

# GENDER AND DRUGS: EXPERIENCES OF STIGMA/TOXICOPHOBIA AND NARCOFEMINIST NARRATIVES

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## Background:

Women are often presented as vulnerable in drug policy discourse and their voices are silenced. We implemented a community-based collaboration with women who use opiates and cocaine crack in Paris and Marseille embedded in a feminist framework. This consortium aims to document the experience of women as well as to produce new knowledge about the structural inequalities linked to gender.

## Methods:

The methodology includes focus groups discussions and semi-structured interviews (N=50), photo-voice and emotional cartography to document their experiences. A narcofeminist approach of auto-ethnography was also implemented.

## Results:

Our research highlights that women are often experiencing stigma according to their drug use. They labeled this stigma as a "toxicophobia" experience. In the semi-structured interviews, women describe avoiding individual contact with health professionals so as not to endure discourses about them that often oscillate between "*infantilization*" and "*false benevolence*". These experiences highlight the gender stereotypes linked to the imaginary of "*the vulnerable woman*" who should be "*protected from psychoactive substances*". Toxicophobia is also revealing how prohibition is shaping discourses and practices according to gender and drugs by impeding women to express themselves about their pleasure. The emotional cartography shows how toxicophobia also has a negative impact for helping women to access to treatment and harm reduction services.

Based on focus groups and photovoice approaches, these women are building a collective story situated within logics of empowerment, that denounces relations of oppression with the idea that disclosing experiences of "toxicophobia" can make representations evolve: "*Society should work on representations*" while "*users are systematically put in a position where they have to justify themselves, to apologize for drug use.*"

## Conclusion:

Our research shows that a narcofeminist approach produces new subjectivities and invents new forms of resistance to discrimination. It can help to enhance the integration of gender-responsive services in drug policy area.

## Disclosure of Interest Statement:

All authors have no conflict of interest to declare.