



The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University

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Wasting the Best and Brightest

Contacts: Lauren R. Duran, 212-841-5260, lduran@casacolumbia.org
Sulaiman Beg, 212-841-5213, sbeg@casacolumbia.org

NEW CASA* REPORT FINDS HALF OF COLLEGE STUDENTS BINGE DRINK, ABUSE PRESCRIPTION AND ILLEGAL DRUGS

NEARLY ONE IN FOUR MEET MEDICAL CRITERIA FOR ALCOHOL, DRUG ABUSE AND DEPENDENCE

WASHINGTON, D. C., March 15, 2007 – Forty-nine percent (3.8 million) of full time college students binge drink and/or abuse prescription and illegal drugs, according to *Wasting the Best and the Brightest: Substance Abuse at America's Colleges and Universities*, a new report by The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University.

The study also finds that 1.8 million full-time college students (22.9 percent) meet the medical criteria for substance abuse and dependence,^[i] two and one half times the 8.5 percent of the general population who meet these same criteria.

The comprehensive 231-page report, the result of more than four years of research, surveys, interviews and focus groups is the most extensive examination ever undertaken of the substance abuse situation on the nation's college campuses.

"It's time to get the 'high' out of higher education," said Joseph A. Califano, Jr., CASA's chairman and president and former U.S. Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare. "Under any circumstances acceptance by administrators, trustees, professors and parents of this college culture of alcohol and other drug abuse is inexcusable. In this world of fierce global competition, we are losing thousands of our nation's best and brightest to alcohol and drugs, and in the process robbing them and our nation of their promising futures."

The report finds that from 1993 to 2005 there has been no real decline in the proportion of students who drink (70 to 68 percent) and binge drink (40 to 40 percent). However, the intensity of excessive drinking and rates of drug abuse have jumped sharply:

- Between 1993 and 2001 the proportion of students who binge

drink frequently⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾ is up 16 percent; who drink on 10 or more occasions in a month, up 25 percent; who get drunk at least three times a month, up 26 percent; and who drink to get drunk, up 21 percent.

- Between 1993 and 2005 the proportion of students abusing prescription drugs increased:
 - 343 percent for opioids like Percocet, Vicodin and OxyContin;
 - 93 percent for abuse of stimulants like Ritalin and Adderall;
 - 450 percent for tranquilizers like Xanax and Valium;
 - 225 percent for sedatives like Nembutal and Seconal.
- Between 1993 and 2005, the proportion of students who:
 - Use marijuana daily more than doubled to 310,000.
 - Use cocaine, heroin, and other illegal drugs (except marijuana), is up 52 percent to 636,000.

Consequences of Abuse

Consequences of substance abuse on college campuses include:

- 1, 717 deaths from unintentional alcohol-related injuries in 2001, up six percent from 1998;
- A 38 percent increase from 1993 to 2001 in the proportion of students injured as a result of their own drinking;
- A 21 percent increase from 2001 to 2005 in the average number of alcohol-related arrests per campus. In 2005, alcohol-related arrests constituted 83 percent of campus arrests;
- 97,000 students were victims of alcohol-related rape or sexual assaults in 2001;
- 696,000 students were assaulted by a student who had been binge drinking in 2001.

These statistics come from a variety of analyses using the best and most recent data available.

What's the Problem?

Nearly 38 percent of college administrators say the major barrier to more effective prevention is the public perception that substance abuse by college students is a normal rite of passage.

“College presidents are reluctant to take on issues they feel they cannot change and this growing public health crisis reflects today’s society where students are socialized to consider substance abuse a harmless rite of passage and to medicate every ill,” said Reverend Edward A. Malloy, CSC, Chair, The CASA Commission on Substance Abuse at Colleges and Universities II and President Emeritus, University of Notre Dame. “To change this culture, college and university presidents need help from parents, alumni, students, Greek and athletic organizations, state and federal governments. Substance abuse on college campuses is not just an issue of public health; it is one of self-interest. Failure to act in the face of foreseeable harm places schools at risk for damaging their academic reputations and liability lawsuits in the millions of dollars.”

Other key findings:

- Rates of daily smoking among college students dropped from 15 percent in 1993 to 12 percent in 2005 and of daily heavy smoking (half a pack or more a day) from nine percent in 1993 to seven percent in 2005. More than 1.8 million full-time college students are current smokers.

- Fraternity and sorority members are likelier than non-members to drink (88 vs. 67 percent), binge drink (64 vs. 37 percent), drink and drive (33 vs. 21 percent), use marijuana (21 vs. 16 percent) or cocaine (3 vs. 1.5 percent), smoke (26 vs. 21 percent).
- 37 percent of college students fear social stigma attached to substance abuse, which keeps them from seeking help. Only 6 percent of students who meet medical criteria for alcohol or drug abuse or dependence seek help.
- 78 percent of college students who use illicit drugs have sexual intercourse compared to 44 percent of those who never use drugs.

“College presidents, deans and trustees have facilitated a college culture of alcohol and drug abuse that is linked to poor student academic performance, depression, anxiety, suicide, property damage, vandalism, fights and a host of medical problems,” noted Califano. “By failing to become part of the solution, these Pontius Pilate presidents and parents, deans, trustees and alumni have become part of the problem. Their acceptance of a status quo of rampant alcohol and other drug abuse puts the best and the brightest--and the nation’s future--in harm’s way.”

More than a decade ago, CASA convened its landmark *Commission on Substance Abuse at Colleges and Universities* to understand better the issues surrounding substance abuse at our nation’s colleges and universities. The Commission issued two reports: *The Smoke-Free Campus: A Report by the Commission on Substance Abuse at Colleges and Universities* (1993) and *Rethinking Rites of Passage: Substance Abuse on America’s Campuses* (1994) which drew attention to the widespread problems of student smoking and drinking, and highlighted the growing problem of dangerous drinking among women. In 2002, CASA reconvened and expanded the *Commission on Substance Abuse at Colleges and Universities II*, to examine what progress, if any, had been made in the intervening years.

CASA is the only national organization that brings together under one roof all the professional disciplines needed to study and combat all types of substance abuse as they affect all aspects of society. CASA has issued 63 reports and white papers, published one book, conducted demonstration projects focused on children, families and schools at 161 sites in 67 cities and counties in 29 states plus Washington, DC and a Native American tribal reservation, and has been evaluating the effectiveness of drug and alcohol treatment in a variety of programs and drug courts. CASA is the creator of the nationwide initiative *Family Day – A Day to Eat Dinner with Your Childrentm* -- the fourth Monday in September -- the 24th in 2007 -- that promotes parental engagement as a simple and effective way to reduce children’s risk of smoking, drinking and using illegal drugs. For more information visit www.casacolumbia.org.

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[1] As diagnosed from the fourth edition of the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV), addiction occurs when a user experiences at least three of these seven conditions: increased tolerance and diminished impact of same usage, withdrawal syndrome, greater consumption over longer

periods, inability to control use, preoccupation with obtaining the drug, important work or recreational activities abandoned, continued use despite the harm it causes. Abuse occurs when a user experiences at least one of these four conditions: problems at work, home or school, problems with family or friends, physical danger to self, trouble with the law.

[\[iii\]](#) Binge drinking three or more times in the past two weeks.

Other Press Releases...

[Wasting the Best and Brightest](#)

March 15, 2007

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