Are Adolescent Girls More Prone to Alcohol, Drug Abuse?

The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) has indicated that “one size fits all” substance abuse prevention programs may fail to reach millions of adolescent girls. CASA suggests that adolescent girls may progress to substance abuse more quickly than adolescent boys and that the health consequences of that abuse are more severe. The Center, in a published report “The Formative Years: Pathways to Substance Abuse among Girls and Young Women Ages 8-22,” offers some of the unique risks that adolescent girls may face, and that may make alcohol and other drug use more dangerous. For example:

- Girls are more likely than boys to be depressed, have eating disorders, or be sexually and/or physically abused. All of these factors can increase the likelihood of substance abuse
- Girls using alcohol and other drugs are more likely to attempt suicide
- Substance use can lead to abuse and addiction more quickly for adolescent girls than boys, even when the same amount of less of a particular substance
- Adolescent girls are more susceptible to alcohol-induced brain damage
- Adolescent girls are more susceptible to lung damage as a result of smoking
- Adolescent girls and young women who frequently use drugs or alcohol are more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviors
- Adolescent girls and young women who frequently use drugs or alcohol are more likely to be the victim of sexual assault
• Adolescent girls are less likely to be asked to show proof of age when purchasing cigarettes

• Adolescent girls are more likely than boys to report crack cocaine and heroin are “fairly or very easy” to obtain.

These results indicate the need for focused prevention and intervention efforts, which recognize and appreciate the unique gender differences of adolescent girls and boys. For more information regarding this issue, please see “The Formative Years: Pathways to Substance Abuse among Girls and Young Women Ages 8-22” from the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University at www.casacolumbia.org

For further information regarding prevention efforts focused on substance abusing women and adolescent girls, please contact Karen Kuehn Howell, Ph.D., at the Maternal Substance Abuse and Child Development Project, Emory University School of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, 1256 Briarcliff Road, N.E., Suite 309W, Atlanta, Georgia, 30306. You can also phone us at 404-712-9800 or visit our website at http://www.emory.edu/MSACD

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