

Prevalence Data

Alcohol Abuse/Dependence

According to the Epidemiological Catchment Area (ECA) Study, an epidemiological study based on the United States Population:

- ♦ lifetime prevalence of alcohol abuse and/or dependence is 13.8% ; one out of every seven persons meets the criteria sometime in his/her lifetime
- ♦ 24% of the lifetime cases report a problem in the past month

Lifetime prevalence rates are:

- ♦ 23.8% for males
- ♦ 4.6% for females

Male to female ratio is 5 to 1.

Lifetime prevalence rates are higher among both sexes under 45 years of age.

Nicotine/Tobacco Use/Abuse

Sixty-two million Americans are current smokers:

- ♦ approximately 29% for individuals age 12 and older

Approximately seven million Americans are current users of smokeless tobacco.

Psychotherapeutic Drugs/Prescription Drugs

Women still receive more psychoactive drug prescriptions than men.

Most common prescription drugs abused by women:

- ♦ benzodiazepines
- ♦ Vicodin (hydrocodone bitartrate and acetaminophen)
- ♦ Fiorinal (butalbital, a rapid-acting barbiturate)
- ♦ caffeine
- ♦ aspirin

Majority of women who use psychotherapeutic drugs are middle-aged (35-50 years old).

At equivalent levels of anxiety, women are more likely than men to be given a benzodiazepine rather than nonpharmacologic therapy.

Women who do not work outside the home may be at higher risk

- ♦ they take more diet pills, sleeping pills, tranquilizers, and mood elevators than other women

Some women with apparent anxiety disorders, symptoms may be caused by abuse of or withdrawal from alcohol, cocaine, or benzodiazepines.

Illicit Drugs

According to estimates based on 1996 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse:

- ♦ 13 million Americans report current use of illicit drugs (in the past month)
- ♦ in 1996, rates of illicit drug use in the past month among males was 8.1%; 4.2% among females

Marijuana is the most commonly used illicit drug among drug users:

- ♦ 77% reporting usage
- ♦ 54% report using marijuana only
- ♦ 23% report using marijuana and another illicit drug

Several longitudinal studies of both genders found a strong correlation between increasing marijuana use and use of other illicit drugs

- ♦ 90% of individuals who used marijuana at least 1000 times in their lives had used other drugs
- ♦ 16% of those who had used marijuana <10 times had used other drugs

Medical Settings

Approximately 20.3% of new patients in ambulatory medical care settings have problems with substance abuse (Babor, 1990).

The relationship of substance abuse and the need for medical services is well documented.

- ◆ between 20-35% of medical-surgical patients in inpatient settings and 10-20% of patients in outpatient settings, have problems with alcohol
- ◆ alcohol use is involved in cases of medical morbidity and mortality associated with cirrhosis of the liver, pancreatitis, and cancer of upper airway, esophagus, and liver

Alcohol use is involved in:

- ◆ 44% of fatal crashes
- ◆ 47% of drownings
- ◆ 38% of fires
- ◆ 34% of falls

Substance Use/Abuse in Population Cohorts

Approximately 2.5 million women 65 or older have alcohol-related problems.

Pregnancy and Alcohol Consumption

- ♦ 20–73% of women consume alcohol during pregnancy.
- ♦ alcohol abuse during pregnancy can result in fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) or fetal alcohol effects (FAE).

Women in the Criminal Justice System

One out of every three women in jail, is there for a drug-related offense.

Nearly 40% of female inmates committed their offense while under the influence of drugs.

Approximately one-fifth of all convicted women report being under the influence of alcohol at the time of offense.

Homeless Women

The lifetime prevalence of alcohol abuse among homeless women is 30% compared to a lifetime prevalence rate of 5% in the general population.

The lifetime prevalence of drug problems (non-alcohol related) among homeless women is 9–32% compared to a lifetime rate of 5% in the general population.

Lesbian Women

Few studies have been conducted, many are methodologically flawed.

Available data suggest an increased risk of alcoholism and substance abuse among lesbians as compared with heterosexual women.

Women with Disabilities

The limited body of research on disability and substance abuse suggests that rates of substance use among women with disabilities are similar to or higher than those of women without disabilities.

Substance Use/Abuse in Ethnic Minorities

Alcohol use varies by culture of origin, acculturation status, and by the length of time in the United States.

African-American Women

African-American women have the highest rates of abstention from alcohol.

Onset of heavy drinking appears to be later among African-American women (45 to 59) compared to Caucasian women (25 to 44).

Native-American Women

Alcohol abuse and its consequences cited as the foremost health problem affecting Native Americans, especially those living on reservations.

Alcoholism is the fifth leading cause of death among Native-American women.

Asian/Pacific-Islander Women

The limited information on Asian-American populations suggests a lower prevalence rate for alcoholism among this group.

Hispanic/Latina Women

According to estimates based on the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse, Hispanic women were more likely to report using illicit drugs in the prior month compared to Caucasian women.

Correlates of Substance Use in Women

Age

Rates of heavy alcohol consumption and alcohol-related problems are highest in the youngest age group (ages 21–34).

Younger women's greater tendency to engage in episodes of heavy drinking increases the likelihood of negative social and behavioral consequences.

Employment

Women employed outside the home have higher rates of drinking and/or greater frequency of drinking compared to homemakers.

Role Deprivation

Recent studies suggest that having too few social roles may have more adverse consequences for women's drinking than having too many.

Recent survey data are consistent with the hypothesis that multiple roles can be beneficial for women, reducing their risks of both mental health and drinking problems.

Reasons for this beneficial effect include: increased self-esteem and social support, more responsibilities and performance demands, and increased social monitoring.

Marital Status

Rates of heavy drinking are highest among persons never married or divorced, with widowed persons having the lowest rates. Rates among married persons are in between these groups.

According to a 1981 national survey, cohabiting women (i.e., living with an unmarried partner in a marriage-like relationship) exceed all other marital status groups in rates of drinking and heavy drinking .

Risk Factors for Substance Abuse Among Younger Women

Role-Related Issues

College-age women drink more often and more heavily during college than after they graduate or enter the labor force, or when they marry.

Marital status is also associated with drinking among younger women: Women who are single, divorced, or separated from their spouses are at increased risk for both quantity and frequency of problem drinking .

Studies have consistently found a strong relationship between women's drinking and their partner's drinking.

Health-Related Issues

Women who are unable to become mothers due to reproductive disorders may be at increased risk for heavy or frequent drinking.

Although women typically do not identify themselves to physicians as problem drinkers they present various symptoms that may be indicative of problem drinking such as gastric difficulties, insomnia, and depression.

Alcohol-Related Problems Among Younger Women

ImpulseControl Problems

Younger women who develop early alcohol problems evidence more impulse control problems than women who have problems with alcohol later in life.

Drinking and Driving

Women in their twenties who have alcohol problems are more likely to be involved in drinking-related automobile accidents than middle-age women with alcohol-problems.

Use of Other Drugs

Women in their twenties who have alcohol problems are more likely to be smokers and to report using stimulants, sedatives, marijuana, and other illegal drugs, in comparison to middle-aged women who have alcohol problems.

Potential Fetal Damage

Pregnant female alcoholics between ages 20–40 are at increased risk for potential fetal damage.

Problems in the Workplace

Professional and managerial women are less likely to exhibit problems with alcohol dependence in comparison to women who are laborers or service workers.

Assaults and Other Violent Experiences

When compared to older women with drinking problems, younger women with drinking problems are more likely to report violent events such as crashes, home injuries, suicide attempts, and unexplained bruises.

SuicideAttempts

Younger female alcoholics have nearly twice the rate of suicide attempts in comparison to female alcoholics in their forties.

Forty percent of female alcoholics in all age-ranges report attempting suicide in comparison to 8% of nonalcoholic females.

Risk Factors Among Middle-Aged/Older Women

Alcohol-related risk factors among middle-aged women include:

- ◆ “empty-nest” syndrome
- ◆ not acquiring new roles, a new job or new interests (failure to adapt to aging)
- ◆ heavy spousal drinking
- ◆ solitary “at-home” drinking patterns
- ◆ presence of a co-morbid psychiatric disorder such as depression, phobia, and eating disorder, or an anxiety disorder

Older Women and Drinking

Older people, of both sexes evidence problem-drinking behavior.

Older women may abuse prescription drugs more often than middle-aged women.

Older women are more likely to fall under “late onset” classification (after age 40).

Some risk factors for drinking among older women include:

- ◆ depression
- ◆ widowhood
- ◆ retirement
- ◆ moving to retirement communities
- ◆ spousal drinking
- ◆ use of psychoactive drugs

Alcohol-Related Problems Among Middle Aged/Older Women

Problem drinking among middle-aged women is associated with loss of parenting and spousal roles (Wilsnack & Cheloha, 1987).

Problem drinking middle-aged women in treatment, role change and/or loss appears to have disastrous consequences.

More middle-aged problem drinking women report the breakup of marriages, departure of children from the home, and remaining at home than middle-aged non-problem-drinking women.

The precipitants for problem drinking among middle-aged women includes:

- ♦ loneliness
- ♦ general unhappiness
- ♦ long-term marital conflict
- ♦ stressful life events.

A large proportion of older women report recent onset (within past 10 years) of problem drinking then older men. A finding supported by both the Michigan Elderly Study and the National Institute of Mental Health ECA teams.

Larger numbers of older women living alone are at greater risk for problem-drinking.

Social-Environmental Factors and Women's Risk for Problem-Drinking

Influence of Partner's Drinking

Women are frequently introduced to alcohol and drug use by men.

- ♦ men's drinking is less influenced by their perception of their wife's drinking, while a woman's drinking is more likely to be affected by the frequency of their partner's drinking

Discrepant drinking patterns between a husband and wife have been linked to more adverse consequences for women, including marital distress

- ♦ discrepant drinking patterns may be indicative of problems or conflict in the marital relationship
- ♦ women with discrepant drinking patterns may merit special attention from health care personnel

Female alcoholics more likely to be married to an alcoholic spouse.

Depression

Women are more likely to have a co-morbid diagnosis of depression.

Some women may drink in response to their higher levels of depressive symptoms, while drinking among other women may lead to later depression.

Alcohol and Sexual Behavior

Alcohol expectancies and reported effects of drinking on sexual behavior:

- ♦ both women and men report drinking to have beneficial effects on their sexual experience
- ♦ in two surveys, sixty percent of women have reported that drinking reduced their sexual inhibitions

Sexual orientation

- ♦ effects of homophobia and discrimination among lesbian women and gay men may place them at increased risk for developing addiction problems
- ♦ other risk factors for heavy drinking among lesbian women
 - physical and sexual abuse
 - having a heavy drinking partner
 - relationship violence

Childhood physical and sexual abuse and women's drinking

- ♦ childhood physical and sexual abuse increase women's risk for problem drinking in adulthood
- ♦ research has linked childhood physical and sexual abuse with alcohol and other drug abuse
- ♦ study of female alcoholics in treatment found that 40% to 74% of patients had a history of rape, incest, or both

Relationship Violence and Women's Drinking

Women who drink are at increased risk for relationship violence if they drink or involved with partner's who drink.

Women's risk for sexual assault and violent assault increases when the perpetrator has been drinking or the woman has been drinking.

Increased risk may arise due to several reasons:

- ♦ women who drink may be perceived by men as being more sexually accessible or vulnerable to dominance
- ♦ women who drink may be less apt to heed to interpersonal cues that may enable them to deflect or avoid conflict
- ♦ women who drink may be perceived by men as deviating from traditional norms of femininity, thereby placing them at increased risk for aggression from men

SUGGESTED READINGS

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