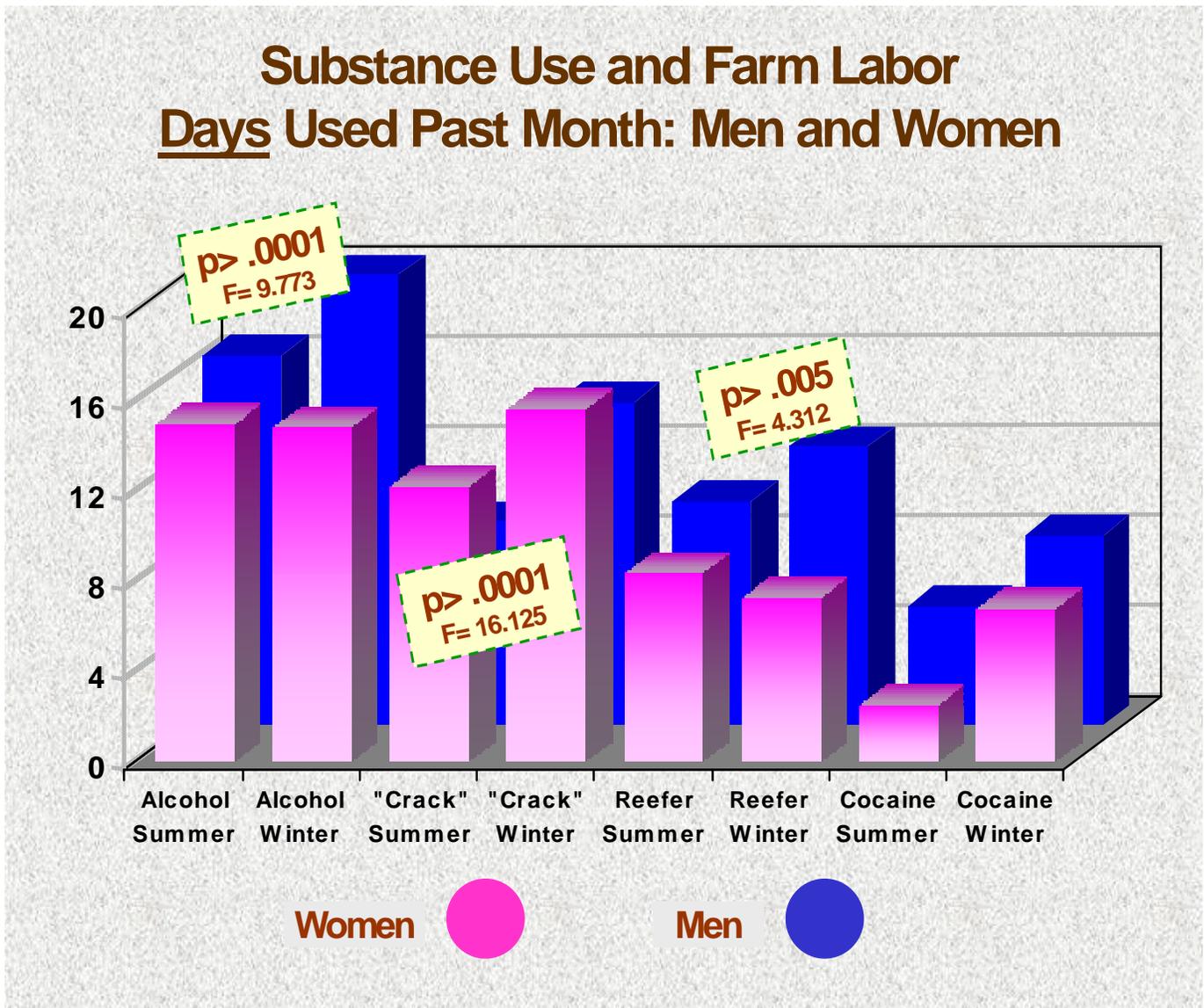


– Substance Use and Migrant Labor, Part Two –

Solid data is rare on migrant substance use. For several decades, the existent studies that had been published only discussed alcohol use [1,2]. Over the past decade, studies published on substances other than alcohol provide data on drug use in relation to other issues, such as HIV risk [3,4,5]. Across various populations, frequency of use is generally measured by a question on “how often” a person used a particular substance by “days” or “occasions” over a specific period, which typically is framed as two weeks, one month, six months, or the past year.

One of the first large-scale investigations to elicit material on patterns of substance use among farm workers took place east of the Mississippi River. Focusing on *HIV seroconversion*, this study took into account variation in use by whether one was working in a home base or working “on the season.” It was found that alcohol and crack-cocaine were the most common substances reported by respondents, followed by marijuana, cocaine and heroin. More than 95 percent reported lifetime alcohol use (92% were current users); more than 85 percent reported lifetime marijuana use (66% current users); and more than 80 percent reported lifetime crack-cocaine use (76% current users). Less than one-half reported lifetime cocaine use (24% current users) and less than one-tenth reported lifetime heroin use (less than 2% current users).

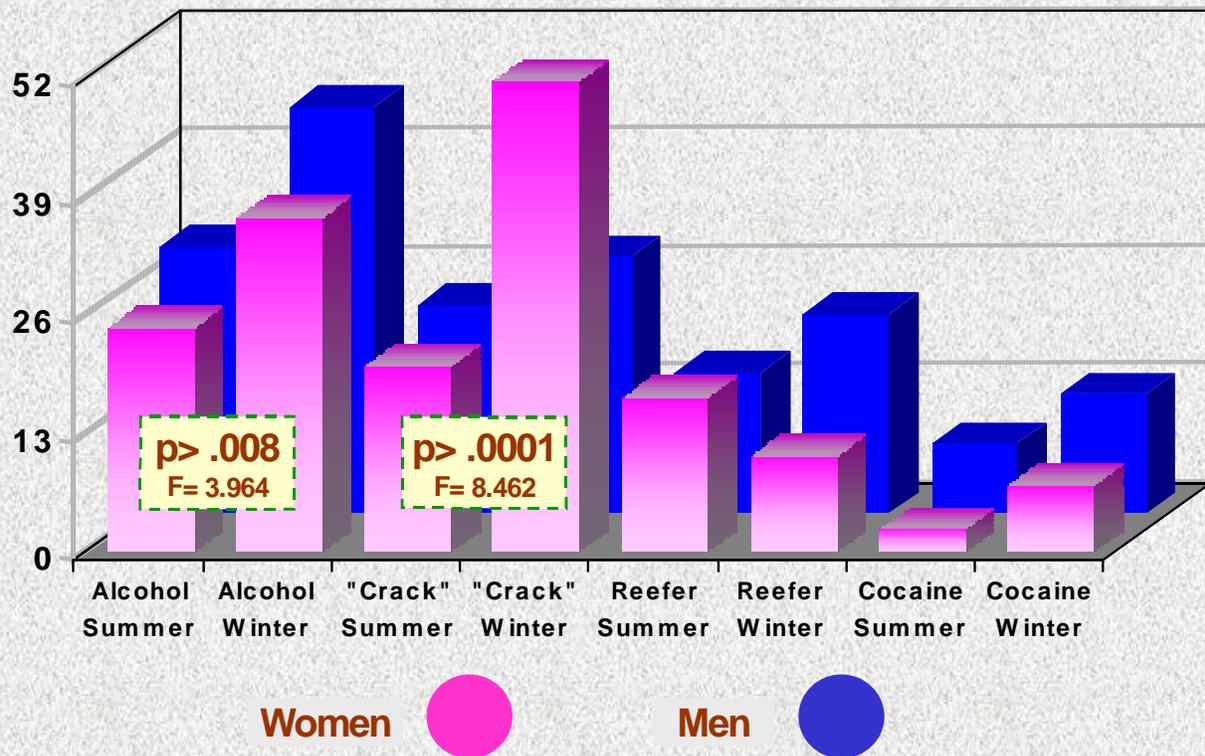
Overall, current substance use was higher in a home base (winter) than “on the season” (summer) by days used in the previous 30 days. Crack-cocaine use was higher in a home base than “on the season,” and higher for women than men. Alcohol consumption and marijuana use however were higher for men than women, particularly in a home base for the men. Cocaine use was lower but followed a pattern that was similar to that of crack-cocaine. Differences were significant (analysis of variance) for alcohol, crack-cocaine and marijuana, but not for cocaine.



The number of occasions (times) migrants reported they used these four substances in the previous 30 days further illustrates variation between winter-demand and summer-demand agricultural labor. Men experienced higher levels of use than women, except where women greatly increased use of crack-cocaine over the winter season (highest for occasions among all four substances) and slightly increased marijuana use over summer season. Women also increased level of alcohol consumption over winter months but not more than the increase by men. This increased use was significant (analysis of variance) for alcohol and crack-cocaine by occasions in the previous 30 days.

Substance Use and Farm Labor

Occasions Used Past Month: Men and Women



Efforts to supplement income and intent to work are two primary considerations in why variation in use occurs in summer versus winter, and between men and women. Most the women who participated in this study were active in commercial sex work at the time of their interview; some were active year-round, some stopped sex work while on the season, and some sporadically engaged in the sex trade as supplemental income. This merging of one economic activity (sex work) with another (agricultural labor) appears to be what increased level of use for women. For men, winter was a time of greater economic opportunity and access to drugs in a home base, and summer was a time when presence in a labor crew “on the season” was indicative of their intent to work. Drug use was a concurrent activity for both women and men, based on its availability, and occasionally it was the “perk” to work.

These unpublished data were collected over a four-year period: four winter seasons from September through May-June in one home base county in the southern United States, and summer seasons differentially occurring in four field sites that varied April to July (one site), to the full range of summer months (two sites), to late summer through October (one site). These field sites covered 12 counties in the Lower South, Middle South, Upper South, and Midwest. The sample comprised 680 men and women interviewed in the home base station (winter) and 301 men and women interviewed across four summer field stations (3 sites for one season, one site two seasons). Selection combined “targeted sampling” with “respondent-driven sampling,” and recruitment focused on migrant living sites (“labor camps”). Thus, the above percentages do not represent proportions of use among all migrants (population-based) but rather patterns of use among those who use. Eligibility was determined by a field test for drug use. All respondents gave informed consent, and were compensated for their time. Financial support is acknowledged from National Institute of Drug Abuse Grant #DA07694. Principal Investigator was Norman Weatherby (now at Tennessee Middle State University). Human subjects Institutional Review Board was completed at the University of Miami School of Medicine.

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