Giving women a voice - narratives on accessing (or not) drug and alcohol services

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Abstract
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Aim The purpose of this project was to gain a greater understanding of why women with alcohol-use disorders (AUDs) decide to engage (or not) with drug and alcohol services.

Background Although women drink less volume of alcohol than men, they have a higher risk of developing alcohol-related harm than their male counterparts (NHMRC 2009). In Australia and New Zealand, the rates of women drinking to excess has grown significantly over the past decade, seeing a dramatic increase in the number of women experiencing alcohol-related health conditions (NHMRC 2009, Ministry of Health 2009). Despite this, women are less likely to engage with services that specifically support and treat people experiencing AUDs (Greenfield et al. 2007). This is made all the more significant when considering that women who do engage with treatment services generally have positive health outcomes and have a greater chance at reducing alcohol-related harms when compared men.

Methods A phenomenological methodological framework underpins this project. Semi-structured, in-depth one-to-one interviews with women experiencing alcohol-use disorders formed the means of data collection. The themes and key findings from the analysis of these interviews as to why women engage (or not) with specialist drug and alcohol services will form the basis of the presentation.

Conclusion Given the fact that increasing numbers of Australian and New Zealand women consume alcohol at harmful levels and are more susceptible to alcohol’s psychological and physiological effects, it is important to establish the deeper meaning behind why they enlist the help of drug and alcohol services. This project fills a gap in understanding in why engage women with AUDs in these services. This research has the potential to inform the development of more specific, targeted and gender-appropriate drug and alcohol services being provided to these vulnerable populations.