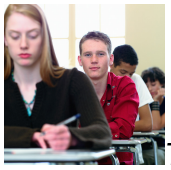
NCADD
NATIONAL COUNCIL ON ALCOHOLISM AND DRUG DEPENDENCE, INC.

Study Hospitalizations Increase for Alcohol & Drug Overdoses



The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, part of the National Institutes of Health, found that the number of hospitalizations due to alcohol and drug overdoses has increased dramatically among 18- to 24-year-olds between 1999 and 2008. Over the 10-year study period, the percentage of alcohol overdoses, drug overdoses and a combination of drug and alcohol overdoses increased by 25 percent, 56 percent and 76 percent, respectively.

Appropriately, there has been an increased media focus on the number of prescription drug related overdoses. Much of this attention has been prompted by the high profile deaths of Heath Ledger, Amy Winehouse, Michael Jackson and most recently Whitney Houston. Regrettably, in many of these stories, the media has failed to provide accurate information to the public about the critical role that alcohol plays in the number of overdose hospitalizations and deaths.

A recent study from NIAAA, **Hospitalizations for Alcohol and Drug Overdoses in Young Adults Ages 18–24 in the United States, 1999–2008** by Aaron M. White, Ph.D., et. al, highlights these facts. NCADD and our National Network of Affiliates is committed to educating the public about the dangers of prescription drug overdose and the critical role played by alcohol. Here is a brief summary of the some of the key sections of the report and it's findings:

Objective: Recent reports indicate an increase in rates of hospitalizations for drug overdoses in the United States. The role of alcohol in hospitalizations for drug overdoses remains unclear. Excessive consumption of alcohol and drugs is prevalent in young adults ages 18–24. The present study explores rates and costs of inpatient hospital stays for alcohol overdoses, drug overdoses, and their co-occurrence in young adults ages 18–24 and changes in these rates between 1999 and 2008.

Results: Hospitalization rates for alcohol overdoses alone increased 25% from 1999 to 2008, reaching 29,412 cases in 2008 at a cost of $266 million. Hospitalization rates for drug overdoses alone increased 55%, totaling 113,907 cases in 2008 at a cost of $737 million. Hospitalization rates for combined alcohol and drug overdoses increased 76%, with 29,202 cases in 2008 at a cost of $198 million.

Conclusions: Rates of hospitalizations for alcohol overdoses, drug overdoses, and their combination all increased from 1999 to 2008 among 18- to 24-year-olds. The cost of such hospitalizations now exceeds $1.2 billion annually. The steepest increase occurred among cases of combined alcohol and drug overdoses. Stronger efforts are needed to educate medical practitioners and the public about the risk of overdoses, particularly when alcohol is combined with other drugs. (*Journal of Studies on Alcohol Drugs, 72,* 774–786, 2011).

Summary: In summary, rates of inpatient hospitalizations for alcohol overdoses, drug overdoses, and their combination increased among 18- to 24-year-olds from 1999 to 2008. Hospitalizations for alcohol overdoses with no other drugs involved increased 25%. Hospitalizations for drug overdoses with no alcohol involved increased 56%. Hospitalizations for combined alcohol and drug overdoses increased the most at 76%. Approximately one in five drug overdose cases involved a concomitant alcohol overdose, indicating that excessive consumption of alcohol plays a prominent role in many cases of drug overdose. The cost of hospital stays stemming from alcohol and drug overdoses exceeded $1.2 billion in 2008. Stronger efforts to educate medical practitioners and the public about the risks of combining alcohol and other drugs could help reduce the number of such hospitalizations.

To read or download the full report, click here.