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Social Support, Gender, and Treatment-Seeking Behavior: Does social support influence treatment attendance among substance abusing women and men?

Robyn Borgman, Joanna Akin, & Gabriel P. Kuperminc

INTRODUCTION

Women are less likely than men to seek treatment for substance abuse.

- 32% of all substance abusers who attend treatment are women (SAMHSA, 2005).
- 23% of men and 15.1% of women with alcohol abuse or dependence have ever received treatment (Greenfield et al., 2006).

Is it possible that negative social support is discouraging treatment attendance among at risk women?

Women have reported reduced treatment attendance due to a lack of positive social support for their treatment-seeking:

- Substance abusing women, if married, are less likely to receive support for treatment from their spouse, than substance abusing men.
- 23% of alcoholic women seeking treatment for their substance use reported receiving negative social support from a loved one compared to only 2% of alcoholic men seeking treatment.

(Xu et al., 2007; Green, 2006)

THIS STUDY

This study used a sample of at risk substance users to test the hypotheses that:

- women are less likely to attend treatment for their substance abuse than men
- women without social support are less likely to attend treatment for their substance abuse than women with social support
- Social support has little or no impact on treatment attendance among at risk men

CONTACT INFORMATION

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METHOD

Participants

Characteristic	Mean, Percentage
Age in Years (n=2076)	42
Gender (n=2079)	
Male	69.6%
Female	30.3%
Transgender	0.1%
Social Support (n=1886)	
Yes	34.7%
No	56%
Race/Ethnicity (n=2017)	
African American	71.5%
Non-African American*	25.4%
Years of Education (n=2080)	11.35

*91.5% of Non-African Americans were White

Design & Procedure

Data from an evaluation of SBIRT (Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment) services

- Participants (18+) entering the ED between January 2009 and August 2011
- Screened positive for at risk substance use
- Completed a survey assessing health behaviors, including drug and alcohol use and treatment attendance.

Measures and Variables

Substance Use Risk

•ASSIST, version III (Alcohol, Smoking, and Substance Screening Test)- calculates individual risk levels for a variety of substances

Alcohol or Drug Risk Levels:
At risk: >3 (WHO, 2008)

Gender & Social Support

•GPRA (Government Performance and Results Act) Outcome Tool, for government monitoring and quality improvement:

Gender: (male, female, transgender)

Social Support: "In the past 30 days, did you have interaction with family and/or friends that are supportive of your recovery?" (yes, no) (CSAT, 2010)

Treatment Attendance

Question developed by the Georgia BASICS team for cost-benefit analyses of the SBIRT services:

"In the last 6 months, have you participated in any other treatment or self-help meetings related to alcohol or drug use?" (yes, no)

Analysis

We used Chi Square analyses to compare the frequencies of treatment attendance among at risk substance abusing women and men, with and without friends or family who are supportive of their recovery.

RESULTS/DISCUSSION

Figure 1. Gender Differences in Past 6 Months Treatment Attendance (n=2062)

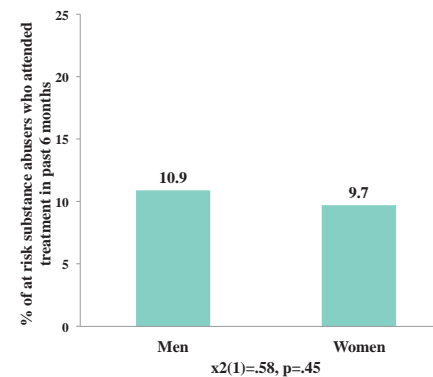


Figure 1.

•As expected, a lower percentage of women (9.7%) attended treatment in the past 6 months than men (10.9%) however, the difference was not statistically significant, at $p=.05$.

Figure 2.

•As expected, a lower percentage of women without social support (5.2%) attended treatment in the past 6 months than women with social support (18.9%), statistically significant, at $p<.001$.

Figure 3.

•Additionally, a lower percentage of men without social support (6.6%) attended treatment in the past 6 months than men with social support (19.4%), statistically significant, at $p<.001$.

Figure 2. Past 6 Months Treatment Attendance Differences Among Women (n=563)

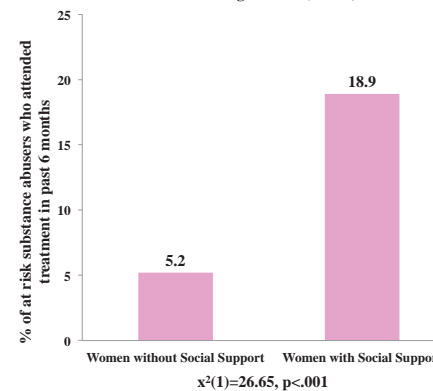
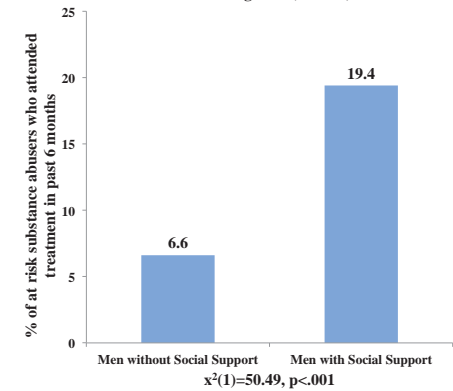


Figure 3. Past 6 Months Treatment Attendance Differences Among Men (n=1308)



Discussion

- In contrast to previous findings among high-risk men and women, there is not a large disparity in past 6 months treatment attendance among men and women at risk or substance abuse.
- However, positive social support had a significant positive effect on treatment attendance among both at-risk men and at-risk women.
- These findings further support the importance of social support in substance abuse recovery for both men and women.

Future Directions

- Further analysis of a variety of sources of social support (i.e. spouse, siblings, parents, employers, institutions, etc.) and their effectiveness in encouraging treatment attendance is necessary to establish a stronger relationship between the two.
- If more causal associations are established between specific support sources and treatment attendance, it will highlight a need to integrate social support into the intervention process.
- Future studies will examine the relationship between social support and treatment outcomes.