

Characteristics of clients entering women-only substance use treatment services in New South Wales, 2014-2018

NATALIA UTHURRALT^{1,2,3}, FELICIA MIAO CAO¹, LUCY BURNS⁴, SHARON REID^{1,2,3}, CAROLYN A. DAY^{1,2}

¹Central Clinical School, Sydney Medical School, The University of Sydney; ²Edith Collins Centre (Translational Research in Alcohol, Drugs and Toxicology), Sydney Local Health District, Australia, ³Drug Health Services, Sydney Local Health District; ⁴National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, UNSW

Presenter's email: eugenia.uthurralt@health.nsw.gov.au

Introduction and Aims: Women experiencing substance use disorders (SUDs) face barriers to treatment, including childcare concerns, stigma, and lack of gender/trauma-informed programming. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in New South Wales (NSW) run women-only treatment services to address these needs. We aim to assess characteristics of women entering treatment in these services.

Design and Methods: Data on client characteristics from six women-only NGO SUD treatment services in NSW between 2014-2018 were extracted from the NADAbase. Logistic regression models in R were used to estimate adjusted and unadjusted odds ratio (UOR) for treatment types and different drugs.

Results: Data were available for 1,357 women. Most (91%) episodes were for residential treatment. The mean age was 35.4 years (range 17-67). Residential clients tended to be younger than non-residential clients (35.1 vs 38.5 years, $p < 0.001$). Methamphetamine was the most reported principal drug of concern (43%) and was more commonly associated with residential treatment (UOR 1.9, $P < 0.001$). Women had high levels of psychological distress (median K10 score 27.5, range 10-50), with the highest for women reporting alcohol as principal drug of concern. Overall, 43% of episodes resulted in treatment completion and this was more common for women entering residential treatment (45% vs 22%, $p < 0.001$).

Discussions and Conclusions: Women entering residential treatment tend to be younger and more likely to have methamphetamine as principal drug of concern. Women enter treatment with high degrees of psychological distress and are more likely to complete treatment if they enter residential treatment.

Implications for Practice or Policy: Women's services need to ensure their programs can respond to a high volume of younger women presenting with methamphetamine use disorder, whilst also providing care for older women with alcohol use disorder experiencing high levels of psychological distress.

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