

WOMEN AND DRUG USE

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Women and Drug Use

- ▣ Women often carry a greater burden and risk than men in drug use
- ▣ Stigma
- ▣ Physiological differences
- ▣ Social interpersonal issues
- ▣ Health risks

Women and drug use

- ▣ Women who use drugs are often perceived with greater disapproval than men, less “feminine”
- ▣ Women who are sex workers carry a double stigma in society
- ▣ Women who use drugs and have children also have a double or treble stigma as in the female drug using, sex working parent.

Women and drug use

- ▣ Paucity of research on female drug use, certainly in earlier days. Perceptions that female drug use was rare and that the experiences of females were no different from males
- ▣ An interesting point of view given the middle class morphineuses of the early 20th century

Women and drug use

- ▣ Women drug users seen as being harder to reach by treatment services
- ▣ Ten years ago ratio of male: females was estimated at 2:1
- ▣ Difference in prevalence rates rapidly diminishing
- ▣ Young females as ready to experiment with drugs as males.

Women and drug use

- ▣ Women tend to have more sub cutaneous fat than men therefore less able to find a vein when injecting
- ▣ Women are more likely to be injected first by a heterosexual partner
- ▣ The person administering the injection has usually obtained and paid for the drug and will inject themselves first
- ▣ On first injection high rates of sharing syringes and spoons

Women and drugs

- ▣ Women who had experienced sexual abuse have high rates of drug misuse and are more likely to engage in high risk sexual behaviour
- ▣ Women in drug treatment are 2-3 times more likely to be suffering PTSD than men in treatment
- ▣ Empirical evidence to suggest that women with a history of sexual abuse may predispose to injecting behaviour

Women and drug use

- ▣ Women injectors have high risk of DVT, 21% of all cases of DVT in women due to injecting (52% under the age of 40)
- ▣ Women more likely to suffer abscesses and other local complications from injecting
- ▣ Women have a greater propensity to “skin popping” leading to ulcers and low grade infections

Women and drugs

- ▣ Women are more likely to share injecting equipment, often fail to perceive the risk in sharing with a regular sexual partner.
- ▣ Often not practicing safe sex with regular sexual partners while men are also more likely to have additional casual sex partners.
- ▣ In terms of sharing men are more likely to pass on injecting equipment and women to receive them.

Women and drugs

- ▣ Women who inject have higher risk of contracting HIV than men although whether this is due to injecting practices or risky sexual behaviour is not clear.
- ▣ Sex work also increase the risk, studies have found over 60% of female drug injectors have participated in sex work

Drug use and pregnancy

- ▣ Pregnant drug users are less likely to attend ante natal clinics than non drug users, often as a result of the perceived consequences.
- ▣ Women who use opiates are less likely to use contraception. Opiate use can result in disappearance of menstruation and the belief that they cannot conceive.