

# The NSDUH Report

March 19, 2009

## Concurrent Illicit Drug and Alcohol Use

### In Brief

- Illicit drug use concurrent with alcohol use (i.e., during or within 2 hours of last alcohol use) was reported by 5.6 percent of past month alcohol users in 2006 and 2007; this is equivalent to an estimated 7.1 million persons
- The illicit drug most frequently used with alcohol was marijuana (reported by 4.8 percent of past month alcohol users)
- Among past month alcohol users, adolescents aged 12 to 17 and young adults aged 18 to 25 had higher rates of illicit drug use concurrent with last alcohol use than persons in older age groups
- Among past month alcohol users, those who binged on alcohol during their last occasion of use were more likely than their counterparts who did not binge to have used illicit drugs concurrent with their last alcohol use (13.9 vs. 3.8 percent)

Concurrent use of illicit drugs and alcohol is a serious public health concern because of the potential additive or interactive effects of multiple substance use,<sup>1,2</sup> which may lead to more severe adverse consequences than use of a single substance. Little is known about the prevalence of illicit drug use at the same time or within a few hours of alcohol use. The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) can help to address the need for information in this area. This issue of *The NSDUH Report* examines this topic using annual averages based on combined 2006 and 2007 NSDUH data.<sup>3,4</sup>

### Illicit Drug Use Concurrent with Last Alcohol Use

Illicit drug use concurrent with the respondent's last alcohol use was reported by 5.6 percent of past month alcohol users aged 12 or older; this is equivalent to an estimated 7.1 million persons. The illicit drug most frequently used with alcohol was marijuana (4.8 percent), followed by cocaine and pain relievers (0.6 and 0.4 percent, respectively) (Figure 1).

## Concurrent Illicit Drug and Alcohol Use, by Demographic Characteristics

Among past month alcohol users, males were nearly twice as likely as females to report illicit drug use concurrent with last alcohol use (7.1 vs. 3.9 percent). Rates were higher among adolescent and young adult past month drinkers than their older counterparts (14.2 percent among 12 to 17 year olds, 13.5 percent among 18 to 25 year olds, 7.7 percent among 26 to 34 year olds, 4.3 percent among 35 to 49 year olds, and 1.1 percent among those aged 50 or older) (Figure 2). American Indian or Alaska Native past month drinkers had the highest rate of illicit drug use concurrent with last alcohol use, and Asian drinkers had the lowest rate (11.7 and 2.1 percent, respectively) (Figure 3).

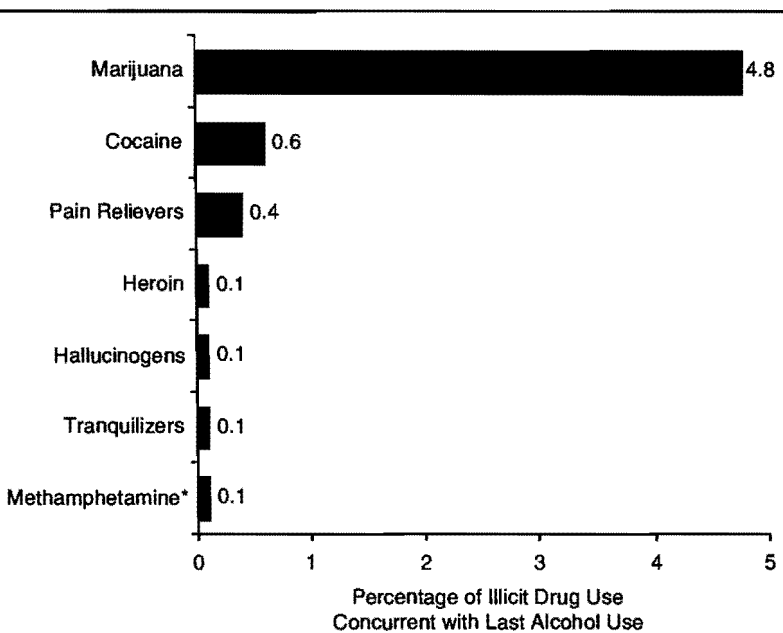
## Concurrent Illicit Drug Use and Level of Alcohol Use

The likelihood of using illicit drugs concurrently with last alcohol use varied with the number of drinks consumed. Among past month alcohol users, those who binged on alcohol during their last occasion of use (i.e., had five or more drinks within a couple of hours) were more likely than their counterparts who did not binge (i.e., had four or fewer drinks) to have used illicit drugs concurrently with their last alcohol use (13.9 vs. 3.8 percent, respectively) (Figure 4).

## Discussion

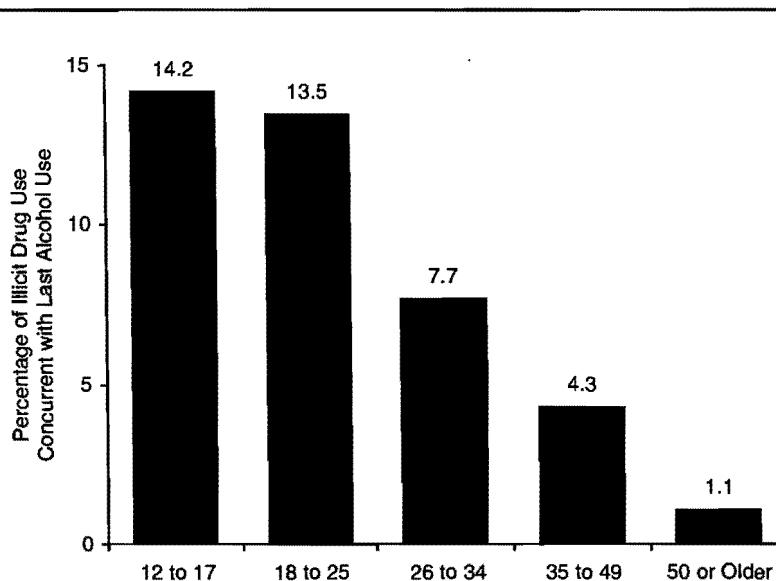
Overall, about 6 percent of past month alcohol users used an illicit drug concurrently with their last

**Figure 1. Illicit Drug Use Concurrent with Last Alcohol Use among Past Month Alcohol Users Aged 12 or Older, by Type of Illicit Drug: 2006 and 2007**



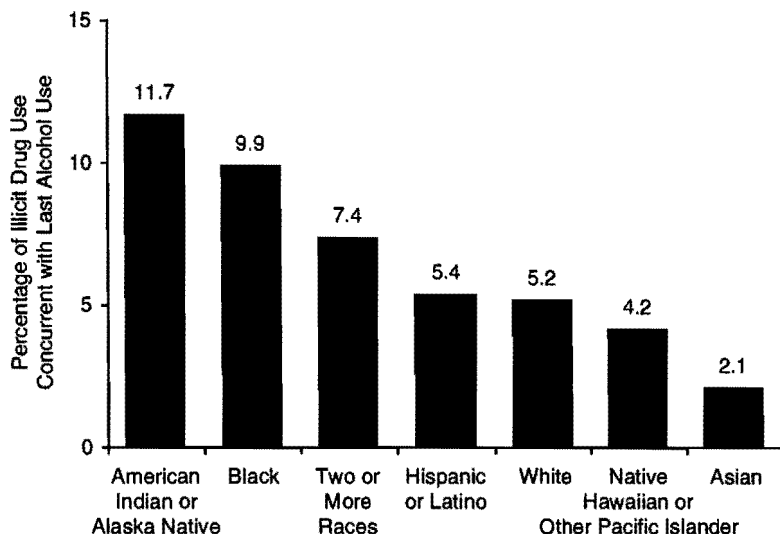
Source: 2006 and 2007 SAMHSA National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUHs).

**Figure 2. Concurrent Illicit Drug and Alcohol Use among Past Month Alcohol Users Aged 12 or Older, by Age Group: 2006 and 2007**



Source: 2006 and 2007 SAMHSA National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUHs).

**Figure 3. Concurrent Illicit Drug and Alcohol Use among Past Month Alcohol Users Aged 12 or Older, by Race/Ethnicity: 2006 and 2007**



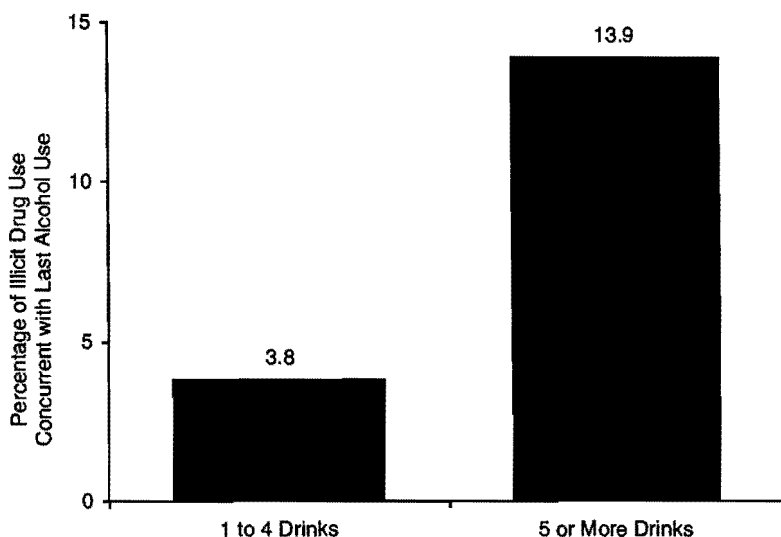
Source: 2006 and 2007 SAMHSA National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUHs).

alcohol use. However, this behavior was more prevalent among certain groups—namely, males, young people aged 12 to 25, and American Indians or Alaska Natives—perhaps reflecting differentials in rates of use of illicit drugs overall. Concurrent illicit drug use also was higher among those who engaged in binge drinking than those who drank less on their last occasion of alcohol use. Some of these differentials also may reflect lower awareness of the potential adverse health consequences of simultaneous alcohol and illicit drug use. Prevention and treatment providers should continue to emphasize the risks of using alcohol and illicit drugs together, with targeted messages for those groups at greatest risk for this behavior.

**End Notes**

- <sup>1</sup> Pennings, E. J., Leccese, A. P., & Wolff, F. A. (2002). Effects of concurrent use of alcohol and cocaine. *Addiction, 97*, 773-783.
- <sup>2</sup> Midanik, L. T., Tam, T. W., & Weisner, C. (2007). Concurrent and simultaneous drug and alcohol use: Results of the 2000 National Alcohol Survey. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence, 90*, 72-80.
- <sup>3</sup> Use of illicit drugs includes use of marijuana/hashish, cocaine (including crack), inhalants, hallucinogens, heroin, or prescription-type drugs used nonmedically.
- <sup>4</sup> Office of Applied Studies. (2008). *Results from the 2007 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National findings* (DHHS Publication No. SMA 08-4343, NSDUH Series H-34). Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

**Figure 4. Concurrent Illicit Drug and Alcohol Use among Past Month Alcohol Users Aged 12 or Older, by Number of Drinks on Last Occasion: 2006 and 2007**



Source: 2006 and 2007 SAMHSA National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUHs).

**Figure Note**

\* Estimates of methamphetamine use include data from methamphetamine items added in 2005 and 2006 and are not comparable with estimates presented in NSDUH reports prior to the 2007 data year. For details, see Section B.4.6 in Appendix B of the Results from the 2007 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National Findings (see end note 4).

**Suggested Citation**

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Research findings from the SAMHSA 2006 and 2007 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). The 2006 and 2007 data used in this report are based on information obtained from 135,672 persons 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.)

The most recent information on NSDUH is available in the following publication:

Office of Applied Studies. (2008). *Results from the 2007 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National findings* (DHHS Publication No. SMA 08-4343, NSDUH Series H-34). Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Also available online: <http://oas.samhsa.gov>.



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