Drinking Behavior Assessed Among Hispanics

BY KERRI WACHTER
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WASHINGTON — Drinking behavior varies considerably across Hispanic national groups, with Puerto Rican men, Mexican men, and Puerto Rican women at the greatest risk for binge drinking.

In a study of more than 5,000 Hispanics, Mexican American men reported the greatest rate of binge drinking at least once a month; Puerto Rican men reported the greatest rate of binge drinking less than once a month.

Among women, Puerto Ricans had the greatest rate of binge drinking less than once an month and at least once a month, reported Suhasini Ramisetty-Mikler, Ph.D., in a poster presented at a joint meeting sponsored by the Research Society on Alcoholism and the International Society for Biomedical Research on Alcoholism

Dr. Ramisetty-Mikler, of the epidemiology department at the University of Texas in Dallas, and her colleagues surveyed 5,224 individuals 18 years and older (50.3% male). Participants belonged to one of four Hispanic national groups: Puerto Ricans (25.6%), Cuban Americans (25.4%), Mexican Americans (24.7%), and South/Central Americans (24.4%). Participants lived in one of five metropolitan areas—Miami, New York, Philadelphia, Houston, and Los Angeles.

The surveys were computer-assisted personal interviews that lasted 1 hour on average and were conducted in the respondent's home.

Variables included in the model were drinking status (current, ex-drinkers, lifetime abstainers), average number of drinks per week (over the last 12 months), frequency of binge drinking (over the last 12 months), age of initiation, Hispanic national origin, birthplace, and other socioeconomic variables (age, marital status, education, income). Binge drinking was defined as four standard drinks for women or five standard drinks for men within a 2-hour period.

Overall, men had greater drinking rates than women. Drinking rates were greatest for younger individuals (18-29 years and 30-39 years). However, Mexican American women were an exception, with an increase in drinking among women aged 50 years and older.

The study was supported by a grant from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. ■

Expectations Lowered for Disulfiram

VIENNA — Disulfiram has a far more truncated role in the treatment of cocaine dependence than once envisioned, Frank J. Vocci, Ph.D., said at the annual congress of the European College of Neuropsychopharmacology.

When the first signals appeared that disulfiram (Antabuse) was effective in treating cocaine dependence, addiction specialists were excited at the prospect of finally having a drug for dual cocaine/alcohol dependence—a common problem that is extremely difficult to treat.

It seemed logical, given that disulfiram has been approved by the Food and Drug Administration for the treatment of alcohol dependence for more than 55 years.

But it was not to be, said Dr. Vocci, director of the division of pharmacotherapies and medical consequences of drug abuse at the National Institute of Mental Health, Bethesda, Md.

Indeed, analysis of the aggregate data from all clinical trials of disulfiram to date—and disulfiram is the best-studied medication for cocaine dependence—indicates that while the drug does result in a mild to moderate reduction in cocaine use, the benefit is restricted to those people who are not alcohol users during the study period.

Moreover, a striking gender disparity was found: Disulfiram simply is not effective in women, who account for roughly half of the more than 3 million long-term cocaine users in the United States.

The current thinking is that disulfiram is effective in cocaine users who have a variant of the dopamine beta-hydroxylase gene.

—Bruce Jancin