

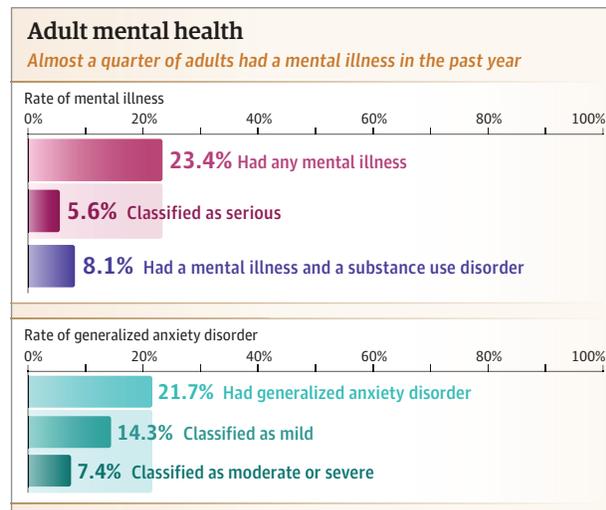
JAMA Data Brief

# Mental Health and Substance Use Linked in New Survey

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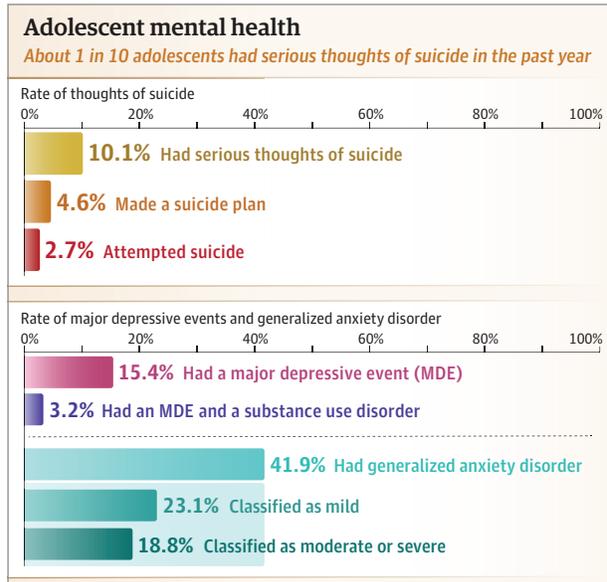
Individuals with mental health conditions are at increased risk of developing a substance use disorder, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), often because they may self-medicate with drugs or alcohol. In its [recently released](#) National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), SAMHSA—an agency within the US Department of Health and Human Services—reviewed self-reported questionnaire results from nearly 70 000 individuals across the US to better gauge the scope of both issues and the way they interact.

Overall in 2024, about 23% of adults aged 18 years or older were classified as having any mental illness in the past year, and 6% categorized their condition as serious, imposing a considerable interference to their daily life. Anxiety disorder symptoms specifically affected about 22% of respondents, with more than 7% experiencing them to a moderate or severe degree. About 8% of participants had a co-occurring mental illness and substance use disorder.



Adolescents aged 12 to 17 years faced similar mental health problems. About 2 in 5 youth respondents experienced some level of anxiety—about 11% had moderate symptoms and 8% had severe manifestations. In the past year, approximately 15% had experienced a major depressive episode, characterized by a 2-week period of depression and problems with daily functions such as sleeping, eating, or concentrating. Of the youth, 3% had had such an episode and a substance use disorder.

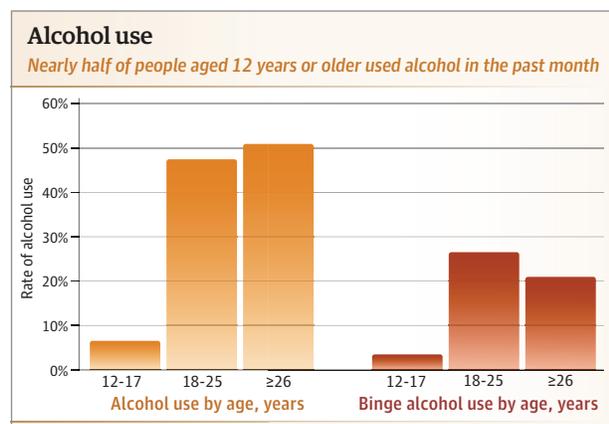
Additionally, 10% of adolescents noted serious thoughts of suicide. Beyond ideation, nearly 5% had made a suicide plan, and nearly 3% had attempted suicide.



Nearly half of the total survey group drank alcohol. Among the underage population, 13% drank at least once within the past month, although only 7% of those aged 12 to 17 years did. Binge drinking—consuming 4 to 5 drinks on the same occasion—was particularly common among adults aged 18 to 25. About 27% engaged in binge drinking, compared with 21% aged 26 years or older and less than 4% of those aged 12 to 17 years.

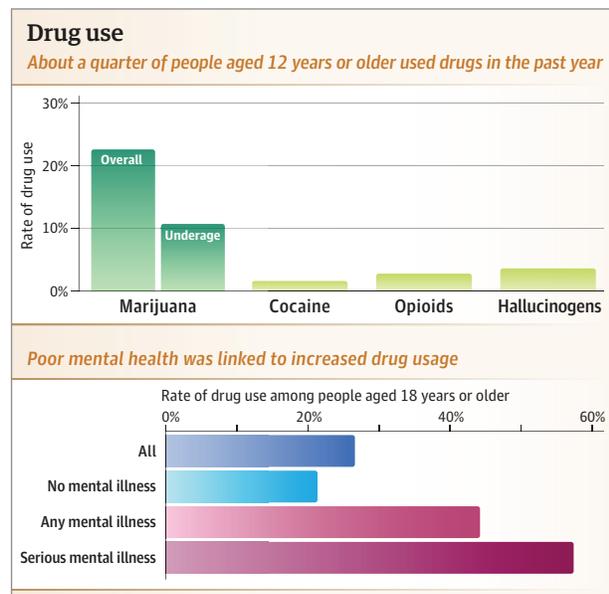
Mental health conditions were linked with increased binge drinking. Of the adolescents who'd had a recent major depressive episode or experienced moderate to severe anxiety, 6% binge drank compared with 3% or less of those who didn't report a mental health issue. Nearly 30% of all adults with any level of mental illness reported binge drinking.

"Although mental health and substance use funding and treatment systems have historically been separate, the NSDUH clearly demonstrates that in reality, people with substance use disorders and those with mental health challenges often have co-occurring conditions," said Art Kleinschmidt, PhD, MBA, principal deputy assistant secretary at SAMHSA, in an [accompanying commentary](#).



Poor mental health was also linked with increased drug usage. About 3 in 10 adolescents who'd had a major depressive episode used substances compared with 1 in 10 who hadn't had one. Meanwhile, a quarter of those with moderate or severe anxiety used drugs compared with 10% of those without anxiety. About 57% of adults with severe mental illness used illegal drugs vs 44% of those with any mental illness and 21% of those with none.

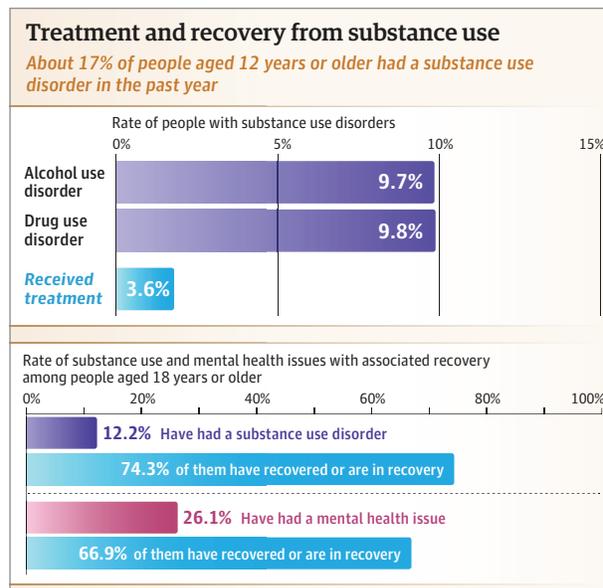
Out of all respondents, about 22% used marijuana, 4% used hallucinogens, 3% misused prescription opioids, and 2% used cocaine. Both adults and adolescents who'd experienced various mental health conditions were more likely than those who hadn't to use marijuana or misuse opioids.



In 2024, about 17% of people reported that they'd had a substance use disorder, with nearly 10% indicating alcohol use and close to 10% indicating drug use. Among adults aged 18 years or older, less than 4% noted that they had received treatment in the past year.

Approximately 12% of adults considered themselves to have had a substance use problem at any point, with 3 of 4 viewing themselves as in recovery.

Regarding mental health, about a quarter perceived that they'd had a problem. About 23% said they had received some mental health treatment in the past year, and 67% responded that they were in recovery.



Although the data show that a high percentage of adults in the US report being in recovery, SAMHSA emphasized the need to increase access and use of these services.

"We have to be strategic and intentional in developing systems of care that will meet the needs of individuals with behavioral health conditions, recognizing that more often than not, people struggling with mental health issues also have substance use challenges and those with substance use challenges also have mental health challenges," Kleinschmidt said.

In addition to expanding crisis intervention care and services, the SAMHSA survey emphasized the need for preventive measures and initiatives fostering well-being.

"Research shows that substance misuse and early health risk behaviors that take root during childhood and adolescence are closely linked to risk for chronic disease, substance use disorders, and mental health conditions later in life and contribute to a significant proportion of the health and social costs associated with chronic disease," Kleinschmidt said.

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**Published Online:** September 26, 2025. doi:10.1001/jama.2025.15338

**Conflict of Interest Disclosures:** None reported.

**Note:** Source references are available through embedded hyperlinks in the article text online.