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ALCOHOL AND DRUG ABUSE AMONG YOUNG WOMEN

Despite increased awareness about the dangers of substance abuse, more than four million women in the United States are addicted to alcohol and other drugs. And according to recent studies, alcohol and other drug abuse among young women is on the rise.

Use of Drugs and Alcohol Starts Early Studies show the first use of alcohol is typically at the age of 13. Typically, the first use of other drugs is at the age of 14. Individuals who use alcohol or other drugs at a young age are often setting themselves up for future long-term addiction.

The use of alcohol, for example, has become commonplace among young women, with 45 percent of females aged 12 or older reporting alcohol use in the past month. In addition, the incidence of binge drinking is ranked highest among women 18-25 years old.

In addition to direct health risks, increased drug use is consuming the time and money of young women.

Alcohol, of course, is not the only problem. Studies estimate that 50 percent of high school seniors have tried marijuana and that just over 21 percent of the people who have entered drug and alcohol treatment programs are under the age of 24.

The rise of substance abuse among young women isn't likely to decrease anytime soon. Recent studies show that alcohol and other forms of drug use are on the rise throughout the nation, especially among young people who live in rural areas.

Early Exposure Increases Risk of Use

Many scientists and physicians believe that individuals who are battling alcoholism and drug abuse are genetically predisposed to such addictions. But experts also commonly acknowledge that exposure to the use and abuse of drugs during childhood plays a significant role.

According to the National Association for Children of Alcoholics, young women raised in households where alcohol abuse is the "norm" are more likely to be truant, drop out of school, repeat grades, or be referred to school counselors or psychologists. In addition, they may have difficulty bonding with teachers and fellow students.

Exposure to drugs prior to birth can be hurtful too. Recent research has discovered a genetic basis for addictive behaviors. Studies are showing that the biochemical make-up of children is decided in the womb and the substances that children are exposed to after conception can have impacts that last a lifetime. Other factors can also lead to substance abuse and addiction, such as:

- Stress
- Lack of a support system
- Increased availability of drugs
- Biochemical imbalance, or pre-disposition to substance abuse
- Mental illness
- Peer Pressure

(over)

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For questions on substance use, abuse and related problems, call NCADA's Help Line at (314) 962-3456.

Profile of a Substance Abuser

Alcoholics and other drug abusers come in all shapes, sizes and colors, and they come from all educational and economic levels. But despite outward differences, many female substance abusers share environmental and personal factors in common. This common ground often includes:

- Low self-esteem
- Feeling a loss of control over life
- Exposure to substance abuse
- Sexual and other kinds of physical victimization in childhood as well as in adulthood
- Marriage or other intimate relationships with substance abusers

The risks of excessive drug use are significant. Young women who engage in substance drug abuse place themselves at increased risk for rape, fatal diseases, accidents, sexually transmitted diseases, and abnormal pregnancies-in addition to other health problems.

Getting Help

Young women coming to the realization that they are substance abusers have many resources available to them, such as:

- 12-step programs
- Mental health agencies
- Community-based programs
- Church groups
- Clinics and hospitals
- In-patient programs

Sources: American Osteopathic Association, National Association for Children of Alcoholics, National Clearing House for Alcohol and Drug Information, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Inc.

Did You Know...?

- High school students drink 35 percent of all wine coolers sold in the U.S.
- 39 percent of all motor vehicle deaths result from alcohol use.
- 12th-graders living in rural areas are more likely than youths in urban areas to use cocaine, crack, amphetamines, inhalants, alcohol, cigarettes, and smokeless tobacco.
- 70 percent of AIDS cases among young women are drug-related.

For More Information

National Association for Children of Alcoholics
11426 Rockville Pike, Suite 100
Rockville, MD 20852
(888) 554-COAS (554-2627)
www.health.org/nacoa

National Clearing House for Alcohol and Drug Information
P.O. Box 2345
Rockville, MD 20847-2345
(800) 729-6686
www.health.org

U. S. Department of Health and Human Services Girl Power!
(800) 729-6686
<http://www.health.org/gpower>

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