



# Center for Behavioral Health Studies

## Adolescent Treatment Programs: Working toward Improved Services

Adolescents with substance abuse problems require specially designed treatment services. This is important because they are at critical life stages of development.

Recent national studies of facilities serving adolescent populations suggests many facilities still do not provide comprehensive services for young people. This is true, especially when other co-occurring mental illnesses are involved.

According to the 2005 National Survey on Drug Use, approximately 2.2 million adolescents (8.9 percent of the total adolescent population) suffered from alcohol and drug abuse. Almost all facilities treating adolescents conduct substance abuse assessments. However, **only half of these programs perform comprehensive mental health assessments.**

### Best Practices

Best practice standards recommend using age appropriate programs and continuing care services for adolescents after residential treatment.

To determine if treatment centers were following "best practice" recommendations, researchers compared data from National Research Information with nine key quality elements. Best practices, for example, include use of developmentally appropriate programs and continuing care for adolescents.

This study found many substance abuse programs have "significant room for im-

provement", in order to meet National quality standards.

"On the positive side, results show some facilities are now willing to admit young patients with other co-occurring mental health conditions." "However, many mental health and substance abuse providers have not attained integrated treatment." Services needing improvement included more comprehensive mental health and medical assessments of adolescent clients.

### Research Findings

This study found only 50 percent of all adolescent facilities were offering specialty programs for adolescents with co-occurring mental health problems.

While about 50 percent are conducting mental health assessments, only 38.9 percent are screening for medical conditions such as HIV and STD's. Results show that almost all facilities treating adolescents are conducting substance abuse assessments (96.6 percent).



Although lower rates of mental health assessments and medical screenings were reported, researchers did find high rates of other recommended practices. Specifically 84.8 percent of all programs were doing discharge planning, aftercare counseling, and relapse prevention groups.

While relatively high rates of ongoing treatment activities are encouraging, continuing aftercare services must be improved in order to ensure the "best possible patient outcomes" for treatment.

--Mona L. Sumner

**Summary**

National Survey on Drug Use and Health recently asked adolescents, age 12 and older, to report on their symptoms of dependence and abuse of alcohol or illicit drugs.

According to the report, about 1.4 million youth (5.4 percent) were classified as needing treatment for illicit drug use in the past year.

Only 10 percent of youth classified as needing treatment for illicit drug use had received drug abuse treatment.

**Of the young people classified as needing treatment, only 7.2 percent received specialty alcohol use treatment.**

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