This issue of the Child Policy newsletter offers a sampling of recent research related to adolescent substance abuse and newborn health.

HOT TOPICS

Drinking Among Adolescents and Young Adults

Adolescent alcohol use is an important public health concern in the United States today. Estimates suggest that by 8th grade, one-fourth of all adolescents consumed alcohol to the point of intoxication and that adolescent drinking plays a key role in the four leading causes of death among teens—car accidents, accidental injuries, homicides, and suicides. RAND conducted a study, titled Ten-Year Prospective Study of Public Health Problems Associated with Early Drinking, which followed 3,400 youths who were recruited in 1985 from 30 socially and economically diverse schools in California and Oregon when they were enrolled in the 7th grade. The study found that children who are drinking alcohol by the 7th grade are significantly more likely to suffer employment problems, abuse other drugs, and commit criminal and violent acts once they reach young adulthood.

RAND has also issued a new report focusing specifically on binge drinking among adolescents and young adults in the United States. This longitudinal study, titled Patterns and Correlates of Binge Drinking Trajectories from Early Adolescence to Young Adulthood, followed 5,694 individuals who completed six surveys from ages 13 to 23 years and is a crucial initial step in identifying and characterizing proper developmental trajectories of binge drinking.

Read the Early Drinking press release
Read more on Binge Drinking

Smoking During Adolescence and Young Adulthood

Experimentation with cigarette smoking is a common occurrence during adolescence, with 78 percent of high school students having tried smoking by the 12th grade. Although most of these adolescents never become committed smokers, a sizable minority of those who experiment with cigarettes progress to regular smoking during the adolescent years. This RAND report looked to identify predictors of the transition from experimentation to regular smoking in middle adolescence, late adolescence, and young adulthood. Researchers found several smoking-related attitudes, social influences, and behaviors such as pro-smoking beliefs, strained relations with parents, and alcohol consumption that prevention efforts may target to curb the escalation of smoking.

Read the full abstract

Postpartum Length of Stay and Newborn Health: A Cost-Effectiveness Analysis

With passage of the Newborns’ and Mothers’ Health Care Act of 1996, insurance plans were prohibited from restricting postpartum hospital stays to less than 48 hours for a standard delivery and 96 hours for a Caesarean section. Analyzing data from studies and administrative records from more than 100,000 births in the state of Washington, this newly issued RAND report found that lengthening the time some newborns and their mothers spend in the hospital is more cost-effective than other measures routinely taken to safeguard newborns. Among the births studied, the report found that hospital stays would need to be lengthened by 15 hours, on average, and that the average cost of longer stays would be about $25,000–$90,000 for each newborn life-year saved. Moreover, the study concluded this to be more cost-effective than medication routinely given to premature newborns to protect them against a common respiratory virus and as cost-effective as a pneumonia vaccine recommended for all infants.

Read the full report

PROJECTS UNDER WAY

Causal Effects of Community-Based Treatment for Youths

The number of substance abuse program admissions for youths in the United States has been rising dramatically. Despite this growth, little is known about the effectiveness of community-based treatment services for adolescents. Using data from the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)–sponsored Drug Abuse Treatment Outcomes Studies for adolescents (DATOS–A), this study will provide a thorough assessment of the comparative effectiveness of community-based adolescent substance abuse programs and develop a more relevant approach to substance abuse treatment services research.

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