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Co-occurrence of Serious Mental Illness and Alcohol, Drug Addiction

Findings from the 2003 National Survey on Drug Use and Health found a major correlation between serious mental illness and alcohol and drug addiction. It found 33.2 million adults aged 18 or older had a serious mental illness or alcohol or drug addiction. An estimated 4.2 million adults suffered from serious mental illness and alcohol and drug addiction in the past year.

- Rates of serious mental illness were relatively low among adults who did not have a substance use disorder. The rate of serious mental illness was 7.0 percent among adults with no alcohol or drug addiction. The rate was much higher among those with alcohol dependence or abuse (19.0 percent). The rate of Serious Mental Illness (SMI) was highest among adults who met the criteria for both drug and alcohol dependence or abuse (30.1 percent)
- Adults who used illicit drugs were more than twice as likely to have serious mental illness, compared to adults who did not use an illicit drug.
- Adults with illicit drug dependence or abuse in the past year were more likely to have SMI in the past year than adults who used illicit drugs but did not have dependence or abuse
- Eighteen percent of adult past-year users of illicit drugs had serious mental illness that year, while the rate was 7.8 percent among adults who had not used an illicit drug.
- Among adults with substance dependence or abuse, 21.6 percent had serious mental illness, compared to 8.0 percent among those who did not have dependence or abuse.
- Adults with alcohol dependence or abuse were more likely to have SMI than adults who had used alcohol but did not have dependence or abuse (OR = 2.0).

In New Jersey, 41 percent of the clients treated in the mental health system or substance abuse system were found to have co-occurring disorders. Clients with co-occurring Disorders were significantly more likely to have one or more subsequent admissions than mental health or substance abuse only clients. Despite the significance treatment for those with co-occurring disorders has been problematic. Factors that contribute to the problems of treating clients with co-occurring disorders include the:

- Stigma attached to both;
- Lack of parity for both;
- Lack of integration. Alcohol and drug treatment and mental health treatment are parallel systems. There are two distinct therapeutic disciplines, philosophies, services, and academic preparation.



PUBLIC POLICY & INFORMATION

Promoting Addiction Prevention, Treatment and Recovery Through Advocacy and Education

In New Jersey, 53 percent of the clients with co-occurring disorders had not been identified in their administrative record, but had admission to both systems within a 12 month period. Substance abuse identified 23 percent of clients with co-occurring disorders and referred 57 percent of these clients for mental health treatment. Mental Health identified 57 percent of clients with co-occurring disorders, yet only 8 percent of all clients with co-occurring disorders and 17 percent of those identified in their records as having co-occurring disorders received a referral for substance abuse treatment.