

## Chapter One: Dissertation Overview

### *Introduction*

This study examines the differences in parenting styles between substance abusing mothers and non-substance abusing mothers. According to Witters, Venturelli, and Hansen (1992), “Substance abuse has been an important issue in our society for a very long time, as far back as 2240 B.C., when drugs were being used” (p. 7). Unfortunately percentages and numbers were not clearly documented during that time, but we know that drugs and substances have been used throughout recorded history, and are currently major problems in America. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services released results from the 2001 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse, reporting, “15.9 million Americans age 12 and older used an illicit drug in 2001” (NHSDA, 2001, p. 1). Substance abuse is an increasing problem with implications that affect the social, legal, and medical systems within our society. Jansen, Glynn, and Howard (1996) state, “The negative impact of abuse of substances is pervasive and has far-reaching implications for the United States in health care, criminal justice, social welfare, education, transportation, interstate and international commerce” (p. 790).

The impact of substance abuse on society is staggering. Substance abuse is a problem behavior that touches the lives of many people regardless of race, gender, or socioeconomic status. In recent years, the impact of substance abuse on families, and, more specifically, on children, has become a major area of study. The focus in this regard has been the long-term negative effects that drug-exposed

children can encounter throughout their lives.

Drug abuse and addiction among women are major public health problems. More than 4.4 million women currently use illicit drugs, and women comprise more than 37% of the illicit-drug-using population. (Leshner, 1995, p. 1). It is important, therefore, to note that drug and alcohol abuse among women of child bearing age has been rising steadily. In the 1980s, parental drug use began receiving attention from the media when babies were born cocaine addicted due to the epidemic of “crack” cocaine. This, in turn, placed an emphasis on finding effective ways to treat and meet the needs of the children, while also addressing the mother’s contributory addictions and behaviors. Since this was a relatively new social problem, only scarce information was available on how to provide for and medically treat babies addicted to crack cocaine, or how to address treatment to alter or curb the mothers' behaviors and addictions. Future research is needed to begin addressing the long-term psychological, physical, educational, and emotional problems associated with children exposed to drugs in utero, specifically crack cocaine.

While it has been 20 years since this problem emerged, some information is available, although sparse, in the general areas of parenting styles, drugs, and pregnancy. Now that parenting and drugs have become another issue of concern, the need for research on the problem has grown. One way to investigate the problem is by examining the patterns of parenting styles among substance abusers. With this information, education, support, and counseling can be initiated to reduce any risk of harm to children.