

WORLD FEDERATION AGAINST DRUG GENDER WORKING GROUP

SUMMARY

Women are disproportionately affected by the illicit use, illicit production and trafficking of drugs. In general, women are discovered later into addiction than men and face greater (even double) stigmatisation. Gender sensitive approaches to prevention, care, treatment and recovery services are of importance to meet the needs of women.

There are few organisations on the global level that specifically addresses the situation of women facing addiction. It is against this background that The World Federation Against Drugs is developing a Gender working group initiative that specifically addresses the illicit drug use/addiction among women, gender based violence and its correlation with illicit drug use and access to health care, treatment and recovery services for women. Whilst advocating for women's rights and contributing to the global drug policy debate.

BACKGROUND

For many decades, dependence of alcohol and drugs were understood as primarily a male issue. The prevalent gender gap in substance use disorders, where men are in majority is narrowing. The ways in which women are affected by and introduced to substance abuse differs from that of men. Yet, women are more often excluded from recovery services and face greater stigma in society. The World Federation Against Drugs has over 10 years' experience within the field of global drug policy but are yet to focus on the specific issues in regards to gender and addiction. To create a significant change in the situation, stigma and access to treatment and recovery services that women face, the WFAD is implementing a gender focused initiative (gender working group) that aims to plan and implement projects and affect the global drug policy debate within the following areas:

- The illicit drug use/addiction among women.

Women are less likely to receive early interventions, when a woman is met by authorities (through police, health care personnel or others), her addiction is often much deeply rooted than that of men in similar situations.

- Gender based violence and its correlation illicit drug abuse

Globally, one in three women over the age of 15 have experiences physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner. Gender based violence includes childhood sexual abuse, intimate partner violence, non-partner assault, and trafficking for sexual exploitation. The problem of gender based violence against women is so widespread that it has been classified as a Global Public Health Issue by WHO. One group that is particularly vulnerable to violence, not only by an intimate partner, but by acquaintances, authority-personnel and professionals, are women in addiction. Even so,

when it comes to research and advocacy regarding violence against women living with addiction, it is an area where little research has been carried out.

- Health care improvement awareness programmes and outreach for women

In many societies, drug use in general, and drug use among women in particular, is heavily stigmatised, resulting in women who use drugs become a more hidden population. Cultural and gender based norms may make it difficult for women to acknowledge their addiction and leave their homes to undergo treatment. As previously stated, women living in addiction are not often known to services. There is a need for outreach for women, and work towards breaking stigmatisation to seek support and care. Drug use can furthermore impact women dually, intimate partner drug use creates burden for the affected women and drug use in itself has great problems for women.

There is a need to develop services, including adequate child care services, and support for women to enable them to enter and stay in recovery.

Finally, as within most groups in society, different groups of women are affected differently. Social inequalities and lack of social and economic resources among women make some more vulnerable to drug use and drug use disorders, being incarcerated, as well as the support received during recovery (lack of care services or financial opportunities). Which is why the group will consist of women from a broad range of regions and organisations, including countries: Sweden, Italy, India, Nigeria, Nepal, Pakistan, and South Africa.

It is based on this background that the WFAD will create a gender working group imitative to work together to tackle the specific issues faced by women living with SUD.

STRATEGIC FOCUS

As a group operating within the WFAD organization and network, the main focus is on issues concerning women and drug and substance abuse and these include;

Background and Prevention – Initiating activities that promotes early intervention and prevention of substance abuse among women.

Treatment and Recovery – increasing activities around the treatment, recovery and reintegration of women in addiction and those in recovery into the society.

Gender based violence – creating the platform for empowering women in abusive relationship and victims of assaults who are prone to illicit use of drugs and substances

Economic and emotional empowerment – promoting and sponsoring initiatives that bridges the income inequality gap.

This is illustrated in the diagram below;

