



OSAM-O-GRAM



DATE: January 2007
DATELINE: Ohio

Wright State University & the University of Akron

Targeted Response Initiative on Substance Abuse among Older Adults Part IV: Negative Consequences of Substance Abuse

According to the study participants, substance abuse among older-aged people results in a broad range of **health** problems, including an increased likelihood of falls, a host problems related by drug interactions, poor nutrition, dehydration, and the deterioration of pre-existing health conditions. For example, a substance abuse treatment provider from Columbus indicated:

If we're looking at somebody who has been drinking for 30 years, we're gonna see a lot of end stage stuff. We're gonna see a list of medications and cardio-vascular [problems].... We also tend to see [alcohol abuse] paired with more depression, more mood disorders.

Alcohol and other drug abuse often increases **financial** problems for seniors and may compromise their ability to pay for essential needs such as shelter and food. Substance abuse among older-aged people contributes to **social problems** such as isolation, family conflicts, and an increased likelihood of victimization and abuse from family members, associates and others.

With alcohol, everyone looks down on you. You end up with marital problems, money problems, job problems. If you've been drinking for more than 50 years, you've got more than just one problem. You end up with no support system--your family gives up on you. (Senior in recovery, Akron)

Women off the street, other addicts exploit [alcohol abusing elderly]. Particularly in my building, I see a lot of men being exploited by women. I had one severe alcoholic in the building that took care of several homeless women... [One woman] that was addicted to alcohol or drugs, she would come almost on a daily basis asking for money and food. (Social service provider, Columbus)

Alcohol and other drug abuse among older-aged people sometimes compromises their ability to access and/or retain **social services**, such as housing assistance or home health aide help. This is of particular concern for homebound seniors who rely on others for meals, medication management, and personal hygiene. For example, a home health aide from Dayton described her experiences with a drug abusing senior client, "She would drink, and then she would go out wandering. And then she fell off the porch, and she broke something. So she wound up goin' 'on hold' [not at home] and if they're 'on hold' long enough, then they will lose their [home aide] services." An older-aged heroin user from Dayton described his attempts to obtain housing assistance:

I want one [senior apartment] bad. They just turned me down. I told 'em that I was a drug addict, you know filling out the application. And I told 'em I had a [criminal] record.... And they just ain't gonna let me in.... I like it [need housing], because they're for senior citizens. We old, we can't do what a young person do, and I don't have nothin'. That's why I need 'em.

According to the study participants, alcohol and drug abuse among older-aged adults leads to numerous health, social and financial problems. It can also complicate access to social services for needy and vulnerable seniors.

OSAM-O-GRAMS report key findings of the Ohio Substance Abuse Monitoring (OSAM) Network. Informants located throughout the state use qualitative and quantitative data to provide semiannual monitoring of substance abuse trends. The OSAM Network is funded by the Ohio Department of Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services by contract to Wright State University and by subcontract to the University of Akron. This OSAM-O-GRAM is based on the January 2007 OSAM Network meeting.

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