

A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland at College Park *

CASA Report on Substance Abuse on College Campuses Under Scrutiny

In June 1994, the Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University released a report, *Rethinking Rites of Passage: Substance Abuse on America's Campuses*. The report concluded that "abusive drinking" on college campuses has led to a rise in the "disastrous consequences of binge drinking--including death, violence, rape and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, such as AIDS" (p. ii). The results of the study were published by numerous media sources as well as substance abuse organizations such as ourselves (see CESAR FAX Volume 3, Issue 31). Recently, however, the report has been undergoing closer scrutiny. Kathy McNamara-Meis, a senior editor of *Forbes Media Critic Magazine*, investigated the sources behind some of the statistical data cited by CASA. Some of her findings appear below.

CASA Reported That . . .

"The number of women who reported drinking to get drunk more than tripled--between 1977 and 1993" (p. ii).

"90% of all reported campus rapes occur when alcohol is being used by either the assailant or the victim" (p. ii).

"60% of college women who have acquired sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS and genital herpes, were under the influence of alcohol at the time they had intercourse" (p. ii).

McNamara-Meis Reported That . . .

"The survey that produced [this statistic] was limited to drinking at a handful of colleges in Massachusetts in . . . 1977 and 1989, hardly a national sampling." Also, "the survey compared apples and oranges--drinking by college students of all ages ('77) to that by freshmen only ('89)" (p. 5).

"This statistic does not appear to exist in the published research available on rape." The CASA report did not provide a source but CASA's vice president said verbally that the source was a 1992 Office for Substance Abuse Prevention (OSAP) bulletin. The OSAP bulletin's source for the figure is a 1991 article about an on-campus lecture, published in a University of Maine student newspaper. The lecturer cited a *Ms.* magazine study as the source. "But the lecturer misspoke or else was misquoted . . . because the *Ms.* study . . . offers no such number" (p. 4).

A publication of the Advocacy Institute is the source for this statistic. That publication cites its source as a June 1990 University of California (UC) at Berkeley publication. According to the author of the UC publication, the statistic was taken "from a speech she had heard given by the director of student health services at the University of Wisconsin" and was "not intended to reflect any kind of original research." Further, the UC publication "does not mention any specific connection between AIDS and alcohol. In a move perhaps designed to attract media attention, CASA simply inserted the phrase 'such as AIDS' after the words '60 percent of college women who have acquired sexually transmitted diseases' " (p. 4).

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from *Rethinking Rites of Passage: Substance Abuse on America's Campuses*, a report by the Commission on Substance Abuse at Colleges and Universities, June 1994, Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University and from Kathy McNamara-Meis, "CASA reports don't hold up against close scrutiny," *The Bacchus Beat*, February 1995, reprinted with permission from *Forbes Media Critic Magazine*. For further information, please contact Kathy McNamara-Meis at 908-781-2078.

* CESAR FAX is supported by a grant from the Governor's Drug and Alcohol Abuse Commission.

CESAR FAX may be copied without permission. Please cite CESAR as the source.

.. 301-403-8329 (voice) .. 301-403-8342 (fax) .. CESAR@cesar.umd.edu (internet) ..