

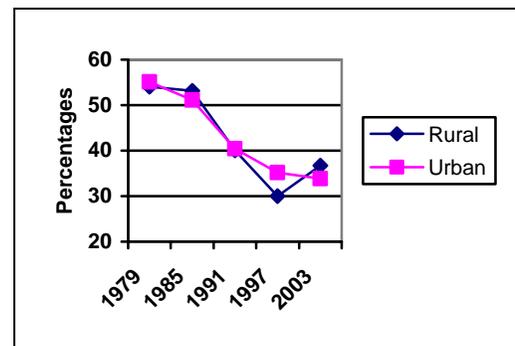
## Substance Abuse in Rural America: Surprising Findings on Prevalence of Alcohol Abuse

### Findings

Alcohol use among rural youth has exceeded that of urban youth in recent years, and *abuse* of alcohol is elevated among rural youth, as highlighted in a study by the Carsey Institute at the University of New Hampshire.

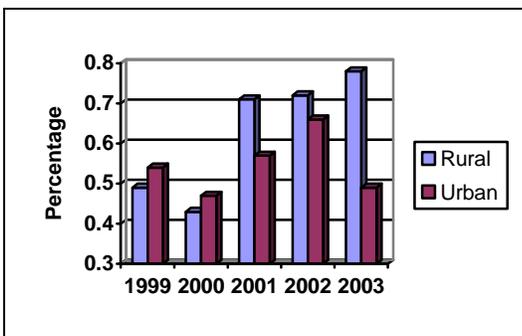
- Rural youth ages 12-17 are significantly more likely to report consuming alcohol than those in urban America, and rural kids ages 12-13 are *more than twice as likely* as urban youth to abuse alcohol.
- In 2003, roughly 37 percent of rural youth reported drinking alcohol in the past year, compared to 34 percent of urban youth. Until the early 1990's, urban and rural youth typically reported drinking at the same rates; since then, the percentages of rural youth drinking has been increasing. Among 16-17 year old rural youth, three in five reported drinking in 2003.
- Rural youth are more likely to abuse alcohol if either parent is absent from the household.

Trends in Alcohol Use among Rural and Urban U.S. Residents Ages 12-17 (NSDUH 1979-2003)



The use of illicit drugs is also concerning in rural America, although it occurs at lower rates than alcohol use and is typically more common in urban areas, except for methamphetamine.

Meth Use among Rural and Urban U.S. Residents Ages 12 and Over (NSDUH 1999-2003)



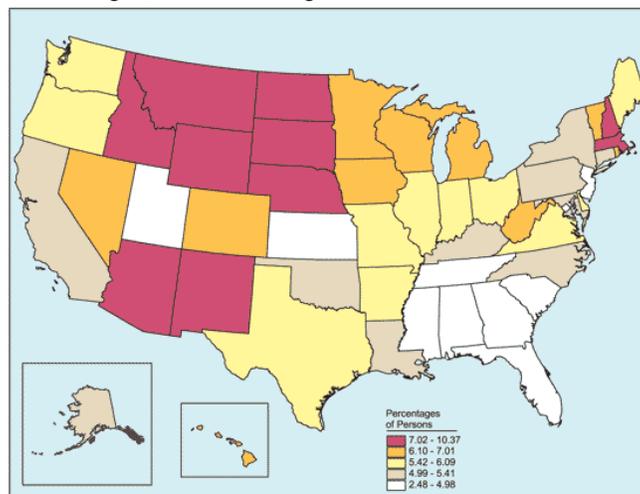
- In 2003, approximately 13 percent of rural residents and 15 percent of urban residents reported using drugs.
- Regarding methamphetamine use, in 2003, the gap between rural and urban use widened, with rural use sharply increasing and urban use decreasing.
- Unemployment was found to be an especially important factor for meth and other stimulant abuse among rural residents. Unemployed rural residents were about *seven times more likely* than unemployed urban residents to abuse stimulants
- Education level is closely tied to illicit drug abuse rates in rural America. Especially among young adults, rates of drug abuse increased as levels of education decreased. One exception was stimulant use (such as meth), where educational attainment did not have any effect on decreasing use.

## Recommendations: The Role of Treatment, Law Enforcement and the Community

**Treatment: States with the highest rates of youth alcohol abuse have the greatest unmet need for alcohol treatment. These states also tend to have large rural populations.**

- Alcohol abuse treatment services are few and far between in rural America. Rural residents often travel long distances and wait months to be treated at under-staffed hospitals and health facilities.
- The majority of prevention programs have been developed, tested, and evaluated in *urban* settings. To address the different needs of rural populations - including job loss, community dynamics and education opportunities - prevention and treatment programs must be tailored for rural settings.
- Mental health workers in rural schools receive less training and are available fewer hours in general than those in urban schools. A higher priority should be placed on identifying and treating youth who are at risk for substance abuse.

Unmet Need for Treatment for Alcohol Use among Youth Ages 12-17 by State Percentages, Annual Averages Based on 2002 and 2003 NSDUH



Source:  
Wright and Sathe 2005

**Law Enforcement and Community: Law enforcement and public health programs in rural America are often spread too thin, resulting in substance abuse problems going undetected and being addressed after-the-fact through the criminal justice system.**

- In 2003, 47 percent of rural admissions to publicly-funded substance abuse treatment centers were referred by the criminal justice system, compared to 35 percent for urban populations.
- Rural communities are less likely to proactively address substance abuse problems. While residential stability and a strong sense of community can lead to a stronger support network in rural areas than in urban areas, close-knit communities often discourage help from “outsiders.” Rural families are more reluctant to use treatment services and a stigma can exist around the need for treatment.
- Increased funding for law enforcement and public education campaigns around substance abuse are an important aspect of addressing rural substance abuse problems.

Full report, “Substance Abuse in Rural and Small Town America” can be found at <http://www.carseyinstitute.unh.edu>

Data gathered from: 2004 Partnership Attitude Tracking Study; 2005 Monitoring the Future; 2004 National Survey on Drug Use and Health; 2004 National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse report; 1994 Rural Substance Abuse: State of Knowledge and Issues; No Place to Hide: Substance Abuse in Mid-Cities and Rural America; South Carolina Rural Health Research Center report.