Women With Substance Use Disorders

The world we live in is filled with enjoyable things. From delicious foods, to mind-altering substances, there is a wide variety of options concerning what one does with their free time and puts into their bodies. Some of these things are socially acceptable, like alcohol, and even encouraged like exercise. There are many different things that can stimulate pleasure in us, some naturally, others chemically; it is in the people who participate in them that are different, resulting in them becoming addicted. **Women with substance use disorders need the option of segregated treatment facilities because co-ed settings may result in barriers to recovery**.

According to Harvard Health publications most research on substance abuse and dependence focused on men until the early 1900’s. When U.S. agencies began requiring federally funded studies to enroll more women, the focus on men changed. Researchers have since learned that gender differences are present in some types of addiction, 11.5% of males ages 12 and older had a substance abuse or dependency problem in 2008 compared to 6.4% females. Women tend to progress more rapidly from using an addictive substance to dependency. As stated by the US National Survey on Drug Use and Health women develop medical and social consequences of addiction more rapidly than men, finding it harder to stop using addictive substance and are more vulnerable to relapse. According to researchers the most commonly drug abuse by women in the United State is alcohol. Compare to men at 20% to 12% of women abusing alcohol, researchers states that since the early 1970’s this gender gap has narrowed because drinking by women being more socially acceptable. Women are less likely to seek treatment due to numerous barriers such as childcare responsibilities, transportation, financial status, and social stigma (Greenfield, Beck, Lawson, Brady, 2010).

The separation of gender in treatment allows for women to be themselves without the distraction, sexual tension, or the tendency to not be honest which would complicates their process of recovery in a coed treatment program. It is vital for one to not be distracted and be honest to get to the root contributors of addition. Gender separation permits women to talk freely about gender-specific challenges and traumas while focus on recovering. Treatment needs of women with substance use disorder are best met in women-only groups, facilitated by women. Women with substance use disorder usually has a complex history of mental, sexual and physical abuse making them fragile contributing to low self-esteem, low self-worth and isolation which is a gateway for relapse (Covington & Bloom, 2007). Women recover best in a warm and welcoming atmosphere, embracing the process, possibility and progress. The rehabilitation process would be unsuccessful if the environment is not conducive to recovery, structured, or safe (Haigh, 1999).

Although services designed for women with substance use disorder acknowledge their predictable victimization experiences are becoming more widespread. Multiple approaches targeting gender-responsive needs have been proposed. Such specific services tend to be the exception rather than the rule (Covington & Bloom, 2007). Women-centered treatment regards each client as unique, with individual life conditions, goals, priorities, and treatment needs. Treatment needs to be individualized in order to be effective (Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2003). Addressing the need of gender separation for treatment of women with SUD involves an approach that includes comprehensive services that take into account the content and context of women’s lives (Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, 1994). Programs need to consider the fact that a woman cannot be treated successfully in a coed treatment program due to the distraction, sexual tension, and the freedom to be totally honest when self-disclosing.

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