

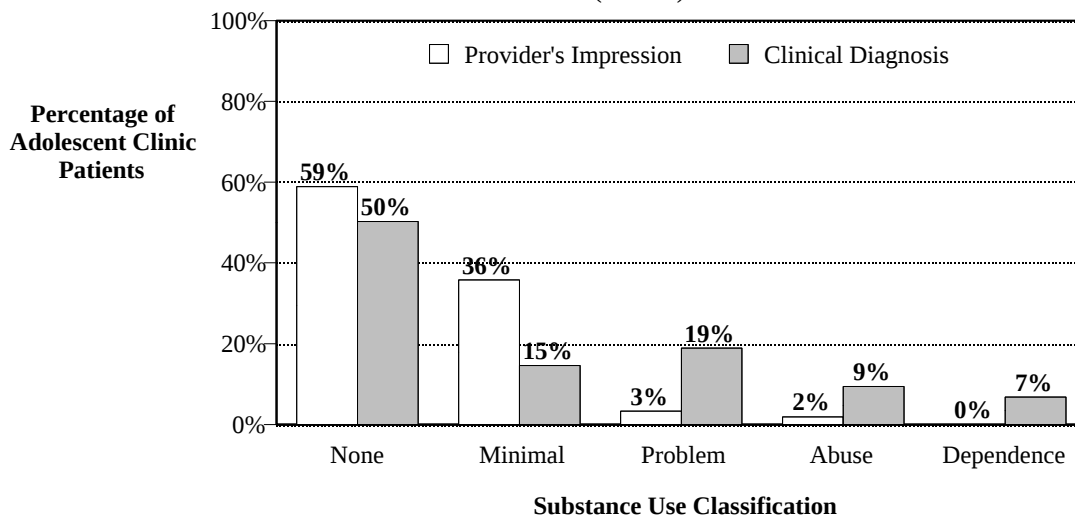
A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland, College Park

Health Care Providers Underestimate Severity of Adolescent Substance Use

Health care providers rarely identify problematic substance use, abuse, or dependence among adolescents, according to a study of youths age 14 to 18 visiting an urban, hospital-based clinic for routine or urgent care. Nearly one-fifth of the youths had a clinical diagnosis of problem substance use, yet providers identified only 3% of youths as having problem substance use. Furthermore, 16% of youths were diagnosed with substance abuse or dependence, yet providers identified only 2% of youths as having these disorders. Providers were better able to identify drug use among boys than among girls and were better able to identify male drug use than male alcohol use (data not shown). The authors note that youths may have been reluctant to fully disclose their substance use to a health care provider. They suggest that structured screening devices “be considered for use with all adolescent patients, rather than only those who are perceived to be at higher risk” (p. 540).

**Percentage of Adolescent Clinic Patients (Age 14 to 18) with
Medical Care Provider’s Impression and Clinical Diagnosis of Substance Use**
(N=533)



NOTE: Clinical diagnoses were assessed by the administration of the Adolescent Diagnostic Interview (ADI) by a trained research assistant at the conclusion of the medical visit.

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from Wilson, C.R., Sherritt, L., Gates, E., and Knight, J.R. “Are Clinical Impressions of Adolescent Substance Use Accurate?” *Pediatrics* 114(5):536-540, 2004.

• 301-405-9770 (voice) • 301-403-8342 (fax) • CESAR@cesar.umd.edu • www.cesar.umd.edu •

CESAR FAX is supported by BYRN 2004-1206, awarded by the U.S. Department of Justice through the Governor’s Office of Crime Control and Prevention. CESAR FAX may be copied without permission. Please cite CESAR as the source.