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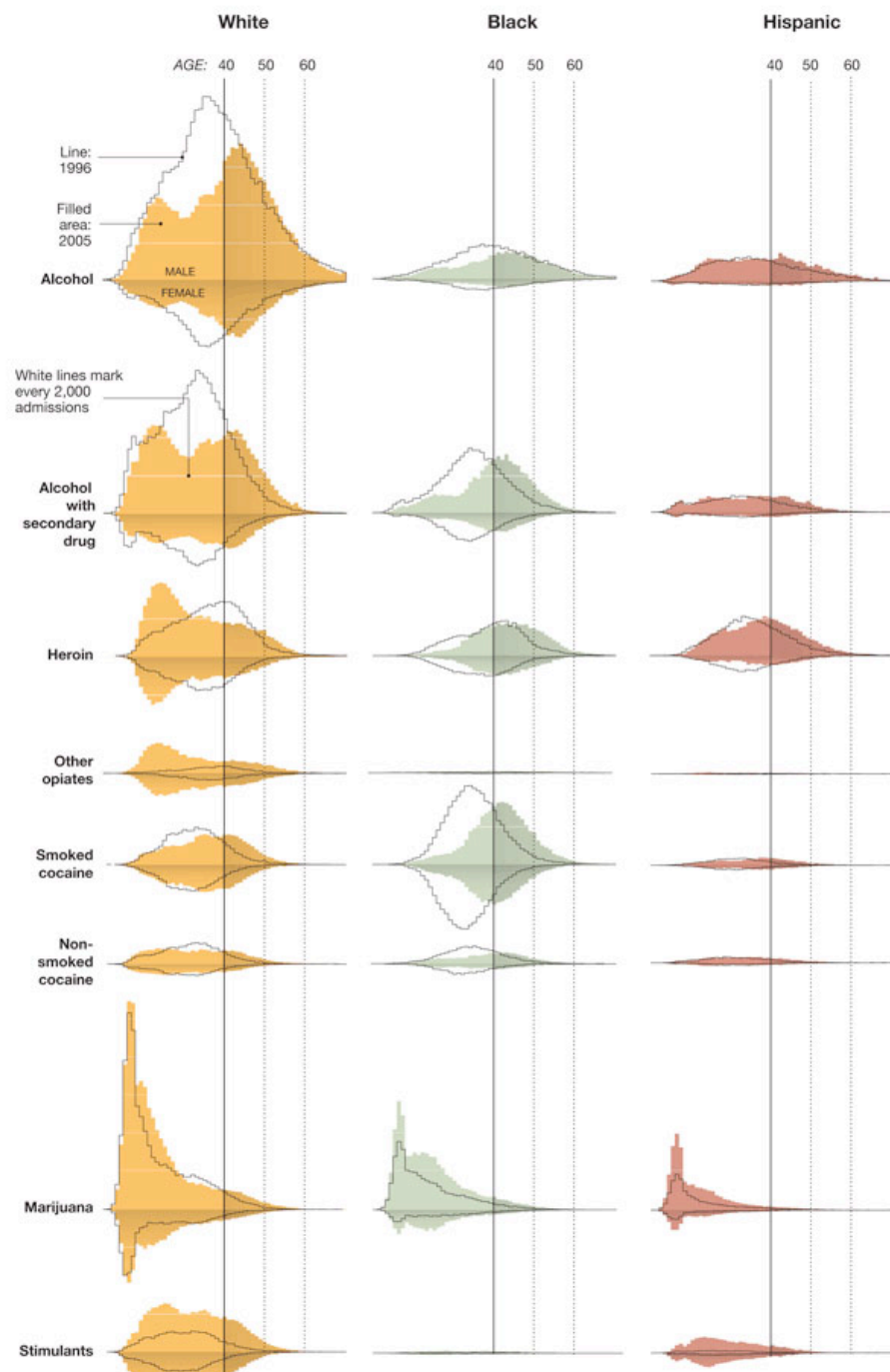
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OP-ED COLUMNIST

Why Is Mom in Rehab?

Admissions to Substance Abuse Treatment Services

A comparison of 1996 and 2005 admissions by age (10 to 70 years old), gender, race and substances abused. Not all substances are shown.


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Data are primarily from public treatment services, and are reported by states individually. Arizona, Kentucky and Wyoming did not submit data for 1996. Alaska and the District of Columbia did not submit data for 2005. Therefore, data do not include all admissions. Also, the data track admissions, not people. People can be admitted more than once in a year.

Source: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Office of Applied Studies

By CHARLES M. BLOW
Published: June 14, 2008

The actress Tatum O'Neal was arrested recently on charges of buying crack cocaine from a man on the street near her New York City home. She is a 44-year-old mother of three. She has spent years in and out of drug abuse treatment (which she chronicled in her 2004 memoir), and according to her publicist she will continue to "attend meetings" for drug and alcohol abuse.

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Ms. O'Neal illustrates a disturbing trend among those being admitted to substance abuse treatment services: a growing percentage of older women are being treated for harder drugs.

Data from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration revealed that the total number of admissions to treatment services from 1996 to 2005 (the last year for which detailed data are available) stayed about the same among people under 40, but jumped 52 percent among those 40 and older. Of the 40 and older group, the rise in admissions among men was 44 percent. Among women, it was 82 percent.

(During the same span, the population in the United States age 40 and older grew by only 19 percent.)

Of these women, admissions for nonsmoked cocaine have doubled; admissions for crack cocaine have tripled; admissions for opiates other than heroin have nearly quadrupled; and admissions for methamphetamines have increased sevenfold.

These trends could grow stronger. A 2006 report by the National Institute on Drug Abuse focused on drug use among baby boomers, all of whom were 41 to 59 years old in 2005. It concluded that "the large size of this cohort, coupled with greater lifetime rates of drug use than previous generations, might result in unprecedented high numbers of older drug users in the next 15 to 20 years."

There was a time when we thought that the biggest substance abuse threat to older women was alcoholism and abuse of prescription drugs.

Ten years ago this month, Betty Ford and the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University issued a report called "Under the Rug: Substance Abuse and the Mature Woman." At the time, Joseph Califano, president of the center said: "Abuse and addiction to alcohol and psychoactive drugs and tobacco by women 60 and older is an inexcusable area of neglect."

But since boomers can't seem to shake their street-drug demons, the focus needs to shift.

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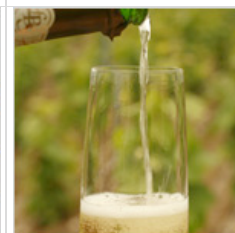
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