In Brief

- In 2005, 30.8 percent of adults aged 18 or older attended religious services 25 or more times in the past year, 78.1 percent reported that religious beliefs are a very important part of their lives, and 75.1 percent reported that religious beliefs influence how they make decisions in their lives.

- In 2005, 2.9 percent of adults who attended religious services 25 or more times in the past year used illicit drugs in the past month compared with 10.1 percent of those who attended religious services fewer than 25 times.

- Adults who reported that religious beliefs are a very important part of their lives were less likely to use illicit drugs in the past month than those who reported that religious beliefs are not a very important part of their lives (6.1 vs. 14.3 percent).

Public opinion polling has shown that 63 percent of Americans were members of a church or synagogue in 2006. Religiosity has been identified in other research as an important protective factor against substance use. The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) includes questions on religious service attendance and religious beliefs. Respondents are asked to indicate how many times in the past 12 months they attended religious services, excluding special occasions such as weddings, funerals, or other special events. Respondents also are asked whether their religious beliefs are a very important part of their lives and whether their religious beliefs influence how they make decisions in their lives.5 NSDUH also includes questions about use of cigarettes, alcohol, and illicit drugs during the month (or 30 days) prior to the interview. Illicit drugs refer to marijuana/hashish, cocaine (including crack), inhalants, hallucinogens, heroin, or prescription-type drugs used nonmedically.

This report examines the relationships between religious service attendance and beliefs and substance use among adults aged 18 or older. All findings are based on data from the 2005 NSDUH.
Religious Involvement among Adults

In 2005, 30.8 percent of adults aged 18 or older (an estimated 67 million persons) attended religious services 25 or more times in the past year, 78.1 percent (168 million persons) reported that religious beliefs are a very important part of their lives, and 75.1 percent (162 million persons) reported that religious beliefs influence how they make decisions in their lives.

Females were more likely than males to report all three types of religious involvement (Table 1). The percentages of adults reporting that their religious beliefs are a very important part of their lives and the percentage reporting that religious beliefs influence how they make decisions increased with each age category. For example, 70.6 percent of young adults aged 18 to 25 reported that religious beliefs are a very important part of their lives compared with 83.7 percent of older adults aged 65 or older. Adults aged 65 or older were more likely to attend religious services 25 times or more in the past year than adults in all other age groups.

Religious Service Attendance and Substance Use

In 2005, adults aged 18 or older who attended religious services 25 or more times in the past year were less likely to have used cigarettes, alcohol, or illicit drugs in the past month than adults who attended religious services fewer than 25 times in the past year (Figure 1). For example, 2.9 percent of adults who attended religious services 25 or more times in the past year used illicit drugs in the past month compared with 10.1 percent of adults who attended religious services fewer than 25 times in the past year.

Important of Religious Beliefs and Substance Use

Adults aged 18 or older who reported in 2005 that religious beliefs are a very important part of their lives were less likely to have used cigarettes, alcohol, or illicit drugs in the past month than adults who reported that religious beliefs are not a very important part of their lives (Figure 2). For example, 6.1 percent of adults who reported that religious beliefs are a very important part of their lives used illicit...
drugs in the past month compared with 14.3 percent of adults who reported that religious beliefs are not a very important part of their lives.

**Religious Beliefs’ Influence on Decisions and Substance Use**

Adults aged 18 or older who reported in 2005 that religious beliefs influence how they make decisions in their lives also were less likely to have used cigarettes, alcohol, or illicit drugs in the past month than adults who reported that religious beliefs do not influence how they make decisions (Figure 3). For example, 5.8 percent of adults who reported that religious beliefs influence how they make decisions in their lives used illicit drugs in the past month compared with 14.0 percent of adults who reported that religious beliefs do not influence how they make decisions.

**End Notes**

5 Response options for both questions were (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) agree, and (4) strongly agree. For this report, responses of agree/strongly agree were grouped into the “yes” category, and responses of strongly disagree/disagree responses were grouped into the “no” category.
6 NSDUH measures the nonmedical use of prescription-type pain relievers, sedatives, stimulants, or tranquilizers. Nonmedical use is defined as the use of prescription-type drugs not prescribed for the respondent by a physician or used only for the experience or feeling they caused. Nonmedical use of any prescription-type pain reliever, sedative, stimulant, or tranquilizer does not include over-the-counter drugs. Nonmedical use of stimulants includes methamphetamine use.

**Figure and Table Notes**

* Respondents are asked whether their religious beliefs are a very important part of their lives and whether their religious beliefs influence how they make decisions in their lives. Response options for both questions were (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) agree, and (4) strongly agree. For this report, responses of agree/strongly agree were grouped into the “yes” category, and responses of strongly disagree/disagree responses were grouped into the “no” category. Adults with unknown or missing data were excluded from the analysis.

**Suggested Citation**

Religious Involvement and Substance Use among Adults

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