

Trends in alcohol- and drug-related emergency department and primary care visits: Data from four U.S. national surveys (1995-2010)

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Published

Sunday, January 1, 2012 - 12:00

Publisher

Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs

Volume

73

Issue

3

Page(s)

454-8

Abstract

Objective: The purpose of this study was to update trends in alcohol- and drug-related emergency department and primary care visits over the last 15 years in the United States.
Method: A trend analysis was conducted on substance-related health services visits, based on self-reported alcohol or other drug use within 6 hours before an injury and/or illness event, from four National Alcohol Surveys: 1995, 2000, 2005, and 2010.
Results: A significant upward trend was found from 1995 to 2010 in alcohol-related emergency department visits but not in alcohol-related primary care visits. The odds of an alcohol-related emergency department visit doubled between 1995 and 2010 (odds ratio = 2.36). No significant trend was found in either drug-related emergency department or drug-related primary care visits between 1995 and 2010.
Conclusions: These data suggest that alcohol-related emergency department visits have increased significantly over the past 15 years, whereas drug-related emergency department visits may have stabilized. These findings underscore the opportunity provided by the emergency department for screening and brief intervention for alcohol-related problems and suggest that Healthy People 2010 objectives calling for a reduction in substance-related emergency department visits were not realized. Thus, it might be prudent to adjust Healthy People 2020 objectives accordingly.

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