

Adolescent Girls and Opioids

for
Adolescent SBIRT Trainees



Scope of the Adolescent Opioid Problem

National Data (2016 NSDUH)

- 891,000 adolescents age 12-17 reported misusing opioids in 2016 (3.6%)
- 3.5 % misused prescription drugs while .1% of adolescents age 12-17 used heroin in 2016



Scope of the Adolescent Opioid Problem

Connecticut Data – NMUPD (2015 YRBS)

- 12% of CT high school students reported **ever** misusing prescription drugs (vs. 16.8% nationally)
- Rates of NMUPD among CT students did not vary by gender



Scope of the Adolescent Opioid Problem

Connecticut Data – Heroin (2015 YRBS)

- 2.2% of CT high school students reported **ever** using heroin (vs. 2.1% nationally)
- Rates of heroin use by CT male high school students was significantly higher than CT female high school students (3.0% vs. 1.1%)



Risk Factors for Adolescent Girls

- Trauma
- Biological/Physical
- Mental/Emotional
- Social Influences
- Transitions



Adolescent Girls - Trauma

- Girls and women have an increased likelihood of violence and trauma at any point in their life span
- There is a close correlation between surviving trauma and experiencing a substance use or mental health disorder
- Trauma can have a strong and long-lasting effect on development and on the experiences of women and girls (including guilt and shame)

Adolescent Girls - Trauma

- **Sexual and Physical Abuse**

- Girls experience more physical and sexual abuse than boys
- Girls who have been sexually abused are more likely to use or misuse substances
- Sexually abused girls use substances earlier, more often, and in greater quantities

Adolescent Girls - Trauma

- **Intimate Partner Violence**

- Girls are at risk of harm from partners/lovers
- Distress of being harmed by someone who supposedly cares for you leads to increase in mental health issues
- Partners may pressure girls to use substances such as opioids

Adolescent Girls – Trauma

- **Household Trauma**

- Exposure to the following household trauma is associated with initiation and increased prevalence of substance use disorders:
 - chaotic, unstructured, argumentative, and violent households
 - being expected to take on adult responsibilities as a child

Adolescent Girls – Trauma and Stigma

- Girls and women with substance use or mental health conditions/disorders are more highly stigmatized and stereotyped
- Lesbian, bisexual, and transgender girls and women may experience additional discrimination and stigma as a result of their sexual orientation
- Discrimination, stigma and stereotyping may be barriers to accessing services (which can prevent or impede recovery)

Adolescent Girls - Trauma

- **Other Forms of Trauma**

- Trafficking
- Sexism, Racism and Discrimination
- Sexual Harassment
- Parental Separation and Divorce
- Involvement with the Criminal Justice System
- Disability (cognitive and physical)



Adolescent Girls - Trauma



*It is important that we recognize girls as **resilient** and **able to recover** from the effects of trauma and substance use and mental health conditions/ disorders*

Adolescent Girls – Biological/Physical

- **Brain Maturation and Early Use**

- Adolescent brains develop at least through age 25
 - increases sensation-seeking behavior
 - impacts the ability to make rational decisions
- Most mental illnesses develop before age 24
- Initiation of drug use before 14 leads to greater likelihood to abuse or become dependent later in life
- Adolescents prescribed opioids by grade 12 are 33% more likely to misuse prescription opioids by 23

Adolescent Girls – Biological/Physical

- **Puberty**

- Early puberty in girls is associated with the highest risk of substance use (compared with on-time or late developing girls)
- Adolescents who believe they are more advanced in puberty than their peers are more likely to have used cigarettes, alcohol and marijuana recently

Adolescent Girls – Biological/Physical

- **Female Life Cycle and Physiology**

- Menstruation and puberty can influence mental health and substance use conditions, risks, and symptomology
- Some studies have shown a link between sex hormones and pain sensitivity - including changes in pain perception across the menstrual cycle
- Opioids and other substances may be used to cope with menstrual pain and cramps

Adolescent Girls – Biological/Physical

- **Substance Use Vulnerabilities**

- Girls ages 10-18 are more likely to report opioid misuse if they are current smokers or alcohol users (while boys' misuse is *only* associated with smoking)
- Some adolescents have a genetic predisposition to substance use
- Girls are more vulnerable to the physical impacts of substance use and addiction (even low levels of use can have serious health consequences for girls)

Adolescent Girls – Biological/Physical

- **Telescoping**

- Women and girls may become physically dependent on opioid pain medication more quickly than men and boys
- Physiological differences between the genders are likely factors in telescoping:
 - body fat percentages
 - metabolic rate
 - hormonal fluctuations

Adolescent Girls – Biological/Physical

*The telescoping phenomenon supports the need for both **screening and early intervention** among adolescent girls and women in order to delay the progression of opioid use and misuse!*

Adolescent Girls – Mental/Emotional

Mental health disorders including depression and anxiety are associated with increased risk for long-term opioid use among adolescents and emerging young adults

Adolescent Girls – Mental/Emotional

- **Mental Health Disorders**

- Mental health disorders are the most common diseases of childhood
- An estimated 17.1 million of the 74.5 million children in the U.S. have or had a mental illness
- Half of all mental illness occurs before age 14 and 75% by age 24
- Many teens with a mental health disorder turn to alcohol or other drugs to “self-medicate”

Adolescent Girls – Mental/Emotional

- **Depression and Anxiety**

- Depression and bipolar disorder affect 14.3% of adolescents age 13-17
- There is a nearly two-fold increase in mood disorders from age 13 to 18, from 8.4% to 15.4%
- Adolescent girls are more than twice as likely to experience depression than boys, 15.9% vs 7.7%
- All anxiety disorder subtypes are more common in girls than boys (phobias, PTSD, panic disorder, etc.)

Adolescent Girls – Social Influences

- **Peers and Partners**

- The presence of peers has been shown to influence risky behavior in social situations
- Peer approval is highly rewarding to the teen brain - may be why teens are more likely to take risks when other teens are around
- Adolescents who feel pressures from social media (feeling left out or like everyone else has a perfect life) may turn to alcohol and drugs
- Women/girls are more likely to initiate hazardous drug use while in an intimate partner relationship

Adolescent Girls – Transitions

- Increases in substance use among girls is associated with the following transitions:
 - Middle school to high school
 - High school to college
 - Moving from one neighborhood to another
 - Major family/life events such as death, divorce or remarriage
 - Puberty
 - Dating/relationship break-up

Adolescent Girls – Transitions

- **Top 5 Reasons Teens Use Drugs During Transitions**
 - To combat loneliness, low self-esteem, anxiety, or depression
 - To mentally “check out” of family issues or school trouble
 - To ease discomfort in an unfamiliar situation
 - To look cool or change their image/reputation
 - To fit in with a desired group of friends

Important Considerations in A-SBIRT with Girls

- Need to establish trust and rapport
- Demonstrate empathy, care, and appropriate boundaries
- Create a safe environment that encourages connection and empowerment
- Discuss sexuality in a respectful and sensitive manner
- Demonstrate culture and gender appropriate respect (through appropriate eye contact, language, tone of voice, and attention)

Resources



- Office on Women's Health (OWH) www.womenshealth.gov
- Office on Women's Health *Final Report: Opioid Use, Misuse, and Overdose in Women*
<https://www.womenshealth.gov/files/documents/final-report-opioid-508.pdf>
- Office on Women's Health's *White Paper: Opioid Use, Misuse, and Overdose in Women*
www.womenshealth.gov/files/documents/white-paper-opioid-508.pdf
- SAMHSA's *Addressing the Needs of Women and Girls: Developing Core Competencies for Mental Health and Substance Abuse Service Professionals* <https://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content/SMA11-4657/SMA11-4657.pdf>

Resources



- *Substance Abuse Treatment: Addressing the Specific Needs of Women A Treatment Improvement Protocol TIP 51*
<https://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content//SMA15-4426/SMA15-4426.pdf>
- *Connecticut Clearinghouse* www.ctclearinghouse.org



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