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MICAP RECAP

Volume 110, Number 4 - September 2015

A Publication of the Michigan Council on Alcohol Problems
an American Alcohol and Drug Information Foundation Entity

*Michigan Council on Alcohol Problems
Celebrating its 110th Anniversary in 2015*

Know! To Discuss The Link Between Alcohol and Sexual Assault

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6155 Huntley Road, Suite H., Columbus, Ohio

Adapted for MICAP-RECAP by Rev. W. J. (Bill) Amundsen, MICAP BOARD MEMBER

Drug Free Action Alliance encourages you to use this as another opportunity to talk to your tween/teen about the many dangers alcohol can pose, including an increased risk of sexual assault.

Twenty-five percent of girls and 10-20 percent of boys have been or will become victims of sexual assault during adolescence or some other point in their lives. In at least half of all these cases, alcohol will play a role; having been consumed by the perpetrator, the victim or both.

Does this mean alcohol causes a perpetrator to sexually assault a victim? NO. Sexual assault is a criminal act of violence and cannot be justified by alcohol or any other drug use.

What if a person becomes heavily intoxicated and does not try to stop another person from making sexual advances? An intoxicated individual cannot legally give sexual consent. Therefore, sexual contact with someone under the influence of alcohol is considered sexual assault and carries consequences punishable by law.

While alcohol and other substance use is never an excuse for such criminal behavior, is there a connection between the two? YES. According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, "Alcohol contributes to sexual assault through multiple pathways, often exacerbating existing risk factors," such as alcohol's effects on cognitive thinking and motor skills, societal beliefs about alcohol's effects on sexual and aggressive behavior and stereotypes about females who choose to drink heavily.

While this may be an uncomfortable topic to discuss with your daughters and sons, it is a critical conversation for their health, safety and well-being.

Here are some FACTS to share with your tween/teen regarding alcohol and sexual assault:

Sexual assault includes verbal, visual or physical abuse that forces a person into sexual contact with another.

Sexual assault can happen with a stranger in an isolated place, which is usually the situation portrayed in the media. Be aware however, stranger rape accounts for only 20% of all rape cases.

Alcohol and Sexual Assault (Continued)

The vast majority of rapes and other sexual assaults are committed on a date, at a party or in the home by someone the victim knows: a friend, classmate, date or other acquaintance.

Even when consumed in small amounts, alcohol can reduce inhibitions, impair motor skills and cloud thinking and judgment (Many times causing individuals to misinterpret their situation). Drinking heavily can incapacitate a person altogether. But in no situation does alcohol excuse or allow a person to sexually take advantage of another.

Regardless of the circumstances (what the victim was wearing, where the victim was going, who the victim was with), a victim of sexual assault is not at fault for the attack, even if poor choices had been made by the victim along the way (like the choice to drink alcohol).

Sexual assault is not about love, passion or pleasure. It is an act of violence, aggression, power and control. Talking regularly with kids about the dangers of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs reduces their risk of using.

Here are some key messages to discuss with your child (especially of dating age):

You always have the right to tell someone, “No. Stop. Get Away.”

Do not assume you know what your date is thinking or feeling. Be clear with each other about what is acceptable and what is not.

It is important to set boundaries and to not let someone pressure you into doing something you don't want to do.

True consent means both partners have equal power, and that one is not pressuring the other.

Forcing or pressuring someone into any type of sexual activity is never okay. This includes physical force or non-physical force such as deception, trickery, threats or verbal pressure. No one should ever say, “If you love me, you will _____ with me.”

If you are forced into something, I want you to know that it is NOT your fault – even if you break a family rule, like underage drinking. I would also want you to tell me about it. I am always here for you and want to help you. But if you feel you cannot tell me, please tell another adult.” When talking to your child, make it a two-way dialogue (talk, but more importantly, listen). Build your child's trust by allowing him/her to share openly with you about touchy subjects such as this one. Children need guidance in developing their own set of personal values, establishing boundaries for themselves and learning how to communicate it with others, and they will look to you in helping to build that foundation.

If you, your child or someone you know is a victim of sexual assault, help is available. Contact the National Sexual Assault Hotline at 1.800.656.HOPE or visit www.rain.org. For more information on the dangers of alcohol and underage drinking, visit www.niaaa.nih.gov.

Updates from Some of MICAP's Partners

Michigan Alcohol Policy Promoting Health and Safety (MAP) - This legislative session, MAP has been delivering information to Michigan's lawmakers on almost a weekly basis. Below are some of the topics.

- Evidence-based strategies to reduce excessive alcohol consumption
- State Control of Alcohol - Protecting the Public's Health
- Powdered Alcohol

Updates (Continued)

- Preventing Excessive Alcohol Consumption/Local and State Alcohol Data Sources
- Why Educational Strategies Don't Work

MAP plans to do this on a regular basis. To see this information you can visit www.michiganalcoholpolicy.org, click on the "Policy" tab and then click the "Legislative Drop" tab.

In addition to doing these "legislative drops," MAP and MICAP both participated in a press conference regarding legislation to ban powdered alcohol in Michigan. The press conference took place April 28 at the Capitol in Lansing. Lastly, on June 4, MAP, MICAP, the Michigan Coalition to Reduce Underage Drinking, and the Troy Community Coalition all attended the Michigan Liquor Control Commission's semi-annual public comment hearing in Southfield.

Prevention Network (PN) - Since January of this year PN has convened a stakeholders meeting six times for the purpose of creating a Statewide Three-Year Strategic plan to address underage drinking. The State of Michigan's Office of Recovery Oriented Systems of Care (SOM/OROSC) has contracted with PN to create this plan. PN is hoping to submit this plan to the SOM/OROSC later this year. SOM/OROSC will then decide on how to proceed.

Know! Alcohol's Female Effect

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Many adults assume that underage drinking mostly involves boys. That assumption however, is false. In fact, girls have not only caught up to boys when it comes to drinking, but in many cases have surpassed them. According to results from the 2012 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, among youth aged 12 to 17, the percentage of females who were current drinkers (13.2 percent) was higher than their male counterparts (12.6 percent).

Research also shows that while alcohol use among boys and girls is just about equal, the impact of alcohol on their bodies and brains are not.

Females are more vulnerable to the effect of alcohol than males, and here's why:

Females have less water in their bodies to help dilute the alcohol in the bloodstream;

Females absorb alcohol at a slower rate; Females naturally produce less alcohol dehydrogenase (a gastric enzyme which breaks down ethanol in the stomach that otherwise is toxic).

What this means is that a female and male of the same size and weight can drink the same amount of alcohol and yet the female will have a higher concentration of alcohol in her blood. It also means that females who go "drink-for-drink" with males are likely to become intoxicated more quickly and are more susceptible to alcohol poisoning.

Alcohol can be damaging to the developing adolescent brain, regardless of gender. However, females are more sensitive to alcohol-induced brain damage than males. Research has found that females who drink heavily for long periods of time may experience a reduction in their corpus callosum (a band of nerves deep within the brain that connect the left and right hemispheres of the brain to communicate and coordinate one's activities), whereas males do not.

As females age, the differences remain. As adults, women struggle more than men to break down fatty acids in the body, therefore resulting in a higher number of women who develop liver diseases after comparatively shorter periods of heavy drinking than men. But even younger women in their late



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Alcohol's Female Effect (Continued)

teens and early 20s who chronically abuse alcohol are at increased risk for ulcers and other gastrointestinal problems.

Underage drinking is damaging and dangerous. Parents are encouraged to talk early and often, sharing clear anti-use messages with daughters and sons alike. It is important to include in your talks, especially with your daughters, the fact that that drinking impacts females more intensely, so that she is better armed to make informed, healthy decisions surrounding alcohol, as a teen and into her adult years.

Sources: 2012 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Summary of National Findings. Girls, Women and Alcohol: Making Informed Choices resource from Healthy Child Manitoba. NYU Langone Medical Center: The Child Study Center: Girls and Alcohol.

Our Speaker's Bureau

If your group or church or class/school would like to hear something more about MICAP, or Alcohol Problems in Michigan or the USA, please contact Rev. Bill Amundsen at (517) 323-2445. Please leave a message if no one answers. He will return your call to arrange a mutually convenient time. We are a temperance organization concerned with under-age and abusive drinking. We work with the State Legislature to encourage a better social policy on beverage alcohol.

Your Gifts Make a Difference

Consider sponsoring an Issue of our MICAP/RECAP for \$1,500.00. Please phone (517) 999-0013 if you are interested. Your gift will inform State and National officials, churches and individuals about a better policy regarding beverage alcohol. As always, your donation may be tax deductible to the extent allowed under federal and state laws. Thank you.