Social Support, Gender, and Treatment-Seeking Behavior for Substance Abuse: Does Social Support Influence Treatment Attendance Among Substance Abusing Women and Men?

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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)

METHOD

Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Sample Characteristics (n=2080)</th>
<th>Mean, Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age in Years (n=2076)</td>
<td>42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (n=2079)</td>
<td>Male: 60.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female: 39.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transgender (n=1886)</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Support (n=1886)</td>
<td>Yes: 34.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No: 65.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity (n=2017)</td>
<td>African American: 71.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-African American: 28.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of Education (n=2080)</td>
<td>11.35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*93.5% 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)

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=2082)

% of at-risk substance abusing women who attended treatment in past 6 months

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10.9</td>
<td></td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

x2(1)=.58, p=.45

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

% of at-risk substance abusing women who attended treatment in past 6 months

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Women without Social Support</th>
<th>Women with Social Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

x2(1)=26.65, p<.001

Future Direction

- 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.

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.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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