

# Substance Use Among Older Adults

## Substance Abuse and Older Adults

- Individuals, 65 years old and over, use more prescribed and over-the-counter medications than any other age group in the United States.
- Prescription drug abuse is growing among older adults, not only because more drugs are prescribed to this group, but also because aging makes their bodies more vulnerable to the drugs' effects.
- Substance abuse among older adults was first described in research in the 1960's; by the 1970's, researchers were convinced that substance abuse was rare and that older adults mature out of their problems.
- Now, it's estimated that 2.5 million older adults in the US have a substance use disorder, and that the abuse of prescription drugs among older adults is one of the fastest growing health problems in the country.

## Baby Boomers Age, Substance Abuse Rises

- A study conducted on individuals ages 50 and over on their substance use and the treatment for those numbers in the years 2000 and 2001. Taking into consideration the baby boomer cohort aging 20 years, the study calculated a 50% increase in the number of older adults (Baby boomer cohort) and a 70% increase in the need for treatment among older adults by 2020.

## Treating Older Adults With Substance Abuse

- Consider whether or not their client needs detox and inpatient services. It is crucial to take into consideration that the best option for them may be in a hospital setting, due to the fact that detoxification can be riskier for an older adult compared to the younger population.
- Brief interventions, meaning the counselor needs to be aware that most aging adults are ashamed of their use and that the intervention needs to be non-confrontational and supportive.
- Motivational counseling, this involves the counselor listening to the older adult and meeting them where they are in their readiness to change. It also places the responsibility to change on that individual.

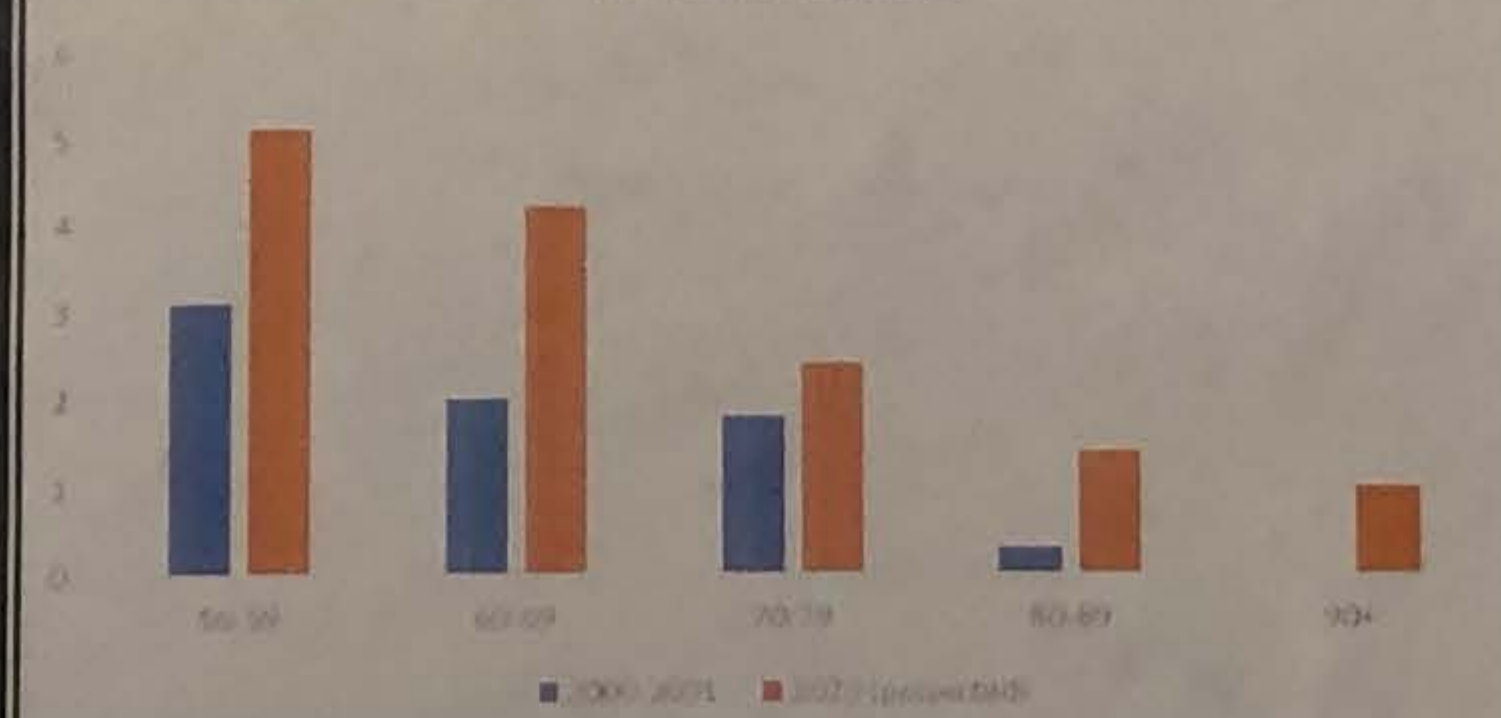
## Hard to Diagnose

- Some of the symptoms of drug misuse and abuse are difficult to diagnose in older adults because the symptoms mimic symptoms of dementia and depression.
- Health care providers for this population are not equipped with the knowledge to screen the older adult population for a substance use disorder and may also have a bias that these types of disorders are not worth treating in the aging population.
- In addition to health care providers mistaking substance abuse for other issues, older adults are more likely to hide their substance abuse and are less likely to seek help.

## Questions for Future Research

- Proposed substance abuse rate for 2020 needs to be examined
- Proposed population rate for 2020 needs to be examined
- If any other drug becomes more prevalent with this age group

Percentage of Population in Need of Substance Abuse Treatment



## Why Substance Use Among Older Adults Is Increasing

- Some birth cohorts that have high rates of substance abuse in their youth have shown higher rates of substance abuse, along with other associated problems, as they age, when compared to other cohorts.

## The Need For Specialists

- There will be a high demand for substance abuse treatment specialists especially by the year 2020.
- There will also be an increased need for training for health care providers on the prevention and treatment for a substance use disorder among the aging adult population.
- Due to current perceptions that substance abuse among the elderly is nonexistent, issues in substance use disorder assessments for this population, and considering that the next cohort to enter this population group is the baby boomers, the United States will most likely have insufficient health care resources to care for these individuals.

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