

DRUG AWARENESS

Women alcohol abusers pose greater health risk

Women who abuse alcohol are at far greater risk of severe health problems and death than their male counterparts, recent research indicates.

According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAA), the death rate among women who drink heavily is 50 to 100 per cent higher compared to male alcoholics.

Female alcoholics are more likely than male alcohol abusers to kill themselves or die of circulatory disorders, cirrhosis of the liver or alcohol related accidents, the NIAA reports.

Heavy drinking among women has also been associated with menstrual disorders, infertility and early menopause. Other research indicates that women who drink daily may increase their risk of breast cancer.

In addition, the NIAA reveals that the course of alcoholism is greatly accelerated among women. They develop the disease sooner even after abusing less alcohol than men.

While women alcoholics traditionally hide a drinking problem, they are now seeking treatment in record numbers, the NIAA reveals.

The percentage of female to male patients in treatment (25% women, 75% men) is roughly equal to the proportion of female alcoholics to male alcoholics within the general population (30% women, 70% men).

The NIAA adds that when it comes to drinking, the differ-

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— NIAA report

ences between men and women aren't confined only to the alcohol abuse.

"Even women who drink moderately are more susceptible than men to alcohol's effects since it generally takes less alcohol to make them intoxicated," explained Judy Bannerman of CompCare Health Services.

The NIAA sites three main reasons for the disparity between the sexes when it comes to drinking.

First, men have more total body water into which alcohol is diffused more evenly. Women, on the other hand have more body fat which retains alcohol leading to a higher concentration of alcohol in their bloodstream.

Second, the intestinal enzyme responsible for metabolizing alcohol is less active in women.

Finally, hormonal fluctuations during menstruation may lead to higher blood alcohol levels during different point in the woman's cycle.

The NIAA also reveals the additional facts about women and drinking:

□ While alcohol abuse is increasingly common among women between the ages of 18 and 34, studies still indicate that fewer women than men drink.

□ Compared to the general population, children of alcohol abusers are at increased risk of development the disease.

However, research indicates that marriage or a long-term relationship may lessen the chances that the daughter of an alco-

holic will inherit the illness.

□ women juggling multiple roles of wife, mother and professional person once were considered at highest greater risk for alcoholism. But recent findings show that women who are single, widowed or unemployed are more likely to abuse alcohol.

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Youth and Drugs removes intimidation from drug education

The corridors of the youth clinic at the Addiction Research Foundation are the first indication that it isn't a typical hospital setting. Posters about safe sex cover the bulletin board, a ping-pong game is in full swing at the far end of the hallway, and in the lounge area, a group of teenagers relax, feet up, shooting the breeze. Neither the atmosphere nor the kids who've come here for treatment seem intimidating; yet, that's how many professionals who work with teenagers feel when it comes to young people and drugs.

Elsbeth Tupker is the director of the Foundation's youth clinic. "In the past, youth workers have tended to refer kids as soon as they identify a drug problem," she says. "Many of them have told me they just don't know how to deal with it."

The Addiction Research Foundation is responding with an education program that will help a wide range of professionals learn how to deal with young people and drugs. Tupker was delighted when she was asked to become involved. She laughs. "That was four years ago. The project has since grown beyond anyone's expectations," including an agreement in 1989 to de-

velop it as part of the Canadian Drug Strategy.

Tupker is a veteran when it comes to counselling teenagers. "I was already working in the field," she says. "I'd been teaching a course for several years on young people and drugs for the Foundation's Department of Training and Education and I was seeing a growing interest in this area. More and more youth workers,

with no special expertise in addictions, were attending my workshops. And as I met these front-line workers, I began to realize that they were capable of doing a lot of the work themselves in terms of assessing kids with drug problems and dealing with them."

The proposal for a special education package was unique, however. It would reflect Tupker's practical experience, but it was to be rooted

in scientific research to be co-ordinated by Dr. Helen Annis, also of the Addiction Research Foundation. "It was an interesting project from a scientist's perspective," says Annis, "because it meant that a lot of very technical information would have to be made accessible to people without a scientific background to show them there was nothing particularly sacred or godlike about that knowledge."

Annis and Tupker assembled a large team of experienced addictions specialists to produce the necessary materials, including experts from the Hospital for Sick Children and Central Toronto Youth Services. After months of work, a pilot program was ready, consisting of written and audio-visual materials that would be available in either self-study or trainer-led formats.

Then began an usually extensive review and evaluation. In the summer of 1989, a first draft of Youth and Drugs materials was reviewed internally. In December, a second draft was sent to about 40 reviewers from agencies across Canada, a group that included teachers, probation officers, and youth workers.

"There was an extraordinary

amount of interest," Annis remembers. "People wrote back with comments and suggestions, ranging all the way from corrections of grammatical errors to the issue of how cultural factors tie into drug abuse."

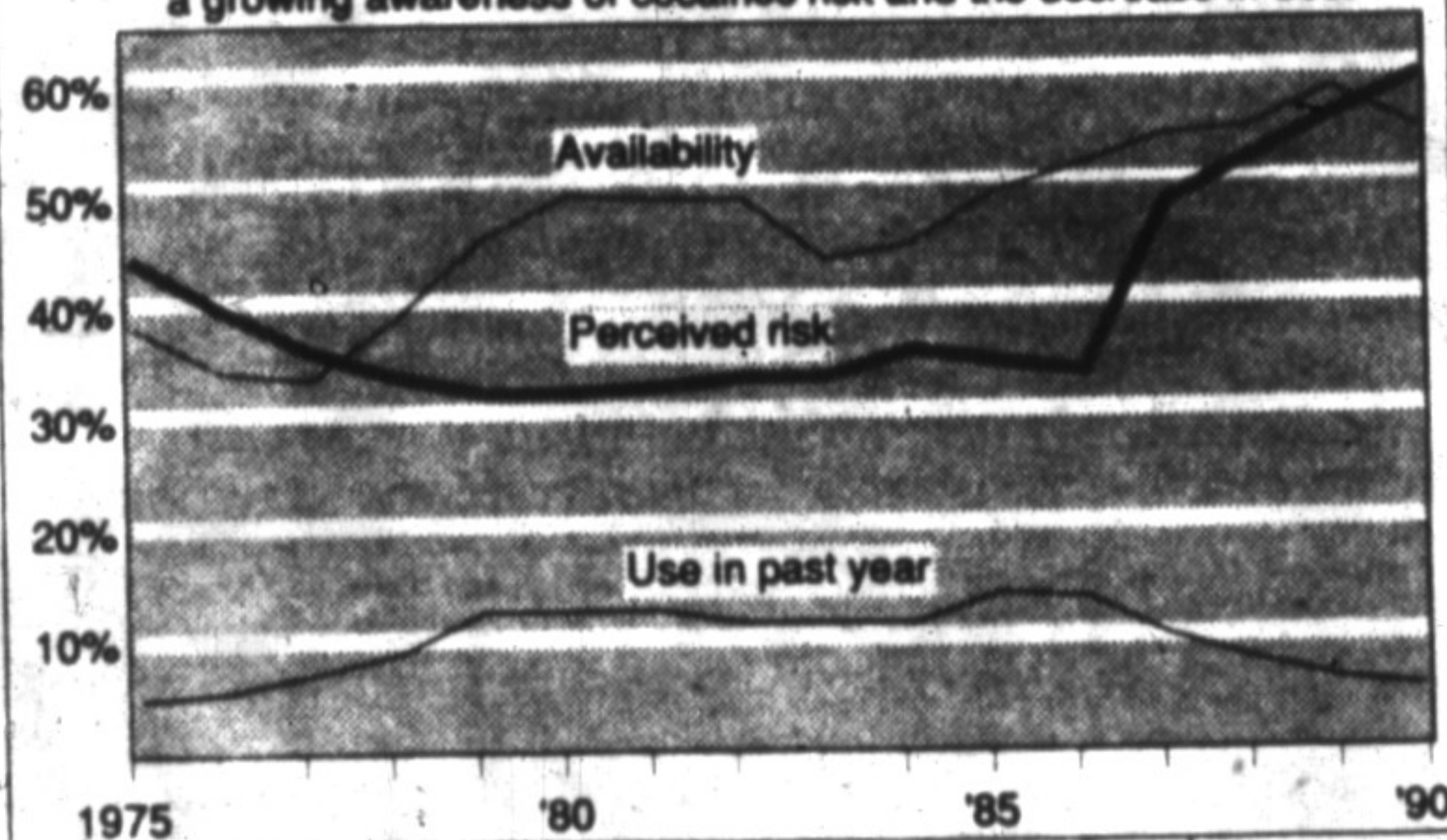
By May of 1990, Youth and Drugs was ready for pilot testing and Tupker soon found herself crisscrossing Canada. "We tested the package in three-day, intensive training sessions in Edmonton, Halifax and Toronto. And what we hear again and again from the people who took part was how readable and realistic both the materials and the approach were."

Annis agrees. "It was a chance to demystify the assessment and treatment process; to empower professionals who feel they don't have the expertise to deal with kids who are using drugs. And that's going to make a big difference in being able to intervene in the early stages of drug abuse."

"And in a way," says Tupker, "what we're also telling adults is to remember their own adolescence. I see plenty of tangible evidence of it myself, right next door to my office. And I think Youth and Drugs is a reflection of that."

Cocaine trends

A continuing survey of North American high school seniors shows a growing awareness of cocaine's risk and the decrease in use.



Basic data: The Good News About Drugs And Alcohol

MAKE AN EDUCATED CHOICE SAY NO TO DRUGS!

The Halton Board of Education

The Halton Board of Education urges all students to eliminate the risks associated with drug use. Making an educated choice and adhere to a drug free environment allows for the greatest learning potential. The Board recognizes the need to constantly evaluate drug education and implement drug prevention policies.

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