

NASW Social Work Blog

A Worrying Rise in Women's Drinking: How Social Workers Can Help

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A troubling trend has taken hold over the past two decades: drinking patterns among men and women have converged – and in some cases, young women are now drinking more than young men. A review of six surveys between 2000 and 2016 found that [the number of women ages 18 and older who drink each year rose by 6 percent](#) (compared to a 0.2 percent decrease for men), while women's binge drinking jumped by 14 percent (compared to a 0.5 percent increase among men). A more recent study found that [girls and young women ages 12 to 20 are now drinking more alcohol than their male counterparts](#).



At the same time, research has shown that women are more likely to suffer harmful effects from drinking. Compared to men who drink, women are at greater risk of experiencing [memory problems, liver inflammation, cognitive deficits, and certain cancers](#). Those who are capable of becoming pregnant also risk prenatal alcohol exposure and [fetal alcohol spectrum disorders \(FASDs\)](#).



This National Women's Health Week (May 8-15), social workers can make a difference by making alcohol screening and brief intervention (SBI) part of routine practice. Alcohol SBI is an [evidence-based practice for reducing risky drinking](#) backed by more than 30 years of research. For a guide to best practices, including validated screening tools

for girls and women of reproductive age, please see NASW's [Practice Perspectives on alcohol screening, brief intervention, and referral to treatment](#).

NASW, the [NASW Foundation](#), and the Health Behavior Research and Training Institute at The University of Texas at Austin Steve Hicks School of Social Work are partners, along with leading medical organizations, in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's [Collaborative for Alcohol-Free Pregnancy](#). This cross-discipline initiative encourages health professionals to help prevent alcohol-exposed pregnancies and FASDs by screening women for risky alcohol use.

For professional development resources, visit NASW's [Behavioral Health](#) webpage. Additional clinical resources are available through our Collaborative partners:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [Alcohol Screening and Brief Intervention Efforts](#)
- American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, [Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders Prevention Program](#)