Presented by Fredrick Dombrowski, PhD, LMHC, MAC, CASAC and Tara Matthews, PhD, LPC, MAC
Objectives

- Participants will identify the unique treatment needs between men and women.
- Participants will identify potential barriers experienced by counselors if a preferred gender lineup between patient and client can’t be arranged.
- Participants will identify strategies to overcome potential barriers to provide equitable and evidence-based treatment.

What percentage of substance use counselors are women?
A. 90%
B. 50%
C. 63%
D. 10%

Current Counselor Demographics

- 67,848 Substance Abuse Counselors in the United States.
- 63.0% women, 36.5% are men.
- White (65.9%), Black or African American (14.4%), and Hispanic or Latino (11.6%).
- In 2021, women earned 100% of what men earned.
- 21% of all Substance Abuse Counselors are LGBT.

https://www.zippia.com/substance-abuse-counselor/jobs/demographics/
Therapist Gender - The Missing Link

- Researchers explore:
  - Systems of Power
  - Sexism
  - Gender theories
  - Gender impact on psychotherapy outcomes
- Majority of research focuses on the client’s gender, rather than the therapist’s gender
- Avoiding the discussion of gender can be damaging (Budge & Moradi, 2018, p. 2024)
- Limited research on trans counselors

Unique Experiences, Women Clients

Engstom et al., 2008; Schiff et al., 2002 - Women in Methadone Tx

- 58% had experienced childhood sexual abuse
- 90% had experienced intimate partner violence
- 29% met the criteria for posttraumatic stress disorder
- Women more likely to seek treatment than men

Unique Experiences of Women Clients

- Motherly and women specific roles
- Lack of support
- Cultural conceptualization
- Expected to place others before themselves
- Different societal expectations and norms
- Lack of medical follow up for those still using substances
- Greater risk for intimate partner violence
- Food insecurity, and risk of HIV

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Aspects to enhance treatment

- Case management
- Treatment planning
- Interagency progress meetings with parenting classes
- Child care
- Housing and transportation support
- Obtaining services supporting women and children after treatment
- Retaining child custody rights or family reunification

Counselor Experience

- Power dynamic differential
- Expectation of adherence for mandated patients
- Countertransference/ harsh responses for mothers
- Cultural expectations
- Concerns of trauma during urinalysis
- May be limited in women specific evidence-based options
- Focus on patient as parent as opposed to "patient"

Unique experience of male clients

- Men have higher rates of suicide completion
- Cultural considerations for avoiding treatment
- Challenge to masculinity
- Differences in conceptualization of substance use
- Less likely to enroll and complete higher education (Pew Research)
- More likely to be harmed on the job
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Perspectives: Navigating Gender Differences Between Counselor and Client

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Experiences from the field...

- “Why are there no women in this room?”
- “May I have a referral to a male therapist?”
- “I am socially and physically attracted to you. I think that would get in the way.”
- “You remind me of my mom. She always says stuff like that.”

Therapeutic Alliance

- Creating therapeutic rapport
- Enhanced by cultural humility
- Flexibility and client focus enhance outcomes
- Maintenance of boundaries
- OARS skills

Bridging the gap

- Open discussion about staff limitations
- Informed consent
- Client remains their own expert
- Attempts at gender specific groups, if possible
- MI, CBT, Circle of Safety
What can you do?

• Self-reflection, self-awareness, and approaching with cultural humility.
• Maintain ongoing supervision.
• Open discussion about concerns if there is a lack of match.
• Refocus on patient goals for treatment.
• Maintain use of evidence-based practices.
• Commitment to cultural humility and education.

Conclusion

• Gender imbalances can impact client and counselors alike.
• Many clinics may have skewed populations.
• Transference and countertransference can be issues.
• Focus on client relationship, openness, and flexibility.
• Obtain ongoing supervision.
• Cultural humility and competence.

Questions

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