

Abstract

Prevalence and characteristics of substance abuse treatment utilization by U.S. adolescents: national data from 1987 to 2008

M.A. Ilgen
J.E. Schulenberg
D.D. Kloska
E. Czyz
L.D. Johnston
P.M. O'Malley

OBJECTIVE:

Although many adolescents use and abuse illicit drugs, few of those who could benefit from substance abuse treatment ever receive these services. The present study examines the prevalence of utilization of substance abuse treatment in national samples of adolescents over the past 22 years and identifies characteristics associated with receipt of these services.

METHOD:

Monitoring the Future data on lifetime utilization of substance abuse treatment was available for 12th grade students who reported any lifetime illicit drug use from 1987 to 2008 (N=25,537). After describing the prevalence of treatment utilization over this time period, logistic regression was used to examine potential predictors of treatment utilization.

RESULTS:

The overall prevalence of treatment utilization has remained relatively unchanged over the past 22 years. In multivariable models, adolescents reporting a greater frequency of lifetime use of marijuana or cocaine were more likely to receive substance abuse treatment. Additionally, substance abuse treatment utilization was more likely in those who received other mental health services.

CONCLUSION:

Despite increased evidence for the effectiveness of substance abuse treatment, utilization of these services by adolescents has remained low and relatively stable over the past 22 years. Attempts to increase utilization of substance abuse treatment services would likely benefit from building on existing connections with mental health treatment.

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