BACKGROUND:
Many studies have found an association between Substance Use Disorders (SUDs) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) in children, adolescents and adults. We intended to determine whether substance abuse and SUDs are associated with former and current ADHD symptomatology in a non-clinical sample of 17 and 18 year old males.

METHOD:
A representative sample of 3280 young men (6.8% of all males born in Austria in the respective year) was investigated during the examination for military service. We collected data on the past (WURS) and current (ADHD symptom checklist) ADHD symptomatology, substance abuse, parental substance use and abuse and motives for substance use.

RESULTS:
Measured by WURS, 10.1% had scored positive for past ADHD symptoms. 2.7% of all subjects stated that they have been treated for ADHD and 1.5% reported that they had at one point received pharmacological treatment for the condition. Abuse of alcohol, nicotine, and illicit substances was significantly (p<.01) more frequent in subjects with ADHD syndrome. Perceived parental alcohol abuse increased the risk for ADHD in the offspring. Motives for substance use differed greatly between groups.

LIMITATIONS:
The sample consists of men only. Subjects had to be fit enough to be enlisted military service, generating a possible bias towards healthier subjects. The cross-sectional design does not allow conclusions about the temporal relationships between ADHD symptoms and substance abuse.

CONCLUSION:
Identification of vulnerability factors for comorbid ADHD and SUD in adolescence should be intensified. Preventive strategies ought to be established.