

WOMEN, RELIGION AND SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER STIGMA



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OBJECTIVES

- To do an introduction on the topic of women, religion, substance use disorder and stigma
- To highlight stigma and its impact on women with SUD
- To briefly explain the concept of addiction

INTRODUCTION

- SUD affects both men and women, but there are gender specific factors that contribute to the Development, Experience and consequences.
- Women often face unique challenges which shape their patterns of use e.g;
 - *Physiological differences & Hormonal influences*
 - *Social expectations and cultural norms*
- Religious beliefs and practices can influence how SUD are perceived within a community and if not careful can perpetuate stigma.
- The general interplay between gender, religious beliefs and cultural expectations can significantly influence a woman's perception of substance use, treatment seeking behavior and the stigma she may encounter.

SPECIFIC CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN WITH SUD

- Biological and physiological differences
- Gender based violence
- Stigma and shame
- Barriers to treatment
- Co-occurring mental health issues
- Pregnancy and motherhood
- Lack of gender-specific treatment

PREVALENCE OF WOMEN SUD

- The prevalence of substance use among women has increased globally, the gender gap has been narrowing and women are more likely to engage in substance use including alcohol, prescription drugs and illicit substances
- The specific prevalence rates vary across the countries and substance of use
- There is a challenge getting gender specific data.

Prevalence cont.....

- In 2021, 26.6 million females aged 18 or older (20.4% of the population) reported using illicit* drugs in the past 12 months (2021 DT 1.24).
- SAMSHA seems to indicate the leading drug of abuse is alcohol, tobacco products, and cannabis respectively
- Its worth noting cannabis has risen by 13% since the 2017
- Emerging trends among women indicates
 - Increase in nicotine vaping esp. among ages 12-24
 - Increase in Tobacco products between ages 26 and above

Prevalence cont....

- Women with SUD in Kenyan NACADA statistics 2022
 - 6.25% of the female population are currently using at least one substance of abuse
 - 5% of the female population are currently using alcohol which translates to about 80% of the total substance use by females

UNDERSTANDING STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION

- Stigma and discrimination surrounding addiction are significant issues that impact individuals who are struggling with substance abuse disorders.
- These negative attitudes and behaviours can be directed towards people with addiction, their families, and even towards individuals in recovery

- Stigma refers to the **negative attitudes, beliefs, and stereotypes** associated with a particular condition or characteristic.
- In the context of addiction, it involves **societal disapproval and judgment** towards individuals who use drugs or struggle with substance abuse.

- Discrimination is when someone treats you in a negative way due to your mental illness.
- Individuals with addiction may face discrimination in various areas of their lives, including employment, housing, education, and healthcare.

UNDERSTANDING ADDICTION

- Understanding addiction as a complex health issue helps combat misconceptions, reduce stigma, and promote effective prevention and treatment strategies.
- It requires a compassionate and evidence-based approach that acknowledges the multifaceted nature of addiction and supports individuals in their journey towards recovery.

Definition of Addiction:

- Addiction is a chronic brain disorder characterized by compulsive drug use despite negative consequences.
- It is a complex condition that involves both physical and psychological dependence on a substance or behavior.

Key features of addiction include:

- 1. Compulsion:** People with addiction experience an intense urge or compulsion to engage in the addictive substance or behaviour.

This compulsion may be difficult to control and can persist despite negative consequences.

2. Loss of Control: Individuals with addiction have difficulty controlling their use of the substance or behavior.

They may make unsuccessful attempts to cut down or quit, and their substance use or engagement in the behavior may consume a significant amount of time and energy.

3. Negative Consequences: Addiction is associated with negative consequences that can affect various aspects of a person's life.

These consequences may include health problems, impaired relationships, difficulties at work or school, financial troubles, and legal issues.

4. Craving:

Craving refers to an intense desire or urge to engage in the addictive substance or behavior.

Cravings can be triggered by various cues, such as environmental stimuli or emotional states, and can be a significant driving force behind addictive behaviors.



5. Tolerance and Withdrawal: With continued use of certain substances, tolerance may develop, requiring higher doses to achieve the desired effect.

Withdrawal symptoms can also occur when the substance is abruptly discontinued, leading to physical and psychological discomfort.

Factors Contributing to Addiction:

Various factors can contribute to the development of addiction, including;

- ✓ genetic predisposition,
- ✓ environmental influences,
- ✓ social factors, and
- ✓ individual vulnerabilities.

Addiction is a result of a combination of biological, psychological, and social factors.

Brain Changes:

Addiction involves changes in the brain's reward and motivation systems.


Prolonged substance use can alter the brain's structure and function, leading to increased cravings, diminished control over drug use, and a reduced ability to experience pleasure from natural rewards.

Progression of Addiction:

Addiction often progresses through stages.

It typically begins with experimentation, followed by regular use, abuse, and eventually dependence and addiction.

However, the progression can vary from person to person, and not everyone who uses drugs will develop an addiction.

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- **Risk Factors:** Certain factors can increase the risk of developing an addiction.
 - These include;
 - Family history of addiction,
 - Early exposure to substances,
 - History of trauma or adverse childhood experiences,
 - Mental health disorders,
 - Social factors like peer influence and
 - Availability of drugs.

THE IMPACT OF SUD STIGMA ON WOMEN

1. **Double stigma :**

- Women with SUD disorders often face a double stigma due to both their gender and their addiction.
- They may encounter societal judgement and negative stereotypes related to women and addiction leading to increased shame and isolation

2. Barriers to Seeking Help:

- Stigma can create significant barriers (treatment entry, retention, and completion) and support services for women in seeking help for their substance use disorders.
- Stigmatizing attitudes, Fear of judgment, social repercussions, and the potential loss of custody of children can deter women from reaching out for support, resulting in delayed or inadequate treatment.

3. Limited Treatment Options:

- Women may face challenges in accessing appropriate and gender-specific treatment options.
- Many treatment programs are designed primarily for men, which may not address the unique needs, experiences, and underlying factors contributing to substance use disorders in women, such as trauma, gender-based violence, or co-occurring mental health issues.

4. Maternal Stigma:

- Women who are mothers and struggling with substance use disorders often face heightened stigma.
- They may be judged as unfit parents, leading to child welfare interventions, custody issues, or the fear of losing custody of their children.
- Maternal stigma can further hinder women from seeking help and support.

5. Housing and Social Exclusion:

Discrimination can extend to housing, with landlords refusing to rent to women with addiction histories or housing policies that specifically target those in recovery.

Social exclusion can also occur, as women facing addiction-related discrimination may be isolated or face rejection from their communities, family, or social networks.

6. Employment and Education:

Discrimination based on addiction can affect a woman's employment opportunities and educational prospects.

Employers may be hesitant to hire or retain a woman with addiction histories, perpetuating barriers to stable employment and economic well-being.

Similarly, educational institutions may stigmatize and exclude individuals struggling with addiction.

7. Criminalization and Legal Consequences:

In some cases, addiction can lead to involvement in the criminal justice system.

Discrimination may manifest through punitive approaches, such as harsh sentences or inadequate access to rehabilitation programs. These punitive measures can perpetuate cycles of addiction and hinder successful reintegration into society.



8. **Lack of Empathy and Support:**

Stigma can lead to a lack of empathy and support for individuals with addiction.

This lack of understanding and compassion can perpetuate feelings of isolation and hinder recovery.

Access to resources such as childcare, affordable housing, transportation, and employment assistance, which are crucial for women in recovery but may be lacking or difficult to access

9. Victim-Blaming:

- Society may unfairly perceive women as responsible for their condition, overlooking the underlying factors that contribute to their substance use.
- They may be subjected to victim-blaming attitudes, particularly in cases where their addiction is related to trauma or abuse.

.10. Self-Stigma:

Stigma can also be internalized, leading to self-stigma or self-shame.

Individuals with addiction may internalize societal beliefs and feel a sense of guilt, shame, and low self-worth due to their condition.

This self-stigma can further isolate individuals and prevent them from seeking the necessary help and support.

11. Intersectionality:

Discrimination and addiction can intersect with other forms of discrimination based on race, ethnicity, age, socioeconomic status, or sexual orientation.

Women with SUD from marginalized communities may face compounded discrimination, making it even more challenging to access adequate support and resources for recovery.

12. Health Disparities:

- Stigma can contribute to health disparities for women with substance use disorders.
- They may face challenges in accessing healthcare, including prenatal care, reproductive health services, and mental health support, which are critical for their overall well-being and recovery.

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Sometimes the smallest step in the right direction ends up being the biggest step of your life. Tip toe if you must, but take the step.” –Nacem Callaway

THANK YOU



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Thank you!