

GENDER-SPECIFIC TREATMENT & RECOVERY

Infographic

Substance use has been subjected to gender differences historically. As the gender gap continues to narrow and more [adolescent] women use substances, gender differences are of necessity to include. Research has already showcased that women face different substance use patterns, triggers, and co-occurring disorders. However, at the same time, they face more barriers, stigma, and a lack of understanding and appropriate services when it comes to treatment to embark on the road of recovery. These barriers and stigma have to be reduced among society and professionals through awareness-raising and research to improve understanding and services. The statements below summarize and highlight the above-mentioned need while the way forward provides further steps to improve treatment and recovery services.

WOMEN FACE UNIQUE ISSUES REGARDING SUBSTANCE USE, WHICH ARE PARTLY INFLUENCED BY SEX (DIFFERENCES BASED ON BIOLOGY) & GENDER (DIFFERENCES BASED ON CULTURALLY DEFINED ROLES FOR MEN & WOMEN)

Women face different triggers to initiate substance use, such as mental health issues, economic deprivation, and trauma connected to physical or psychological abuse.

WOMEN HAVE DIFFERENT SUBSTANCE USE PATTERNS THAN MEN & FACE UNIQUE OBSTACLES TO ACCESS EFFECTIVE TREATMENT

While women typically begin using substances later than men, women tend to accelerate their consumption rate more rapidly upon initiation

WOMEN FACE UNIQUE OBSTACLES TO ACCESS EFFECTIVE TREATMENT

They face double stigmatisation, fear the risk of losing custody of their children, cannot access sensitised treatment, etc.

MOST TREATMENT SERVICES ARE CATERED TO MEET THE NEEDS OF MEN & ARE, THEREFORE, LESS LIKELY TO BE EFFECTIVE DUE TO THE LACK OF GENDER-SENSITIVE & GENDER-DISAGGREGATED EVALUATION

To increase effectiveness, treatment services need to acknowledge the barriers, stigma, normative expectations, etc. women face, including the high prevalence of violence and other types of abuse, and ensure trauma-informed and gender-sensitive interventions

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IS REPORTEDLY HIGHER AMONG WOMEN WHO USE DRUGS, WHICH IS NOT ONLY PERPETRATED BY FAMILY MEMBERS BUT ALSO BY SERVICE PROVIDERS, ACQUAINTANCES, & OTHER ROLE-PLAYERS WITHIN SOCIETIES

Substance use can become a coping mechanism for women to face gender-based violence. Simultaneously, while in treatment, they can still be at risk. This fear can disrupt their journey of recovery

REHABILITATION, TOGETHER WITH THE WHOLE TREATMENT PROCESS, AIMS TO LET PEOPLE RETURN TO PRODUCTIVE FUNCTIONING IN THE FAMILY, WORKPLACE, & COMMUNITY

A significant part of rehabilitation, supporting the recovery phase, is aftercare services to provide long-term support and avoid relapses

RECOVERY IS A PROCESS THROUGH WHICH AN INDIVIDUAL IS ENABLED TO MOVE FROM PROBLEMATIC SUBSTANCE USE TO LIVE WITHOUT SUBSTANCES AS AN ACTIVE & CONTRIBUTING MEMBER OF SOCIETY

This change process is necessary for individuals to stop committing crimes, harming themselves, and their community, and contribute successfully to society. All services that promote CHIME (Connectedness, Hope, Identity, Meaning, and Empowerment) can be considered successful and desirable

SOCIAL REINTEGRATION AIMS TO HELP INTEGRATE THE FORMER SUBSTANCE USER INTO THE COMMUNITY & INCLUDES HOUSING, EDUCATION, & EMPLOYMENT (INCLUDING TRAININGS)

Preparatory skills will help support positive social reintegration. There also is a strong need for long-term aftercare services that support the recovery process

SEVERAL SUB-GROUPS OF WOMEN, WHICH OFTEN INTERSECT OR OVERLAP, WITH SUDS REQUIRE SPECIAL NEEDS

Examples of sub-groups are pregnant and parenting women, women with disabilities, elderly women, women involved in crime, women without homes, women with co-occurring mental health conditions, women involved in sex work, women from ethnic minorities, immigrant women, people within the LGBTQIA+ community, etc.

WAY FORWARD

It is acknowledged that gender-based violence is rooted in women's unequal status reflecting the unequal distribution of social, political, and economic power between women and men in society along with gender-based stereotypes and biases. [unrecognised] Gender differences are also strongly apparent in treatment services. Research is yet lacking on many cross-cutting issues. Treatment should be approached holistically and adapted to the individual needs. Below, various factors, but not limited to, that require inclusion are listed:

- *Treatment programmes need to be equipped with tools and services to meet the needs of women on all levels to support and not undermine their recovery.*
- *Treatment barriers faced by women should be limited if not eradicated.*
- *Emphasise the need for trauma-informed, evidence-based, and gender and culturally-specific treatment.*
 - *Destigmatise the need for substance use treatment for women among society and health care professionals.*
- *Pledge for short- and long-term interventions and a continuum of care, including aftercare, while limiting the risk of relapse.*
 - *Create a safe environment for women in treatment and prevent gender-based violence in society and treatment services.*
 - *Include comprehensive and integrated services that recognise substance use disorders as a health care issue while also drawing input from a range of other health and support services, such as those addressing housing, employment, or educational needs.*
- *Provide more information on tools to strengthen access to more gender-sensitive recovery support that addresses emerging needs leading to a recovery-oriented system of care.*