

Girls and Substance Use

Most girls and young woman try alcohol.

- ◆ In 2005, young women and young men in grades 9-12 were nearly equally likely to use alcohol currently[^] (43% versus 44%) and to participate in episodic heavy drinking* (24% versus 28%).⁷
- ◆ In 2005, young women who reported being drunk** increased by grade—20% of 8th graders, 44% of 10th graders, and 54% of 12th graders reported being drunk sometime in their lifetime.⁸ (See also Figure 1.)
- ◆ Overall, Black young women in grades 9-12 were significantly less likely to report episodic heavy drinking than either Latina or White young women (10%, 22%, and 28%, respectively).⁷ (See also Figure 2.)
- ◆ In a survey of young people in grades 6-12, 15% of young women reported drinking wine coolers during the past month and 38% during the past year.¹⁰ (See also Figure 3.)
- ◆ In a study of adolescents ages 12-18, 3 out of 10 young women (31%) reported having tried alcopops (sweet-flavored malt beverages). Six out of ten young women who had seen or heard alcopop advertisements (60%) reported having tried these drinks.¹

Tobacco use is a gateway to other drug use.

- ◆ In a large survey of U.S. high school students in grades 9-12, 14% of young women reported smoking a whole cigarette before age 13.⁷
- ◆ Among young women in grades 9-12, 53% have ever tried a cigarette and 23% reported current[^] cigarette use.⁷

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[^] Current use is defined as at least one use in the 30 days previous to the study. The YRBS uses the same definition for current use of alcohol, cigarettes, and other drugs.

* Episodic heavy drinking is defined as having 5 or more drinks in a row at least once in the previous 30 days. The YRBS uses the same episodic heavy drinking definition for both young women and young men.

** The 2005 Monitoring the Future report does not provide a clear definition for “being drunk.” The 2000 Monitoring the Future question for “being drunk” states: “On how many occasions (if any) have you been drunk or very high from drinking alcoholic beverages?”⁸

Figure 1: Alcohol use among young women, by grade, 2005.⁸

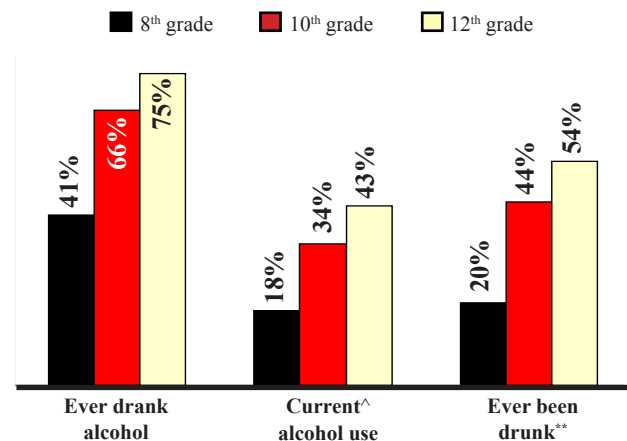


Figure 2: Percentage of high school young women reporting alcohol use, by race/ethnicity, 2005.⁷

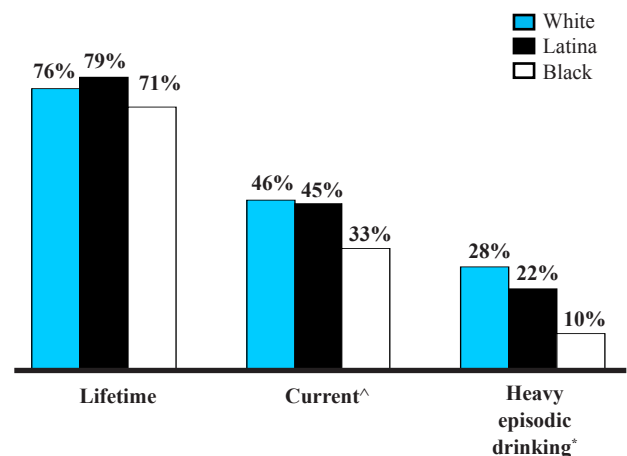
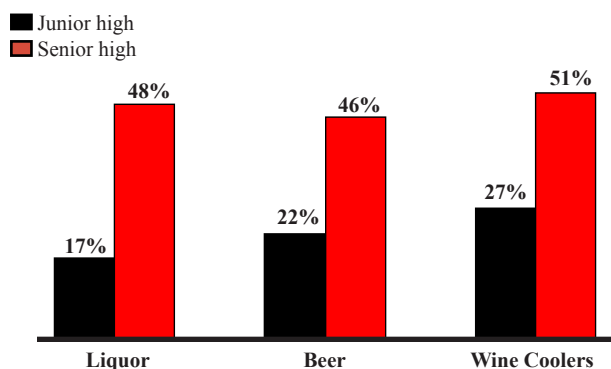


Figure 3: Percentage of girls and young women who drank alcoholic beverages during the past year, by type of drink.¹⁰



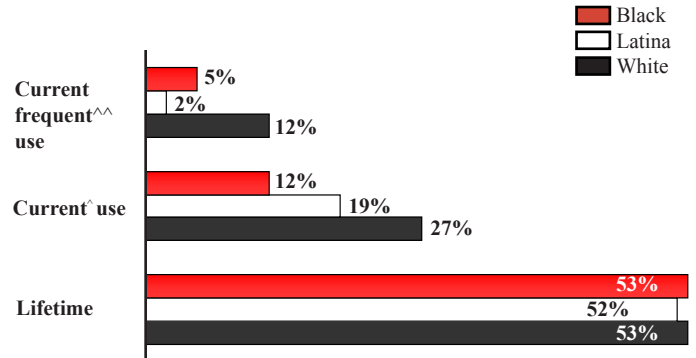
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Tobacco - the gateway drug...

- ♦ White young women were significantly more likely than Black or Latina young women to report smoking at least 20 of the last 30 days^^ (12%, 5%, and 2% respectively).⁷ (See also Figure 4.)
- ♦ Young women in grades 9-12 who were current smokers were twice as likely as young women who had never smoked to think that smokers have more friends. The difference was even more pronounced among girls in grades 6-8—girls who currently smoked were three times as likely as girls who had never smoked to think that smokers have more friends.⁴ (See also Figure 5.)

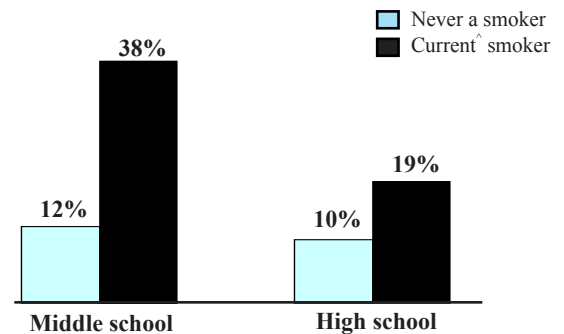
Figure 4: Prevalence of cigarette smoking among high school young women, by race/ethnicity, 2005.⁷



Marijuana is the most widely used illicit (illegal) drug.***

- ♦ In a 2005 study, lifetime marijuana use among girls and young women increased by grade—15% of 8th graders, 32% of 10th graders, and 40% of 12th graders had used marijuana.⁸ (See also Figure 6.)
- ♦ In 2005, nearly identical percentages of Black, Latina, and White young women in grades 9-12 reported ever having used marijuana (38%, 38%, and 36% respectively) and currently using marijuana (19%, 18%, and 19% respectively).⁷ (See Figure 7.)
- ♦ Among young women in grades 9-12 in 2005, 6% reported trying marijuana for the first time before age 13, and 3% reported using marijuana on school property.⁷

Figure 5: Percentage of girls and young women who believe that smokers have more friends, by smoking status, 2000.⁴



Many girls use other illicit drugs, including inhalants, cocaine and heroin.

- ♦ Among young women in 2005, 21% of 8th graders, 37% of 10th graders, and 46% of 12th graders used an illicit drug at some point in their lifetime.⁸
- ♦ The percentage of young women in grades 9-12 who have ever sniffed glue, breathed contents of aerosol spray cans, or inhaled paints or sprays to get high has decreased over time from 18% in 1995 to 14% in 2005.⁷

Figure 6: Lifetime use of marijuana and any illicit drug*** other than marijuana by girls and young women, by grade, 2005.⁸



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^^Current frequent use of cigarettes is defined as smoking on 20 or more days in the previous 30 days.

***The 2005 Monitoring the Future report states that alcohol and tobacco are licit (legal) drugs, although they are illegal for use by minors. For 12th graders: “Any illicit” (illegal) “drug” includes any use of marijuana, LSD, other hallucinogens, crack, other cocaine, or heroin or any use of other narcotics, amphetamines, barbiturates, or tranquilizers not under a doctor’s orders.” For 8th and 10th graders: “The use of other narcotics and barbiturates has been excluded.”⁸

Other illicit drugs...

- ◆ The most widely used illicit drugs other than marijuana among young women in grade 12 were amphetamines (13%), inhalants (9%) and tranquilizers (9%).⁸ (See also Figure 8.)
- ◆ Substances such as spray paint, glue, and gasoline, can be misused as inhalants and obtained easily and legally. In 2005, 11% of 8th grade girls used an inhalant to get high in the past year, compared to 7% of 10th grade young women and 4% of 12th grade young women.⁸ (See also Figure 9.)
- ◆ The lifetime use of methamphetamines among high school young women has decreased over time—9% in 2001, 7% in 2003 and 6% in 2005.⁷
- ◆ In 2005, 1 in 20 young women in grade 12 (5%) reported ever using ecstasy.⁷ This is a decrease from 1 in 10 (10%) in 2003.⁶
- ◆ The percentage of young women in grades 9-12 who have used any form of cocaine one or more times in their lifetime has increased from 4% in 1991 to 7% in 2005. Young women’s use of cocaine one or more times in the past 30 days has also increased from 1% in 1991 to 3% in 2005.⁷
- ◆ The lifetime use of heroin among high school young women has declined over time—3% in 2001, 2% in 2003 and 1% in 2005.⁷

Some girls use other dangerous drugs, such as steroids and diet pills.

- ◆ In 2005, 3% of young women in grades 9-12 reported taking steroid pills or shots without a doctor’s prescription one or more times in their lifetime.⁷ In 2003, however, the rate was higher at 5%.⁶ (See also Figure 10.)
- ◆ White and Latina young women were more likely to use steroids illegally than were Black young women (4%, 2%, and 1% respectively).⁷
- ◆ The use of diet pills, powders, or liquids to lose weight or to keep from gaining weight is higher among young women in grades 9-12 than it is among young men. In 2005, 8% of young women—9% of White, 8% of Latina, and 5% of Black young women—reported using these diet products within the past year, while only 5% of young men reported doing so.⁷

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Figure 7: Percentage of marijuana use among young women in grades 9-12, by race/ethnicity.⁷

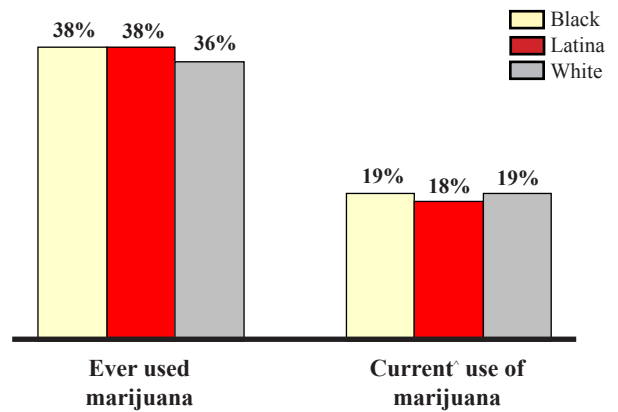


Figure 8: Lifetime use of illicit drugs by 12th grade girls, 2005.⁸

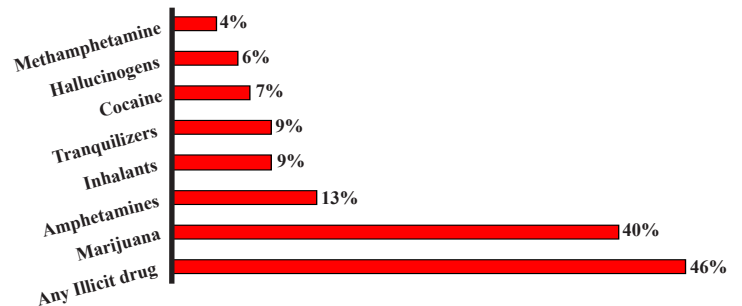
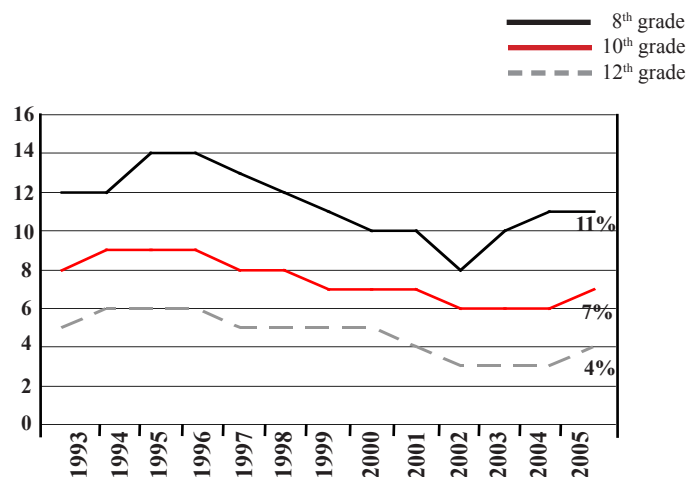


Figure 9: Trends in annual inhalant use by girls and young women, 1993-2005.⁸



Other dangerous drugs...

- ◆ Since 1983, young women have been more likely than young men to use diet pills. In that year, nearly half of young women in grade 12 (45%) reported ever having used nonprescription diet pills. Young women’s lifetime and annual use of these drugs first decreased through 1992 and then increased until 2002, when rates began to decline again, reaching 18% and 13% respectively in 2005.⁸ (See also Figure 11.)

Girls who use substances are more likely to face other health risks.

- ◆ In a survey of 1,000 adolescents ages 12-17, young women who said their boyfriends were two or more years older were more likely than other young women who said their boyfriends were closer to their age or who did not have boyfriends to smoke (65% and 14% respectively), to drink alcohol (58% and 25%), to get drunk (35% and 6%), or to have tried marijuana (50% and 8%). Spending more than 10 hours a week with a boyfriend and having sexually active friends also were associated with increased substance use among young women.⁹ (See also Figure 12.)
- ◆ Among sexually active young women in grades 9–12 in 2005, 19% reported using alcohol or drugs before last sexual intercourse. Sexually active White (21%) and Latina (19%) young women were more likely than Black young women (13%) to have used these substances before their last sexual intercourse.⁷
- ◆ The more substances that sexually active young women have ever used, the less likely they are to have used a condom the last time they had sex and the more likely they are to have had two or more sexual partners in the previous three months. For instance, young women who used 5 or more substances in their lifetime were twice as likely as young women who did not use any substances not to have used condoms during their last intercourse. Thus, they increased their chances of acquiring and of transmitting sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV infection.¹¹ (See Figure 13.)
- ◆ Use of injectable substances puts girls and young women who share needles at direct risk of HIV infection.⁵ Through 2001, 7% of HIV infections and 13% of AIDS cases among young women ages 13-19 were due to injection drug use.³

Figure 10: Percentage of high school students reporting illegal steroid use in their lifetime, by gender and year.^{2,6,7}

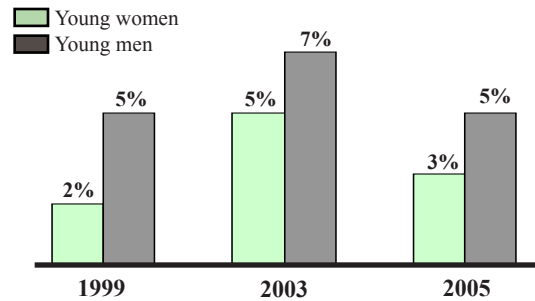


Figure 11: Trends in lifetime and annual use of nonprescription diet pills among 12th grade young women, 1983-2005.⁸

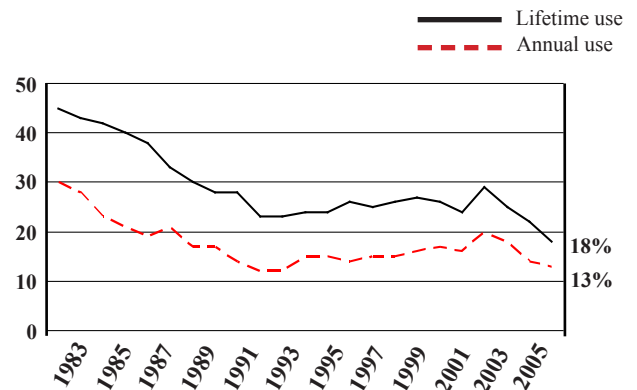


Figure 12: Risk of substance abuse among teen women, by number of risk factors (older boyfriend, > 10 hours spent with boyfriend, sexually active friends).⁹

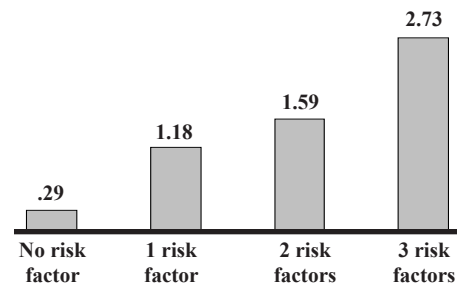
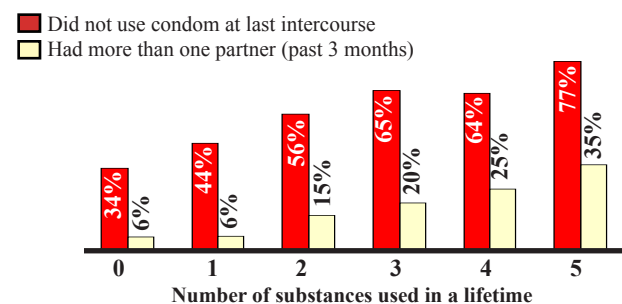


Figure 13: Prevalence of risk factors for sexually transmitted infections among sexually active young women ages 14-22.¹¹



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For more information on girls and health issues, see these Girls Incorporated® Fact Sheets:

- ◆ **Girls and Their Bodies**
- ◆ **Girls and HIV, AIDS, and STDs**
- ◆ **Girls and Sexual Activity**
- ◆ **Girls and Tobacco**

Girls Inc. Preventing Adolescent Pregnancy® bolsters girls' communication and skills as well as their motivation and resources for being in charge of their sexual health and avoiding teen pregnancy.

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Girls Inc. is a nonprofit organization in the United States and Canada that inspires all girls to be strong, smart, and boldSM. With local roots dating to 1864 and national status in the U.S. since 1945, Girls Inc. has responded to the changing needs of girls and their communities through research-based programs and advocacy that empower girls to reach their full potential and to understand, value, and assert their rights.

Girls Inc. programs focus on science, math, and technology, health and sexuality, economic and financial literacy, sports skills, leadership and advocacy, and media literacy for girls ages 6 to 18 throughout the United States and in Canada. While our goal is to reach all girls, we recognize that girls in at-risk communities have an even greater need for our programs. Of those we serve, 70% are girls of color and 66% come from families earning \$25,000 or less; 49% are from single-parent households, most of which are headed by women.

Girls Inc. in 2006 reached nearly 800,000 girls through Girls Inc. affiliates, our website, and educational products. Guided by our vision of empowered girls and an equitable society, Girls Inc. is committed to reaching millions more girls through its programs and public education efforts.

The National Resource Center (NRC) is the organization's research, program development, national services, and training site. Research and evaluation conducted by the NRC provide the foundation for Girls Inc. programs. The NRC also responds to requests for information on girls' issues and distributes Girls Inc. publications.

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