from the National Comorbidity Survey. *Experimental and Clinical Psychopharmacology*, 2, 244-268.

- American Psychiatric Association. (1994). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (4th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.

Figure and Table Notes

- * NSDUH defines *binge alcohol use* 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 each of 5 or more days in the past 30 days. All heavy alcohol users are also binge alcohol users.
- ** Race/ethnicity categories are determined by combining the responses from two separate questions. For this report, respondents identifying themselves as Hispanic were assigned to the Hispanic group regardless of their racial identification. Respondents identifying themselves as non-Hispanic were grouped according to their racial identification. Thus, "white" refers to those identifying themselves as non-Hispanic and white.

- ***Differences between estimates for males and females significant at $p < 0.05$.

Suggested Citation

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Office of Applied Studies. (August 2, 2007). *The NSDUH Report: Gender Differences in Alcohol Use and Alcohol Dependence or Abuse: 2004 and 2005*. Rockville, MD.

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Research findings from the SAMHSA 2004 and 2005 National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUHs)

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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 2004 and 2005 data used in this report are based on information obtained from 136,068 respondents aged 12 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 on NSDUH used in compiling data for this issue is available in the following publications:

Office of Applied Studies. (2006). *Results from the 2005 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National findings* (DHHS Publication No. SMA 06-4194, NSDUH Series H-30). Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

Office of Applied Studies. (2005). *Results from the 2004 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National findings* (DHHS Publication No. SMA 05-4062, NSDUH Series H-28). 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, 2003, 2004, and 2005 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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