

UPDATES FROM SCIP February 2001



Marijuana Withdrawal Symptoms

In the first out-of-laboratory study on marijuana, researchers at McLean Hospital in Massachusetts have identified marijuana withdrawal symptoms.

According to researchers, increased irritability, anxiety and physical tension and declines in appetite and mood are all signs of marijuana withdrawal.

Researchers conducted a four-week study of chronic marijuana users who abstained from using the drug during the study period. Symptoms of withdrawal first appeared in chronic users within 24 hours. They were most pronounced for the first 10 days of the study, but increases in irritability and physical tension were observed in chronic users for all 28 days of abstinence.

(Source: JTO Wire, 12-22-00)



Caffeine Linked to Miscarriages

A new study shows a possible connection between caffeine use and miscarriages.

According to a study conducted by a research team in Sweden and the United States, one to three cups of American coffee a day increases the risk of miscarriage by 30 percent, while three to five cups increases the risk by 40 percent. Five cups of coffee per day more than doubles a pregnant woman's risk of a miscarriage.

(Source: JTO Wire, 12-21-00)



Memory and Relapse

Researchers determined that memory could be a primary cause of relapse among recovering illicit drug, alcohol and tobacco addicts.

The study found that the brain recognizes familiar reminders, such as smells or sights, associated with the addiction. The association could trick the brain into believing that a bad habit is something that still is good.

There are very long-term changes in the brain that far outlast the drug itself. The drug kind of hijacks the part of the brain involved in rational decision-making and makes it hard to overcome the craving that results.

A relapse could be triggered by walking past a familiar bar or smelling cigarette smoke. The research provides a biological reason, which will help to develop strategies to target genes that might be involved in the craving state.

The more that's understood about what's happening in the systems which cause cravings, the better drugs that can be developed to treat the craving state.

(Source: JTO Wire, 6-27-00)

Lifelong Problems

Teenagers who abuse alcohol often end up with worse drinking and mental-health problems as they age.

Researchers followed 940 high school students until age 24. They found that teens diagnosed with alcohol problems were more at risk for further drinking problems, other substance abuse, depression and personality disorders as they got older. For many adolescents, alcohol use disorders and problematic alcohol consumption are not benign conditions that self-resolve.

(Source: JTO Wire, 1-3-01)



Better Risk Indicators

Key factors in determining whether teens are likely to drink, smoke, use weapons, have sex or think about suicide include how well the child does in school and how they spend their free time. Income, ethnicity and residence in a single-parent home have little impact on whether a teen would get in trouble. Most risk and most protective factors are not restricted to a single group.

The study of 20,000 teens and their parents found that 47 percent of teens had used alcohol, including 60 percent of white students and 42 percent of black students. In addition, 26 percent of the teens said they had used or carried a weapon or saw one used against someone.

The lesson of the report is that parents should pay more attention to their children. Too many kids – rich kids and poor kids – are left to their own devices. Kids need structure to grow. (Source: JTO Wire, 12-4-00)



Home Alone

A new U.S. Census report shows that 7 million schoolchildren are spending afternoons unsupervised.

Nearly half of all children ages 12 to 14 spent seven hours home alone, and one of every 10 elementary-school children, some as young as five years old, spends 4-1/2 hours a week unsupervised by an adult.

The numbers are cause for concern, especially since the afternoon hours are the peak time for juvenile crime. In many ways, children's needs grow more complicated as adolescents.

Of special concern was the report's finding that two percent of the nation's five-year-olds spent an average of 4-1/2 hours a week

unsupervised by an adult. Parents are leaving their children unsupervised for several reasons. The biggest factor is that parents have less time to spend with their children because more of them are employed and work longer hours than they did a generation ago.

Grade-school children with working parents are more than twice as likely to spend part of the day caring for themselves than those whose parents don't work, outside the home.

High childcare costs appear to be the major reason why many families choose to leave five- to eight-year-olds to care for themselves a few hours a week.

(Source: JTO Wire, 11-8-00)



Beer Seen as More Dangerous than Liquor, Wine

When it comes to violence, all alcohol is not created equal: beer is four times more likely to be consumed in a potentially hazardous way than liquor and wine combined.

Eighty-one percent of the beer consumed is done so in a hazardous way, compared to 16 percent of liquor and 4 percent of wine. That's just one factor that advocates must consider when tackling the interrelated problems of alcohol abuse and violence: research has shown that up to 66 percent of all homicides and sexual assaults are related to alcohol, and two-thirds of all incidents of partner abuse involve alcohol.

Drinking also plays a role in gun violence: research has shown that 35 to 63 percent of all firearms' victims had alcohol in their blood, as did 18-65 percent of all suicide victims.

Both anti-violence activists and alcohol-control advocates need to come together around an environmental model of prevention and address the problem of alcohol-related violence in its political, social and economic context. Studies in California have shown a relationship between the density of alcohol outlets and violent crime.

(Source: HEC News, 8-16-01)



