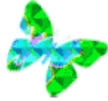




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Advocacy for the Real World.

Women and Addiction Facts

Nationwide, 21.5 million women smoke, 4.5 million are alcoholics or alcohol abusers, 3.5 million misuse prescription drugs and 3.1 million report regularly using illicit drugs. Most female drug abusers use more than one drug. (1,2)

Nationally, almost half of all women age 15-44 have used drugs at least once in their lifetime. This involves approximately two million who used cocaine, six million who used marijuana and four million who used prescription drugs non-medically. (2)

The gap between the number of men and women who use tobacco, illegal drugs and alcohol has narrowed. Among 12-17 year olds, females surpass males in the use of cigarettes, cocaine, crack, inhalants and prescription drugs for non-medical reasons. (1,3)

For women, substance abuse is linked to sexual assault, unwanted pregnancies, and diseases such as lung cancer, cirrhosis and AIDS, skyrocketing prison populations and child abuse and neglect. (1)

Addicted Women Have Multiple Problems

Several personal and social factors increase the risk of problem drinking among women. They are: the influence of a partner's drinking; depression; sexual behavior and orientation; and violent victimization in childhood as well as in adulthood. (4)

There is an apparent link between women's eating disorders and substance abuse. As many as 55 percent of female bulimic patients have drug and alcohol problems. (5)

Women tend to abuse prescription drugs more than men. They comprise 60 percent of all prescription drug-related emergency room visits. (6)



More than any other group of adults, women over 59 have problems related to alcohol and psychoactive prescription drugs, and get addicted faster by using smaller amounts. (7)

Alcohol-related problems are the third leading cause of death for women between 35 and 55. (1)

Females have less muscle tissue than men and the enzymes that metabolize alcohol are less efficient in women, therefore the alcohol in their bodies is less diluted. (3)

Women become addicted more quickly and develop substance abuse-related diseases sooner than men. This includes alcohol-related liver damage, high blood pressure, stroke, heart disease, gastrointestinal hemorrhage, anemia, malnutrition, and colorectal cancer. (9)

Every year, 140,000 women die from smoking. Lung cancer rates among females have increased six-fold in the past 40 years. More women die from lung cancer than breast cancer. (1)

The resurgence of tuberculosis (TB) is linked to the spread of HIV infection among drug users. Although TB is more prevalent among males, the disease is on the rise among female drug users. (6)

HIV/AIDS is Growing Among Women

AIDS is increasing more rapidly among women. It is now the fourth leading cause of death among women aged 25- 44. As of January 1997, there were 85,000 cases of AIDS among women in the U.S. (9)

Nearly 70 percent of female AIDS cases are drug-related. Of these, 60 percent were infected by injecting drugs. Of cases acquired through heterosexual transmission, 80 percent involve partners who are injecting drug users. (1,3)

In New York State, the percent of adult AIDS cases involving women rose from 10.3 percent in 1985 to 26 percent in 1997. Some 94 percent of the pediatric AIDS cases involved perinatal HIV transmission from an infected mother. (10)

Some 80 percent of female AIDS cases in New York State are in women of color. Injection drug use is the primary method of transmission for all racial and ethnic groups in the state, with the exception of women from Asia or the Pacific Islands, for whom heterosexual HIV transmission predominates. (11)



Addictions Cause Problems in Pregnancy

Use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs during pregnancy is a leading preventable cause of mental, physical, psychological impairments in children. A recent survey shows that 5.5 percent of pregnant women report using illicit drugs while pregnant, 18.8 percent drink alcohol, and 20.4 percent smoke tobacco. (12,13)

Heavy drinking by a pregnant woman can cause the child to have Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS), the leading known cause of mental retardation. An estimated 1-3 of every 1,000 babies are born with FAS. Other problems are increased risk for miscarriage, growth retardation, facial dysmorphism, central nervous system deficits, and other neurodevelopmental effects. (12)

National advisories, warning against the use of alcohol by both pregnant women and women considering pregnancy, were first released in 1981. Despite the established health risk, the number of women who continued to drink alcohol during pregnancy rose from .08% in 1991 to 3.5% in 1995. (13)

In New York State, an estimated 20,000 “problem drinker” women give birth each year. (15)

Of women who use illicit drugs, about half are in the childbearing age group of 15 to 44. Pregnant women who use drugs such as heroin, methadone, amphetamines, PCP, marijuana, crack or cocaine risk giving birth to addicted babies who may undergo withdrawal, known as Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS). Signs of NAS include increased sensitivity to noise, irritability, poor coordination, tremors, and feeding problems. (14)

Pregnant, substance-abusing women are seven times less likely than non-addicted women to get prenatal care. (6)

Among the many potential complications of crack or cocaine, heroin and other drugs used in pregnancy are intrauterine growth retardation, infections (especially sexually transmitted diseases), central nervous system damage, congenital abnormalities, respiratory difficulties, smaller head size due to reduced brain growth, prematurity and low birthweight. (14)

Addicted Women are Victims of Violence

Women in treatment report alarming histories of abuse, most commonly related to repetitive childhood physical or sexual assault. Seventy percent of women in treatment were abused as



children compared to 12 percent of men. (1)

Women are more likely than men to become victims of alcohol and drug-related accidents, violence and suicide. A recent study of homicide in New York City showed that 59 percent of white women and 72 percent of African American women had been using cocaine prior to death, compared with 38 percent of white males and 44 percent of African American males.(1,5)

Studies show that 30-59 percent of the women in drug treatment also suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). This is 2-3 times higher than in men. (16)

Alcohol has been linked to 75 percent of rapes and 70 percent of domestic violence. These victims are more likely to abuse drugs than women who are not victims. (16)

Child Welfare Issues

Reports of child abuse and neglect rose 64 percent from 1985 to 1994. Substance abuse and addiction are primary causes of the dramatic rise in child abuse and neglect. Eighty percent of the states report that parental substance abuse and poverty are the greatest child welfare problems. In some cities, more than 75 percent of these cases are linked to alcohol and drugs. (1)

Within the child welfare system, the percentage of children under age four who were exposed to drugs while in utero increased from 29 percent in 1986 to 62 percent in 1991. (1)

Sixty-seven percent of child welfare professionals believe that chemically affected families are more likely to re-enter the child welfare system within a five-year period. (17)

More Addicted Women are Incarcerated

The number of women in state prisons with sentences for drug-related offenses increased 432 percent between 1986 and 1991 nationwide. (18)

Nearly 60 percent of the women in New York's prisons are incarcerated for drug offenses, compared with 32 percent of the men. Four out of five women inmates have histories of substance abuse. (19,20)

Eighty percent of women in New York's prisons and jails are mothers, and many are highly motivated to reunite with their children. (21)



Women's Treatment Barriers and Benefits

Nationwide, women are under-represented in addiction treatment. Although about 30 percent of individuals with addiction problems are women, they make up only 20-25 percent of those in treatment. (22)

Women tend to come into treatment much later in their addiction than men, often exhibiting chronic, deteriorating conditions. They frequently enter treatment as the result of a crisis, such as a breakdown in their health, a domestic assault, the threat of losing their children, or an encounter with the law. (6)

The percentage of female admissions to treatment was 26.1 percent in 1998. Seventy percent of these women had children and 34 percent had children living with them. (23)

Barriers facing women today are similar to those of 40 years ago. Their greatest fear is not caring for or losing their children. Other barriers are greater social stigma, lack of money or health insurance, inadequate transportation, and lack of treatment services sensitive to gender needs. (22)

Women receive the most benefit from treatment with services that are sensitive to their needs. These may include women-only therapy groups, and female staff trained to help meet basic needs such as child care, transportation, parent training, job counseling, family planning, literacy, legal assistance, etc. (22)

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