Are Women More Vulnerable to Alcohol’s Effects?

According to information from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, women may be more vulnerable than men to the adverse consequences of alcohol use. Published in Alcohol Alert (No. 46), this data suggests that women are more vulnerable than men to alcohol-related organ damage, trauma, and legal difficulties. Specific gender differences include:

**Liver damage**: Compared with men, women develop alcohol-induced liver disease over a shorter period of time and after consuming less alcohol. In addition, women are more likely than men to develop alcoholic hepatitis and to die from cirrhosis of the liver.

**Brain damage**: Women may be more vulnerable than men to alcohol-induced brain damage. According to NIAAA, researchers found that a brain region involved in coordinating multiple brain functions was significantly smaller among alcoholic women compared with both nonalcoholic women and alcoholic men.

**Breast cancer**: According to NIAAA, many studies report that moderate to heavy alcohol consumption increases the risk for breast cancer, although one recent study found no increased breast cancer risk associated with consumption of up to one drink per day.

**Violent victimization**: NIAAA cites a survey of female college students that found a significant relationship between the amount of alcohol the women reported drinking each week and their experiences of sexual victimization. Another study found that female high school students who
used alcohol in the past year were more likely than nondrinking students to be the victims of dating violence. Finally, a history of heavy premarital drinking by both partners has been found to predict first-year aggression among newlyweds.

**Traffic crashes:** According to NIAAA, although women are less likely than men to drive after drinking and to be involved in fatal alcohol-related crashes, women have a higher relative risk of driver fatality than men at similar blood alcohol concentrations.

Obviously, gender differences are important in understanding the consequences of alcohol use and abuse and more research into gender differences is indicated to direct prevention and intervention efforts. For further information regarding this issue, please see NIAAA’s publication, “Alcohol Alert Number 46” or visit their website at [www.niaaa.nih.gov](http://www.niaaa.nih.gov).

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The Maternal Substance Abuse and Child Development Project is funded in part by the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health & Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD).