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Support and services for people with alcohol-related brain injury

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Abstract

Integrated treatment and support from both mental health services and drug and alcohol treatment services is needed for those living with alcohol-related brain injury. This is because alcohol-related brain injury (ARBI) remains a forgotten disorder.

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Support and services for people with alcohol-related brain injury

BY RENEE BRIGHTON, LORNA MOXHAM AND VICTORIA TRAYNOR

Integrated treatment and support from both mental health services and drug and alcohol treatment services is needed for those living with alcohol-related brain injury. This is because alcohol-related brain injury (ARBI) remains a forgotten disorder.

Whilst alcohol is an intrinsic part of Australian culture and the adverse effects of risky drinking are highlighted in the media, one area of neglect in these campaigns is ARBI. National epidemiological studies do not include this cohort, so the numbers of people affected are difficult to grasp. A review of secondary data sources found the population most affected were those in younger age groups of 40-64 years.

A research project is currently being undertaken by the University of Wollongong of the experiences of people living with ARBI. The

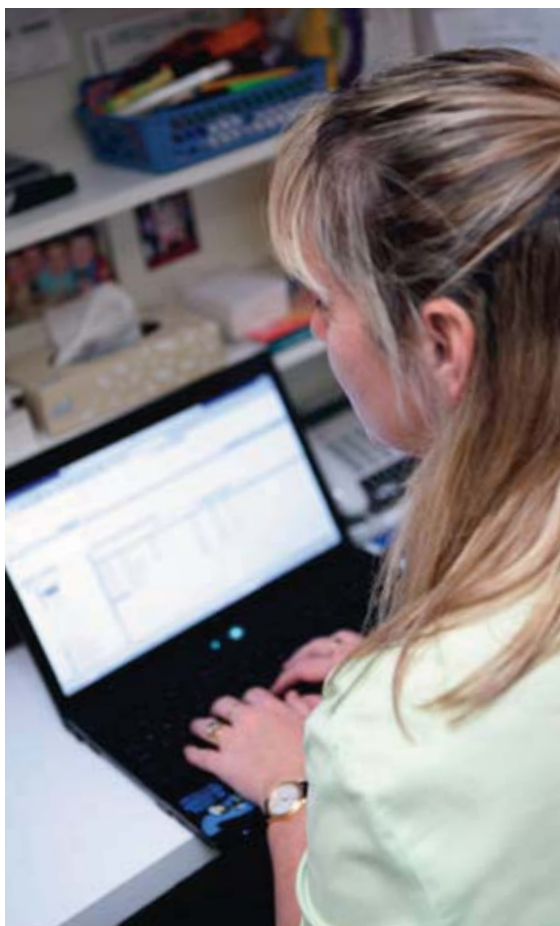
purpose of this research is to gain a greater understanding of the issues and challenges faced by people living with this major health issue. Professional support for people with alcohol-related brain injury appears to be completely inadequate and people fall between the 'service' cracks. Whose problem is this given that no single authority has overall responsibility for the coordination, planning and delivery of services?

As part of this project, an analysis of current research has been undertaken. An overall theme of social exclusion was found to explain the experience of people with ARBI. The pathway of care for people with ARBI also remains unclear with many barriers to access appropriate services. People living with ARBI are an even more marginalised sub-population than mental health services users as they do not fit neatly into any existing category or model of care, according to the authors.

Within contemporary mental health policy, recovery is a transcending value-base for mental health practice. People with ARBI would benefit from being part of this value-base. Before people with ARBI can satisfactorily live with their injury, the issue of providing people with appropriate services must be addressed.

This project provides a voice for those with alcohol-related injury and calls into question the often heard catchcry by mental health nurses that "they are not one of ours". This research will help communicate the impact that segregated practice has on this population and how social and service exclusion can be addressed to improve the quality of life for people with alcohol-related brain injury.

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