

ADDICTION ADDICTION ADDICTION ADDICTION

Research Roundup

Prenatal cocaine exposure causes cognitive deficits

Prenatal cocaine exposure may cause significant cognitive deficits and double the rate of developmental delay during the first two years of a child's life, according to the results of a longitudinal, prospective, masked, comparison birth cohort study.

Participants included 218 cocaine-exposed and 197 unexposed infants identified from a high-risk, low-socioeconomic status, primarily black (80%) population and recruited from a large urban teaching hospital between 1994 and 1996. Clinical interviews and urine and meconium samples were used to test for drug use.

The researchers found that among cocaine-exposed children, the rate of mental retardation (13.7%) was nearly five times higher than the rate expected for the population at large. The percentage of children with mild or greater delays requiring intervention was 38 percent, almost double the rate of the high-risk non-cocaine but polydrug-exposed comparison group, according to the researchers.

The authors conclude, "Because two-year outcomes are predictive of later cognitive outcomes, it is possible that these children will continue to have learning difficulties at school age." [Singer LT, Arendt R, Minnes S, Farkas K, Salvator A, Kirchner HL, Kliegman R: *JAMA* 2002; 287(15):1952-60.]

Sponsorship yields benefits for sponsor

Sponsorship in some 12-Step treatment programs for injection drug users may yield greater sustained benefits for the sponsor than for the person being sponsored, according to the results of a new study.

The findings, which were based on a longitudinal study of 500 former and current injection drug users recruited from the community-at-large in inner-city Baltimore, revealed that having a

sponsor in Narcotics Anonymous (NA) and Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) was not associated with any improvement in one-year sustained abstinence rates compared with a non-sponsored group. However, after controlling for community organization involvement, NA/AA meeting attendance, marital status, employment, participation in drug/alcohol treatment centers and HIV status, they found that being a sponsor over the same one-year time period was strongly associated with substantial improvements in sustained abstinence rates. After controlling for the same variables, the study found that involvement in community organizations was also strongly associated with sustained abstinence.

"Our investigation suggests that, for NA/AA sponsors in this study population, providing direction and support to other addicts is associated with improved success in sustained abstinence for the sponsors but does little to improve the short-term success of the persons being sponsored," say the researchers. [Crape BL, Latkin CA, Laris AS, Knowlton AR: *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* 2002; 65(3): 291-301.]

Heavy drinking associated with health problems

A recent analysis of longitudinal data of men over 50 found that those who engage in very heavy drinking (i.e., 5+ per day) put themselves at significant risk for a range of health problems.

The study, which used two waves of data on men (ages 51 to 61 years) from the Health and Retirement Study, examined the association of problem drinking history and alcohol consumption with the onset of several health conditions and death over a six-year follow-up period. Five types of health outcomes were examined: mortality, general health, functional status, cognitive status and mental health. Drinking categories were based on the num-

ber of drinks consumed per day (0, <1, 1-2, 3-4 and 5+).

The researchers found that over the six-year follow-up period, the risk for developing functional impairments quadrupled from baseline for very heavy drinkers. A problem drinking history (defined as 2 or more affirmative responses to the CAGE) also was found to increase the onset of depression, psychiatric problems and memory problems. The researchers note that heavy drinking among the mature adults was not linked with an increased incidence of other health conditions, such as angina, cancer, congestive heart failure, diabetes, myocardial infarction, lung disease or stroke.

"Very heavy drinking and a problem drinking history greatly increased rates of onset of functional impairments, psychiatric problems and memory loss in late middle age men who had not experienced these impairments at their initial interview," say the researchers. [Perreira KM, Sloan FA: *Addiction* 2002; 97(3):301-310.]

Effects of ecstasy on mood, gender studied

Another study has found that women may be more susceptible than men to the harmful effects of ecstasy use.

Researchers conducted a parallel group study to investigate the acute and sub-acute effects of 3, 4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA; ecstasy) on the mood of recreational users, and to determine whether the effects differ for males and females. Participants included 40 subjects who reported taking ecstasy and a control group of 40 subjects who reported taking other illicit substances (excluding ecstasy). Participants were assessed on the evening of drug use and again four days later.

Female ecstasy users were found to be more depressed mid-week compared with their male counterparts and