

## Women and alcohol: social perspectives

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### A few facts and figures

- Only 6.4% of dependent drinkers access treatment (Wolstenholme et al, 2012)
- Women are less likely to do so than men
- Demoralising effects of shame and stigma, particularly among women (Staddon, 2012; Lushin+Anastas, 2011 ; Tuchman, 2010)
- Importance of gender in client-provider relationship (Marsh et al, 2009)
- Importance IBA (Identification and brief advice) provided in wide variety settings (Alcohol Learning Centre)

#### THE GOOD NEWS:

- Recent review of hundreds of studies shows that full recovery is not just an unusual achievement of a few 'alcoholics' (White, 2012)

### My own journey from alcoholism to full recovery

- Alcohol for anxiety, mood swings +depression for over 20 years
- Stopped drinking on my own (last drink Nov 16 1988)
- On GP's advice also went for treatment 2 months later
- Greater shame and self-disgust
- Give over my power to 'God as I understood Him' ??
- I wanted to take back power over my life –not anyone else's job
- Feminist politics+ uncritical acceptance from other women
- Challenging stigma, not accepting it

### Expert by experience and study

- Further degrees at Bristol and Plymouth Universities
- Several years' work now in theory and practice
- Alcohol use/ misuse from perspective of feminist service user
- Working with women with shared experience but no one 'solution'
- Continued running small support groups in Bristol
- Now a registered charity, Women's Independent Alcohol Support (WIAS)

### Why alcohol is attractive

Accessing time out/ leisure  
Temporary relief distress  
Acting out  
Accessing other selves  
Key to adulthood  
Social pressures  
Transgression, carnival

### Looking sociologically: women's alcohol use

- Different meanings for women's drinking
- Seeking social causes of misuse
- Depression, domestic abuse,,mental health issues
- Loneliness, poverty
- Perceptions of public, medical profession, treatment providers
- Greedy, immoral, shamed as woman and especially as mother
- Higher expectations female behaviour
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### Effects on women of social disapproval

- Guilt and stigma
- Diminished personal esteem
- Loss of family support
- Loss of children
- Loss of income
- Homelessness; continual state of crisis

### Problems encountered when seeking help

GPs often unsure what to suggest  
 Women often hide issues domestic abuse  
 GPs low awareness need for women-only treatment  
 Very little choice about kinds of treatment  
 Much treatment mixed sex with negative effect on women  
 Felt silenced/embarrassed in mixed sex groups  
 Destruction self-confidence and increase shame  
 Alcohol still seen as cause rather than consequence  
 Emphasis still on abstinence as first priority  
 Transport+family care problems often seen as excuses

### Women have said they want to be heard

Non-judgmental non-directive approach (Staddon, 2014)  
 A variety of kinds of help to be available  
 Ideally from members same sex  
 Women's supportive phonenumber with good information  
 Moderated women's internet forum so could discuss variety of problems and make friends  
 Small same sex groups discussing lives as well as alcohol problems  
 Greater understanding and help with causes of alcoholism  
 Unbiased support from women who have recovered  
 Help building life skills, open-ended and available flexi  
 time/weekends

### How we work at WIAS, a service user controlled charity

- Offer unconditional positive regard
- Offer access to other women with similar experiences and knowledge of the different ways to recover
- Network other women's support groups
- Small friendly women only groups
- Facilitated by women who have recovered
- Invitation to 'keep calling back'
- Proven method (cf. Samaritans, Saneline, Women's Aid)
- Offer training to other organisations, interested in approaching women's alcohol issues from a social perspective

### We are happy to help

- Phone us on 0117-9428077—we can call you back
- Email us at [contact@wiaswomen.org.uk](mailto:contact@wiaswomen.org.uk)
- Look at our website, (soon to be greatly updated) at [www.wiaswomen.org.uk](http://www.wiaswomen.org.uk)
- Tell all your contacts
- Invite us to come and talk at your events
- We particularly hope to be talking to GPs and social workers
- But we will do all we can to help anyone
- Our motto is: No blame—no shame

### HOW CAN THESE IDEAS HELP YOUR WORK?

1. Join the group with the flip chart colour you were given at the start (blue, green, red, or yellow)
2. Nominate someone to write on your flipchart
3. Discuss each of the 4 questions for 5 minutes each and write answers on the flipchart
4. We will collate these later and send them to your email. The results will also be published on the SPN website.

## The 4 questions

1. What are the problems facing provision of gender specific treatment ?
2. How far are philosophical differences of approach to women's drinking a problem?
3. How might training for GPs and for social workers be improved in the area of women's alcohol misuse?
4. To what extent is current concern over women's alcohol use an expression of a generalised fear of social change?

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