

Why women only?—a practice and research based approach

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Women's Independent Alcohol Support

Alcohol: the accepted drug

- Most women associate alcohol with pleasure, relaxation, sociability
- Likely to recoil from another woman who 'alcoholic'
- Threatens 'safe' pleasure of others

Alcohol useful and acceptable

Helps access time out/ leisure in busy life

Key to adulthood—the right to drink

Offers temporary relief distress

*In moderation, fits well with role of
wife/mother/pillar of society*

When women's alcohol use may become a problem

- Domestic+sexual abuse
- Mental health issues
- Depression
- Low self-esteem
- Poverty
- Homelessness; continual state of crisis
- **Distress may be embodied by using alcohol**
- May relieve feelings of social dissonance
- May offer brief sense of authenticity+self-worth

How many women are serious drinkers?

- More women in Bristol admitted hospital with alcohol-related harm than national average 9JSNA 2016-2017 Data profile pdf 8.2 MB
- Telephone calls to us indicate women extremely reluctant to admit to alcohol issues, especially to their GPs
- Demoralising effects of shame and stigma, particularly among women (Staddon, 2012; Lushin+Anastas, 2011 ;Tuchman, 2010)
- Importance of gender in client–provider relationship well established (Marsh et al, 2009)

Personal experience and research

- Stopped drinking on my own (Nov 16 1988) after over 20 years
- On GP's advice also went for treatment 2 months later
- Increased my shame and self-disgust
- Outside treatment encountered feminist politics
- Unconditional positive regard and help understanding my issues
- Challenging stigma, not accepting it
- Academic research at Bristol and Plymouth Universities
- Several years' work now in theory and practice
- Alcohol use/ misuse from perspective of feminist service user

Some problems for women getting treatment

- GPs may be unsure what to suggest
- Mixed sex groups
- Women often hide domestic abuse
- Alcohol still seen as cause rather than consequence
- Feel silenced/embarrassed/greater shame

Why women-only?

- Different health risks
- Different causes
- Greater stigma
- Background abuse common—may feel unsafe in a mixed sex group

Women have asked for something different

- Non-judgmental non-directive approach
(Staddon, 2014)
- A variety of kinds of help to be available
- Ideally from members same sex
- Greater understanding and help with causes of alcoholism
- Unbiased support from women who have recovered
- Help building life skills, open-ended and available flexi times+weekends

WIAS is therefore women-only and service user controlled

- Developed concept of 'no blame, no shame'
- Set up small groups of women with 2 facilitators, one an alcohol survivor
- Discussion and shared ideas in safe space
- Low key support and encouragement
- 'Hard' information about alcohol and other sources of help available
- Helpline, drop-by, groups, individual counselling

Unconditional positive regard