



Addiction and Gender

Side Event at the 60th Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs 2017

Tuesday, March 14, 2017

Panelists from Austria, Spain and Israel present a gender perspective on narcotic drug use and addiction, and treatment approaches, focusing on different risk factors and vulnerabilities, biological and psychological responses, and medical and social consequences of drug use for women and girls. Co-sponsored by the International Council of Women and Women's International Zionist Organization, and the NGO Committee on the Status of Women Vienna.

Moderator: Ms. Eleonore Hauer-Rona, International Council of Women

Dr. Gabriele Fischer, Medical University of Vienna

Gender aspects in substance use disorder

Historically, addiction research has neglected the scientific focus on women, and most studies have been conducted on male patients only, with the concluding results generalised to the female population. The role of sex and gender differences in susceptibility to the development of addictive disorders, and their consequences for prevention and treatment strategies require detailed studies, as do the increasing prevalence rates of addictive disorders among adolescents and the aging population. These differences are described in view to epidemiological and etiological factors, onset and course of illness, symptomatology, comorbidity, as well as treatment. Evidence-based science on differences between men and women in addictive disorders is still underrepresented, and there are methodological flaws and limitations in research on sex and gender differences, emphasizing the need for a sex and gender-sensitive methodology in evidence-based studies.

Dr. Torrens, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

Psychiatric comorbidity in substance use disorder: a gender perspective

In recent decades, the coexistence of other psychiatric disorders with substance use ("Dual diagnosis") has become a matter of great concern. The relevance is related to its high prevalence, its clinical and social severity, its difficult management and its association with poor outcomes for the subjects affected. In women that use drugs, special factors can influence this high prevalence (i.e. stigma, intimate partner violence...), and also worse prognosis (i.e. more risk behaviours). In this presentation, we will review the state of the art of psychiatric comorbidity among women with substance use disorders.

Mrs. Ronit Lev-Ari, Ruth House, Afula, Israel

Girls at risk and drugs

There is a significant difference between girls and boys at risk. The same circumstances in early childhood influence boys and girls, but the results are extremely different. Most of the abused boys become violent as children and as adults. Most of the abused girls become abused teenagers and abused women as part of "self-destruction" which is typical among girls at risk. Taking drugs is one of the most extreme forms of self-destruction.

Prof. Dr. Gabriele Fischer, Department for Psychiatry & Psychotherapy, Medical University of Vienna Center for Public Health

Dr. Fischer studied medicine at the Medical University of Vienna and received her doctor's degree in 1984, specialized in psychiatry and neurology. From 1986-1989, she did a research fellowship and psychiatric residency at Washington University Medical School, St. Louis, Missouri USA. In 1994, she became Medical Director of the Addiction Clinic, and in 2000, Professor of Psychiatry and Neurology at the Medical University of Vienna. Dr. Fischer is involved in epidemiological clinical and psychopharmacological studies on substance use disorder and non-substance related addictions including co-morbidities; her research focus includes sex/gender differences in psychiatry. She has been a consultant for UNODC, WHO and the European Parliament. She is member of the Scientific Board for Quality Control and Quality Management in Medicine and of the European Monitoring Center for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), Member of General Medical Council in Austria, and founding board member of Women for women: health policy in focus.

Dr. Marta Torrens, Professor, Addiction Department, Institute of Neuropsychiatry and Addiction, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

Dr. Torrens is a Psychiatrist and Professor of Psychiatry at Autonomous University of Barcelona; Head of Addiction Programme at the Institute of Neuropsychiatry and Addiction Parc de Salut Mar, Barcelona; Member of the Clinical Commission of the National Plan on Drugs from the Spanish Ministry of Health; Executive member of the Section on Dual Disorders/Pathology of WPA. Dr. Torrens works on drug abuse in clinical, teaching and research areas. Her main clinical experience is the assessment and treatment of addiction, psychiatric comorbidity in addiction (dual diagnosis) and new psychoactive substances. Her research has been published in the main journals of the field. She has participated in many national and international conferences about good practices in clinical treatment of drug abuse. She has collaborated with international organisations including EMCDDA, WHO and UNODC, and has been invited as an expert at scientific congresses and meetings.

Ms. Ronit Lev-Ari, Director, Ruth House, Afula, Israel

Ms. Lev-Ari studied Sociology, Anthropology and Political Science at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. She received a B.A. in 1975 and a Masters degree in Criminology from Tel Aviv University in 1979. Her thesis was on battered women, the first empirical research on this subject in Israel. From 1983-2000, she initiated and managed the Department for Prevention of Family Violence in Naamat, working with teenagers to prevent violence and drug abuse. From 2000-2003, she served as Director for the Advancement of the Status of Women in the Prime Minister's office. Important changes and improvements can be counted to her credit, including increases in budgets for shelters and centers for battered women and their children. There are 60 centers for women victims of domestic violence in Israel today. The new Beit Ruth Center for Girls, in cooperation with WIZO, is Ronit's current undertaking.

