

# The NSDUH Report

April 16, 2009

## Children Living with Substance-Dependent or Substance-Abusing Parents: 2002 to 2007

### In Brief

- Combined data from 2002 to 2007 indicate that over 8.3 million children under 18 years of age (11.9 percent) lived with at least one parent who was dependent on or abused alcohol or an illicit drug during the past year
- Of these, almost 7.3 million (10.3 percent) lived with a parent who was dependent on or abused alcohol, and about 2.1 million (3.0 percent) lived with a parent who was dependent on or abused illicit drugs
- About 5.4 million children under 18 years of age lived with a father who met the criteria for past year substance dependence or abuse, and 3.4 million lived with a mother who met the criteria

Parental substance dependence and abuse can have profound effects on children, including child abuse and neglect, injuries and deaths related to motor vehicle accidents, and increased odds that the children will become substance dependent or abusers themselves. Up-to-date estimates of the number of children living with substance-dependent or substance-abusing parents are needed for planning both adult treatment and prevention efforts and programs that support and protect affected children.

The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) can be used to address this data need. NSDUH annually collects data on alcohol or illicit drug dependence or abuse. It defines dependence or abuse using criteria specified in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV)*,<sup>1</sup> which includes such symptoms as withdrawal, tolerance, use in dangerous situations, trouble with the law, and interference in major

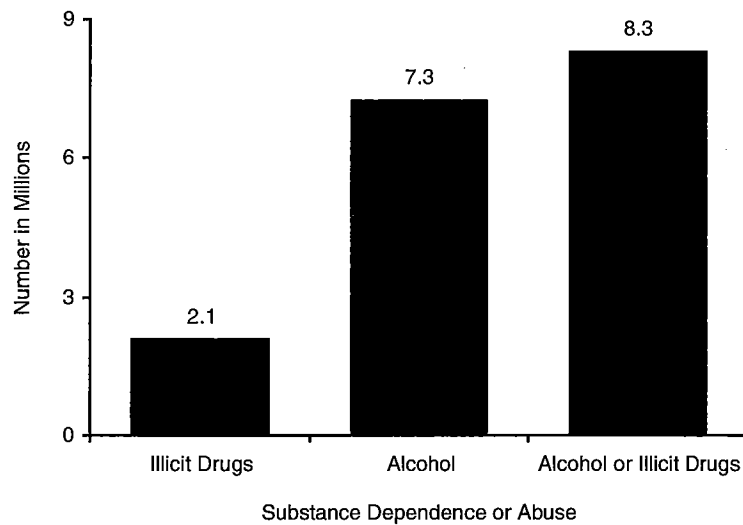
obligations at work, school, or home during the past year. The NSDUH sample includes representative subsamples of mothers and fathers, as well as mother-father pairs who live in the same household. The survey obtains information about children living in the household, including age and relationship to the adult respondent.

This issue of *The NSDUH Report* examines the number of children living with substance-dependent or substance-abusing parents. It focuses on biological, step-, adoptive, and foster children under 18 years of age who were living with one or both parents at the time of the survey interview.<sup>2,3,4,5</sup> All findings are based on annual averages from the combined 2002 to 2007 NSDUH data.

### Children Living with Substance-Dependent or Substance-Abusing Parents

Over 8.3 million children under 18 years of age (11.9 percent) lived with at least one parent who was dependent on or abused alcohol or an illicit drug during the past year (Figure 1).<sup>6</sup> Of these, almost 7.3 million (10.3 percent) lived with a parent who was dependent on or abused alcohol, and about 2.1 million (3.0 percent) lived with a parent who was dependent on or abused an illicit drug. Past year substance dependence or abuse by parents involved almost 14 percent of children aged 5 or younger

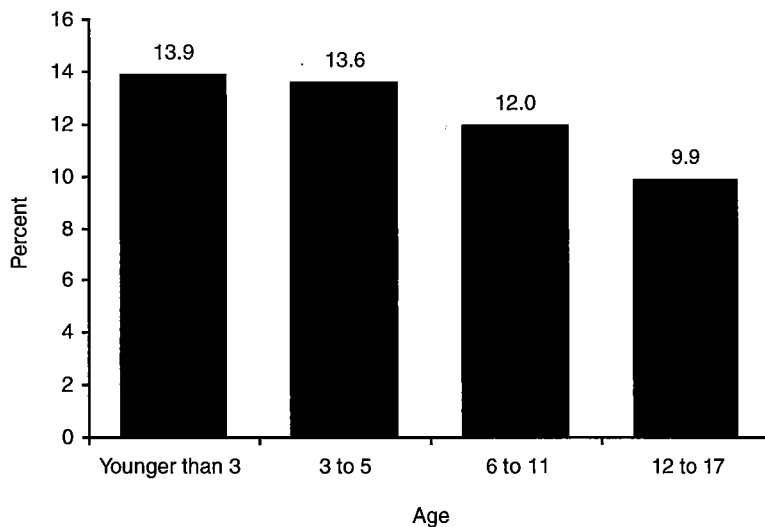
**Figure 1. Estimated Numbers of Children\* under 18 Years of Age Living with One or More Parents with Past Year Substance Dependence or Abuse: 2002 to 2007**



\* Includes biological, step-, adoptive, or foster children. Children under 18 years of age who were not living with one or more parents were excluded from this analysis. Approximately 4.0 percent of children under age 18 were not living with one or more parents.

Source: 2002 to 2007 SAMHSA National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUHs).

**Figure 2. Percentages of Children\* under 18 Years of Age Living with One or More Parents with Past Year Substance Dependence or Abuse, by Child's Age: 2002 to 2007**



\* Includes biological, step-, adoptive, or foster children. Children under 18 years of age who were not living with one or more parents were excluded from this analysis. Approximately 4.0 percent of children under age 18 were not living with one or more parents.

Source: 2002 to 2007 SAMHSA National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUHs).

compared with 12.0 percent of children aged 6 to 11 and 9.9 percent of youths aged 12 to 17 (Figure 2).

### Parental Gender and Household Structure

About 5.4 million children under 18 years of age lived with a father who met the criteria for past year substance dependence or abuse, and 3.4 million lived with a mother who met the criteria (Table 1). These population estimates are equivalent to 10.2 percent of all children in this age range who lived with their father and 5.1 percent of those who lived with their mother. One in eight (12.8 percent) children under age 18 in two-parent households had one or more parents who were dependent on or abused alcohol or illicit drugs in the past year. Among children residing in single-parent households, living with a substance dependent or abusing parent was more likely in father-only households (16.1 percent) than in mother-only households (8.4 percent).

### Discussion

Substance use disorders can have a profound influence on the lives of individuals and their families, particularly their children. The data in this report indicate that more than 1 in 10 children in the United States under the age of 18 were living in homes with a substance-dependent or substance-abusing parent. These data highlight

**Table 1. Estimated Numbers and Percentages of Children\* under 18 Years of Age Living with One or More Parents with Past Year Substance Dependence or Abuse, by Parental Gender and Household Composition: 2002 to 2007**

Characteristic	Estimated Number	%
<b>Parental Gender</b>		
Father	5,445,000	10.2
Mother	3,441,000	5.1
<b>Household Composition</b>		
Two Parents	6,429,000	12.8
One Parent (Father)	492,000	16.1
One Parent (Mother)	1,427,000	8.4

\* Includes biological, step-, adoptive, or foster children. Children under 18 years of age who were not living with one or more parents were excluded from this analysis. Approximately 4.0 percent of children under age 18 were not living with one or more parents.

Source: 2002 to 2007 SAMHSA National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUHs).

the potential breadth of needs for the whole family—from substance abuse treatment for the affected adults to prevention and supportive services for the children.

### End Notes

- 1 American Psychiatric Association. (1994). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (DSM-IV)* (4th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.
- 2 An estimated 96.0 percent of children under 18 years of age lived with at least one parent. Estimates of the child population for this report are adjusted to U.S. Census Bureau estimates in conjunction with interpolated estimates of children not residing with at least one parent. For details, see End Notes 3, 4, and 5.
- 3 U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division. (2008, November 28). *Monthly postcensal civilian non-institutional population, by single year of age, sex, race, and Hispanic origin: 1/1/2005 to 6/1/2005*. Retrieved December 8, 2008, from <http://www.census.gov/popest/national/asrh/2007-nat-ni.html>
- 4 U.S. Census Bureau, Housing and Household Economic Statistics Division, Fertility & Family Statistics Branch. (2008, July 29). *America's families and living arrangements: 2007. Table C3. Living arrangements of children under 18*

*years and marital status of parents, by age, gender, race, and Hispanic origin of the child for all children: 2007*. Retrieved November 18, 2008, from <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hh-fam/cps2007.html>

- 5 U.S. Census Bureau, Housing and Household Economic Statistics Division, Fertility & Family Statistics Branch. (2008, August 27). *America's families and living arrangements: 2004. Table C3. Living arrangements of children under 18 years and marital status of parents, by age, gender, race, and Hispanic origin of the child for all children: March 2004*. Retrieved December 8, 2008, from <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hh-fam/cps2004.html>

- 6 To avoid duplicate counting in estimates of the number of children for whom both parents met the criteria for substance dependence or abuse, data from mother-father pairs in the survey were used to estimate the rate of co-occurrence of these disorders among both parents in two-parent households.

### Suggested Citation

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Office of Applied Studies. (April 16, 2009). *The NSDUH Report: Children Living with Substance-Dependent or Substance-Abusing Parents: 2002 to 2007*. Rockville, MD.

For change of address, corrections, or to be removed from this list, please e-mail: [shortreports@samhsa.hhs.gov](mailto:shortreports@samhsa.hhs.gov).

---

Research findings from the SAMHSA 2002 to 2007 National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUHs)

## Children Living with Substance-Dependent or Substance-Abusing Parents: 2002 to 2007

- Combined data from 2002 to 2007 indicate that over 8.3 million children under 18 years of age (11.9 percent) lived with at least one parent who was dependent on or abused alcohol or an illicit drug during the past year
- Of these, almost 7.3 million (10.3 percent) lived with a parent who was dependent on or abused alcohol, and about 2.1 million (3.0 percent) lived with a parent who was dependent on or abused illicit drugs
- About 5.4 million children under 18 years of age lived with a father who met the criteria for past year substance dependence or abuse, and 3.4 million lived with a mother who met the criteria

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 2002 to 2007 data used in this report are based on information obtained from 87,656 parents aged 18 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 the most recent 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>.



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES  
Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration  
Office of Applied Studies  
[www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)