

# For women drinkers, holidays are tough

AP — The holiday season can be stressful for everyone, but for women struggling with a drinking problem it can be devastating, an expert on alcohol and drug abuse said.

The holidays tend to intensify feelings of shame, guilt and failure that women drinkers experience, said Susan Heath, director of the women's program at Arms Acres, an alcohol and drug abuse treatment center in Carmel, N.Y.

"Many drinkers set very high standards for themselves, especially around religious holidays," she said.

Heath said that friends and relatives of alcoholics look the other way because they don't want to upset the family.

"Women in particular want to maintain a semblance of family peace during the holidays," Shottlinger said. "To pressure a woman drinker is to take her out of her role as nurturer and care giver, and that's too disturbing for family members to face at this time of the year."

AFTER THE holidays, family

members face reality, Heath said. They've just observed the disastrous effects of alcoholism first-hand, and now urge mom into treatment.

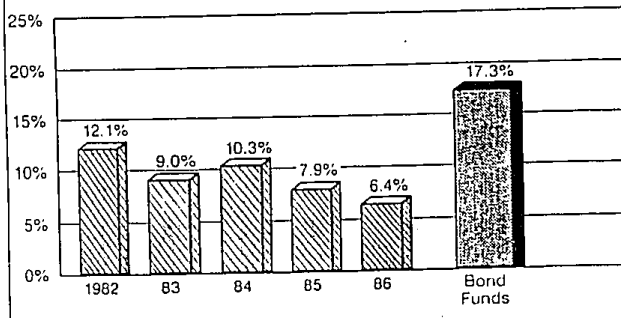
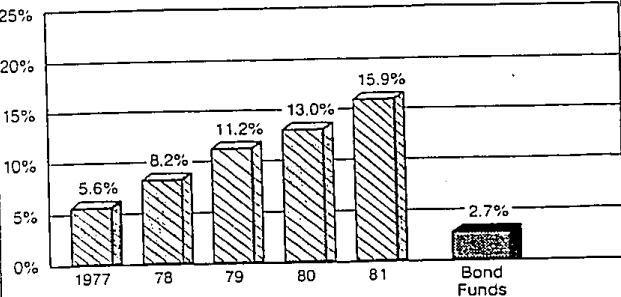
"Twice the number of women enter treatment at Arms Acres in January compared to the rest of the year," Heath said.

Most men seek help because of pressure from their employers, alcohol treatment experts said. But most women are motivated by family pressure.

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"BUT ALCOHOLICS recognize there's a big gap between the way they think they should behave and the way they actually behave. If they keep doing things that go against their values, their self-esteem plummets. So they drink even more, spiraling down faster."

Women juggling additional holiday responsibilities carry another burden, said Christine Lubinski, Washington representative of the National Council on Alcoholism.

"The holidays are supposed to be a family time," she said, "and expectations for peaceful, loving behavior are at their highest."

"Stress is at its highest, too, because of all the pressures on women to perform as the ideal wife, mother and hostess. This can be a dangerous combination, especially for alcoholic women."

As stress increases with the holidays, so do the number of opportunities to drink, she said. She said that the availability of alcohol at most holiday parties can often mask a serious drinking problem.

AN ESTIMATED 4 million problem drinkers are female, according to an NCA study.

During the holidays, the hot line operated by the Washington office of the NCA is deluged with telephone calls. Many are from family members upset because mom was drinking and burned the turkey or knocked over the Christmas tree.

Still, few confront mom right away, said Mark Shottlinger, execu-

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