

The State of Drug Use in America

Key Findings from the 2006 National Survey on Drug Use and Health

Office of National Drug Control Policy 2007

The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) is the largest indicator of drug use trends in the United States and provides yearly national and State level estimates of alcohol, tobacco, illicit drug, and non-medical prescription drug use. Each year, the NSDUH surveys approximately 67,500 people, including residents of households, non-institutionalized group quarters, and civilians living on military bases.

According to the latest NSDUH, an estimated 20.4 million (8.3%) Americans aged 12 and older are current users of an illicit drug. Although there are still too many people using drugs, current drug use is roughly half of what it was at its peak in 1979 (14%). Below are some highlights from the 2006 NSDUH report:

Sustained Declines in Youth Drug Use

- The rate of adolescents ages 12 to 17 reporting drug use in the past month dropped from 11.6 percent in 2002 to 9.8 percent in 2006. This level sustains declines achieved in 2005 (9.9 percent).
- The level of current marijuana use among youth ages 12 to 17 declined significantly, from 8.2 percent in 2002 to 6.7 percent in 2006. The decline in marijuana use was particularly pronounced in adolescent males (a 25% decline between 2002-2006).

High Drug Use Rates Among “Baby Boomers” Continue

- High drug use rates from the peak years of the “counter culture” are still echoed in the relatively high drug use patterns of those same initiates from the 1970’s who are now older.
- There is a striking rise in the drug use rates of those in the age category 50-54, which shot up a stunning 76 percent between 2002 and 2006 (from 3.4 percent to 6.0 percent). This rise does not represent new drug initiation at advancing age; rather, the use is predominately of marijuana, likely acquired as a habit in their youth and carried along as baggage through their life cycle.

Prescription Drug Abuse Remains a Serious Concern

- In 2006, there were 2.6 million past year initiates of the non-medical use of prescription-type drugs. Among this category of illicit drug use, the number of past year initiates of the non-medical use of pain relievers (2.2 million) equaled that of marijuana (2.1 million).
- Past month non-medical use of pain relievers among the population 12 and older increased 11 percent between 2002 and 2006 (from 1.9% to 2.1%). This increase was driven by a 20 percent increase among 18 to 25 year olds (from 4.1% to 4.9%). Among this subpopulation, the non-medical use of psychotherapeutics overall increased between 2002 and 2006—from 5.4 to 6.4 percent, as did the non-medical use of tranquilizers during the same time period (from 1.6% to 2.0%).

Millions of Americans are in Need of Drug Treatment Services

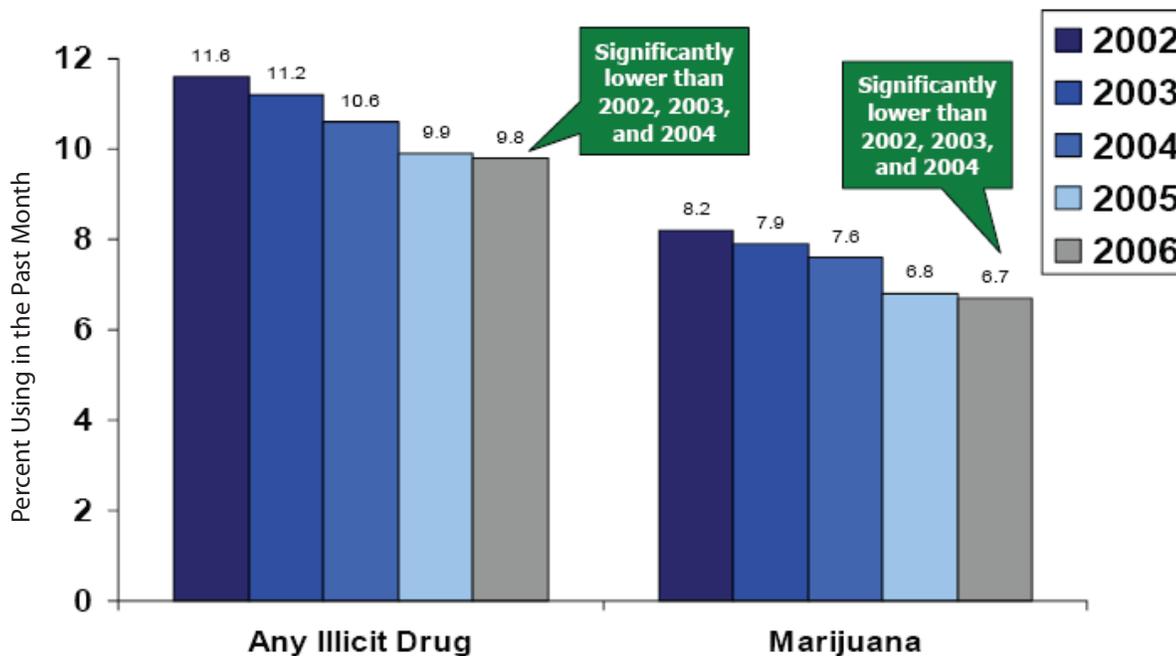
- In 2006, there were an estimated 7.0 million people classified with dependence on or abuse of illicit drugs (with or without alcohol). The specific illicit drugs that had the highest levels of past year dependence or abuse in 2006 were marijuana (4.2 million), followed by cocaine (1.7 million), and pain relievers (1.6 million).
- Of those people who were dependent on or abusive of illicit drugs, 59% were dependent on or abusive of marijuana.

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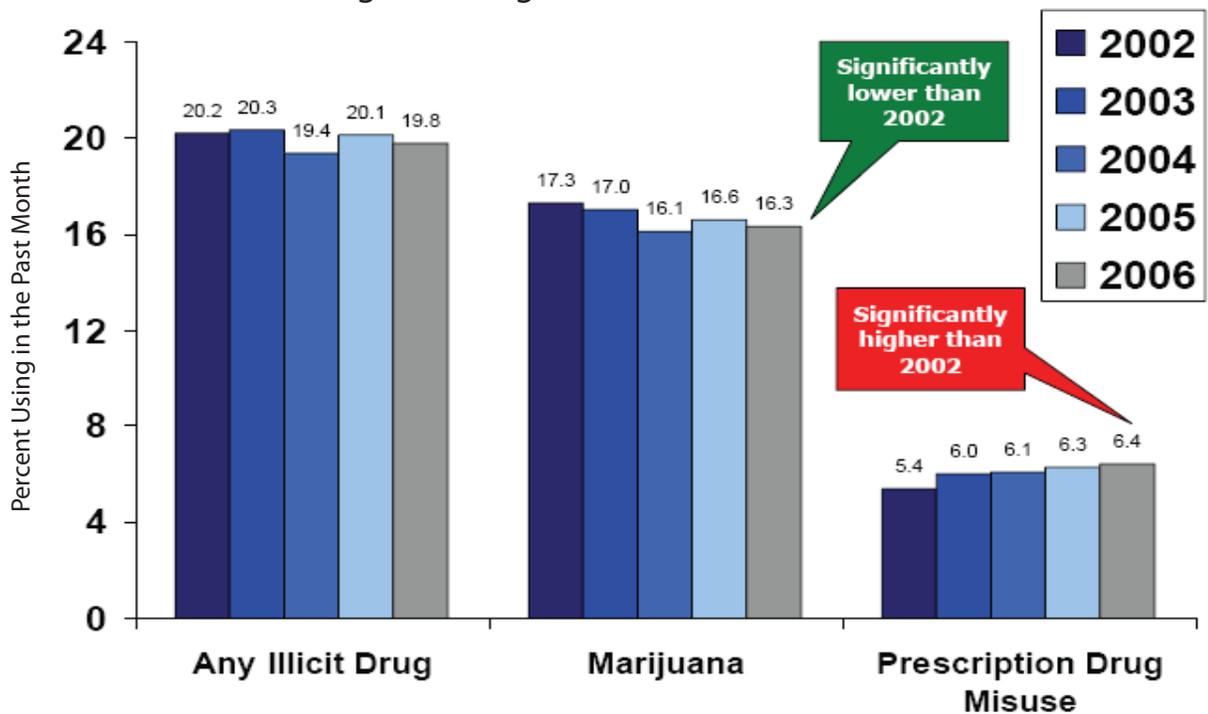
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Past Month Use of Any Illicit Drug and Marijuana among Youths Aged 12-17: 2002-2006



Source: SAMHSA, 2006 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (Sept. '07)

Past Month Use of Selected Illicit Drugs among Young Adults Aged 18 to 25: 2002-2006



Source: SAMHSA, 2006 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (Sept. '07)

