

Alcohol Abuse Problems

Alcohol abuse is one of the most prevalent problems impacting society today. The following information examines four major alcohol abuse issues and the dangers associated with them.

Underage drinking

Underage drinking is the most serious health problem facing youth today. Young people who use alcohol before their minds and bodies are mature are more likely to develop problems with alcohol or other drugs later in life.

According to a 2001 report by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, young people who drink before age 15 are four times more likely to develop alcohol addiction than those who begin drinking after age 21.

Statistics from the National Institute on Drug Abuse show 64 percent of young people report that by the time they are seniors in high school, they have been drunk at least once. Nearly 60 percent drink when they are upset and 42 percent say they drink alone.

Use of alcohol greatly increases the chances that young people will be involved in a car crash, homicide or suicide, the leading causes of death for teenagers and young adults. A 16 year old is more likely to die of alcohol-related causes than any other.

Binge drinking

Binge drinking is an increasing alcohol abuse problem among youth. Males who consume five or more drinks in one sitting and females who consume four or more are defined as binge drinkers. A survey by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services states 11.5 percent of 12 to 17 year olds, and 36.8 percent of 18 to 25 year olds participate in binge drinking.

Colleges and universities are seriously affected by binge drinking. More than 40 percent of college students are binge drinkers, says a study by the Harvard School of Public Health. And 70 percent of those students participate in binge drinking two to three times a week.

Binge drinking has a damaging affect on campus life with increased fighting, vandalism, unprotected sex, acquaintance rape, and poor academic performance. Binge

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drinkers are twice as likely to end up in trouble with police, and require medical attention for alcohol overdose. They are also 1½ times as likely to be hurt or injured while drinking. Students who are not binge drinkers are also at heightened risk for experiencing secondhand effects, ranging from common annoyances to vandalism and assaults.

Underage students are far more likely to binge drink than students 21 and older according to the Harvard study. Underage students may not drink as often as students of legal age, but when they drink, they drink faster and in larger quantities.

According to the National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information, college students spend \$5.5 billion on alcohol each year, more than they spend on soft drinks, tea, milk, juice, coffee and school books combined. The 12 million students enrolled in colleges in the U.S. consume more than 430 million gallons of alcohol a year. Dr. Henry Wechsler, an author of the Harvard study, reports that 94 percent of underage college drinkers say it is easy to procure alcohol, and 57 percent say they pay \$1 or less per drink. One in three college students now drinks primarily to get drunk.

Academic performance

Drinking takes a heavy toll on academic performance. The study by the Harvard School of Public Health of 66 colleges found that D and F students consumed an average of nine drinks a week, C students about six, B students around four, and A students less than three drinks a week.

Students who are frequent drinkers were eight times more likely to miss classes and fall behind in their schoolwork than infrequent or non-drinkers. Other students report experiencing secondhand effects such as having sleep or studying interrupted, or having to take care of a drunk student.

Crime and alcohol abuse

Alcohol, more than any other drug, has been linked with a high incidence of violence and aggression. A report by the U.S. Department of Justice states alcohol abuse was a factor in a significant percentage of violent crimes committed in the U.S.

Rape, fights, assaults leading to injury, manslaughter, and homicide are often linked with alcohol. Alcohol is a key factor in up to 68 percent of murders, 48 percent of robberies, and 44 percent of burglaries. Among prison inmates, more than 42 percent of those convicted of rape reported being under the influence of alcohol or other drugs at the time of the offense. There is also a link between alcohol abuse and date rape. Fifty-five percent of females and 75 percent of males involved in acquaintance rape had been drinking or using drugs at the time. Alcohol was also reported to be a factor in more than 60 percent of men and 50 percent of women arrested for property crimes. Sixty-four percent of all reported child abuse and neglect cases were associated with parental alcohol and other drug abuse.

A report by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration states that approximately 1.5 million people were arrested in 2000 for driving under the influence or narcotics. In 2001, 41 percent of traffic fatalities involved alcohol and 275,000 people were injured in alcohol-related crashes.

Alcohol also plays a significant role in the occurrence of domestic abuse. According to FBI statistics, every 15 seconds a woman in the U.S. is beaten by her male partner. There are more than two million reported victims each year, but only about one in ten cases ever gets reported. Two-thirds of all victims reported that alcohol had been a factor. Among spouse victims, three out of four incidents involved an offender who had been drinking.