

The NSDUH Report

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Underage Alcohol Use among Full-Time College Students

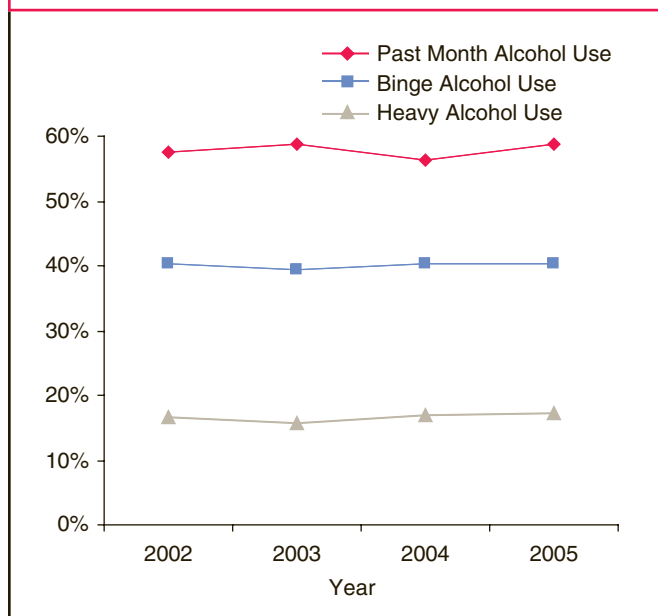
In Brief

- The rates of past month, binge, and heavy alcohol use among full-time college students aged 18 to 20 remained steady from 2002 to 2005
- Based on 2002 to 2005 combined data, 57.8 percent of full-time college students aged 18 to 20 used alcohol in the past month, 40.1 percent engaged in binge alcohol use, and 16.6 percent engaged in heavy alcohol use
- Based on 2002 to 2005 combined data, male full-time students in this age group were more likely to have used alcohol in the past month, engaged in binge alcohol use, and engaged in heavy alcohol use than their female counterparts

During the past decade, increased attention has been directed toward underage alcohol use and binge drinking among college students and the negative consequences related to these behaviors.¹⁻⁵ Binge drinking refers to the “consumption of a sufficiently large amount of alcohol to place the drinker at increased risk of experiencing alcohol-related problems and to place others at increased risk of experiencing secondhand effects” (p. 287).²

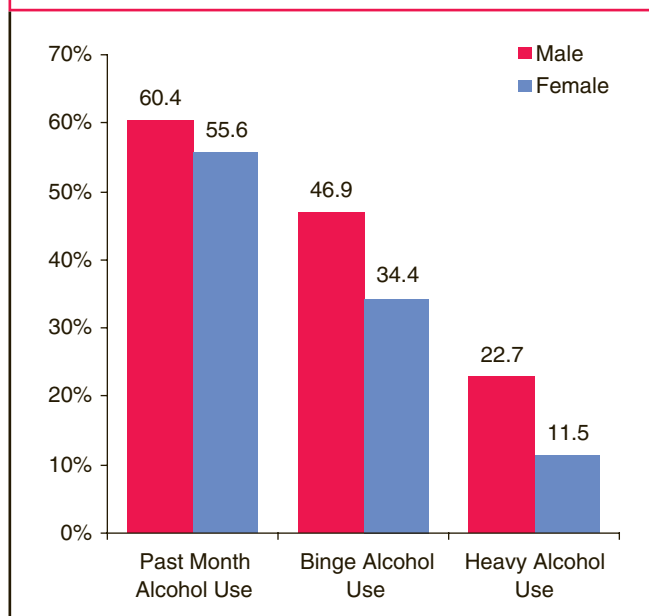
The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) asks respondents aged 12 or older to report their frequency and quantity of alcohol use during the month before the survey. NSDUH defines binge alcohol use as drinking five or more drinks on the same occasion (i.e., at the same time or within a couple of hours of each other) on at least 1 day in the past 30 days. NSDUH defines heavy alcohol use 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.

Figure 1. Past Month, Binge, and Heavy Alcohol Use among Full-Time College Students Aged 18 to 20, by Year: 2002-2005



Source: SAMHSA, 2002-2005 NSDUHs.

Figure 2. Past Month, Binge, and Heavy Alcohol Use among Full-Time College Students Aged 18 to 20, by Gender: 2002-2005



Source: SAMHSA, 2002-2005 NSDUHs.

NSDUH also asks young adults aged 18 to 22 about college attendance. For this analysis, respondents were classified as college students if they reported that they were in their first through fourth year (or higher) at a college or university and that they were a full-time student. Respondents who were on break from college were considered enrolled if they intended to return to college or university when the break ended.⁶

Data from the 2005 survey indicate that young adults aged 18 to 22 enrolled full time in college were more likely than their peers not enrolled full time (i.e., part-time college students and persons not currently enrolled in college) to use alcohol in the past month, binge drink, and drink heavily.⁷

This report examines trends and patterns in the rates of alcohol use among full-time college students who have not yet reached the legal drinking age (i.e., college students aged 18 to 20) based on data from the 2002, 2003, 2004, and 2005 NSDUHs.

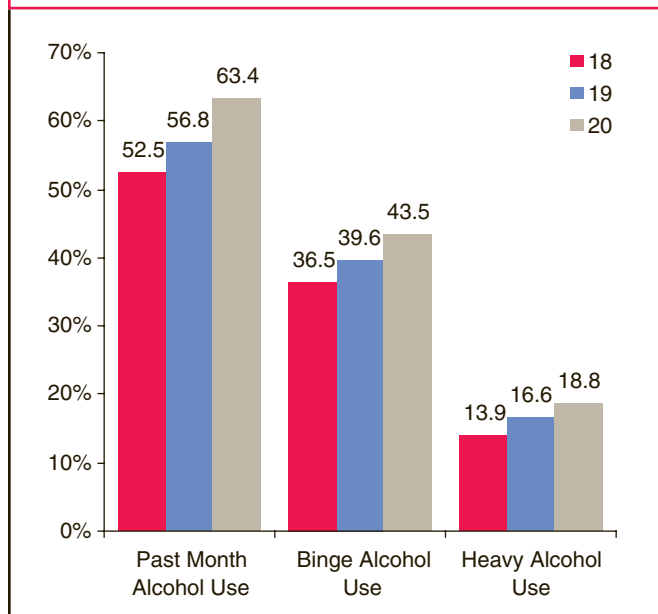
Demographic Characteristics of Full-Time College Students Aged 18 to 20

From 2002 to 2005, an average of 5.2 million young adults aged 18 to 20 were enrolled full time in college each year. This represents 41.3 percent of young adults in this age range. Full-time college students included an average of 2.8 million women aged 18 to 20 (46.0 percent of women in this age group) and 2.4 million men aged 18 to 20 years (36.9 percent of men in this age group) each year. Over half of full-time college students aged 18 to 20 (58.2 percent) lived in the same household with a parent, grandparent, or parent-in-law, while 41.8 percent lived independently of a parental relative.⁸

Past Month Alcohol Use

From 2002 to 2005, the rates of past month alcohol use among full-time college students aged 18 to 20 remained steady (Figure 1), with an annual average of 57.8 percent (3.0 million

Figure 3. Past Month, Binge, and Heavy Alcohol Use among Full-Time College Students Aged 18 to 20, by Age: 2002-2005



Source: SAMHSA, 2002-2005 NSDUHs.

students) using alcohol in the past month. Male full-time students in this age group were more likely to have used alcohol in the past month than their female counterparts (60.4 vs. 55.6 percent) (Figure 2). Rates of past month alcohol use among this group increased with increasing age (Figure 3). Among full-time college students aged 18 to 20, those living with a parent, grandparent, or parent-in-law were less likely to have used alcohol in the past month than those who were not living with a parental relative (51.2 vs. 67.0 percent).

Binge Alcohol Use

Rates of past month binge alcohol use among full-time college students aged 18 to 20 also remained steady from 2002 to 2005 (Figure 1), with an annual average of 40.1 percent (2.1 million students) engaging in binge alcohol use. In this group of young adult students, males were more likely to have engaged in binge alcohol use than females (46.9 vs. 34.4 percent) (Figure 2).

Rates of binge alcohol use among this group also increased with increasing age (Figure 3). Full-time college students aged 18 to 20 living with a parent, grandparent, or parent-in-law were less likely to have engaged in binge alcohol use than full-time college students aged 18 to 20 who were not living with a parental relative (34.0 vs. 48.5 percent).

Heavy Alcohol Use

From 2002 to 2005, rates of heavy alcohol use among full-time college students aged 18 to 20 also remained steady (Figure 1), with an annual average of 16.6 percent (866,000 students) engaging in heavy drinking. As is true for past month and binge alcohol use, rates of heavy alcohol use were higher among males than females and increased with increasing age (Figures 2 and 3). Among full-time college students aged 18 to 20, those living with a parent, grandparent, or parent-in-law were less likely to have engaged in heavy alcohol use than those who were not living with a parental relative (12.3 vs. 22.5 percent).

End Notes

- Reifman, A., & Watson, W. K. (2003). Binge drinking during the first semester of college: Continuation and desistance from high school patterns. *Journal of American College Health, 52*, 73-81.
- Wechsler, H., & Nelson, T. F. (2001). Binge drinking and the American college student: What's five drinks? *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors, 15*, 287-291.
- Turrissi, R., Wiersma, K. A., & Hughes, K. K. (2000). Binge-drinking-related consequences in college students: Role of drinking beliefs and mother-teen communications. *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors, 14*, 342-355.
- Weingardt, K. R., Baer, J. S., Kivlahan, D. R., Roberts, L. J., Miller, E. T., & Marlatt, G. A. (1998). Episodic heavy drinking among college students: Methodological issues and longitudinal perspectives. *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors, 12*, 155-167.
- Wechsler, H., Davenport, A., Dowdall, G., Moeykens, B., & Castillo, S. (1994). Health and behavioral consequences of binge drinking in college: A national survey of students at 140 campuses. *Journal of the American Medical Association, 272*, 1672-1677.
- Respondents whose current college enrollment status was unknown were excluded from the analysis.
- 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.
- Living with a parental relative is defined as currently living in the same household with a parent, grandparent, or parent-in-law. Respondents who did not live with a parental relative and had unknown information on one or more household relationships were excluded from this analysis.

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Research findings from the SAMHSA 2002-2005 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 2002, 2003, 2004, and 2005 data are based on information obtained from 35,634 persons aged 18 to 20. 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.

Office of Applied Studies. (2004). *Results from the 2003 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National findings* (DHHS Publication No. SMA 04-3964, NSDUH Series H-25). Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

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