

Why Gender and Age Specific Treatment Matters

In recent years, drug and alcohol treatment programs have grown dramatically in the United States. Yet, most addiction treatment center programs are designed for all adults, age 18 and older; both men and women.

This broad-based, treatment-for-everyone approach may not be as effective as a more targeted treatment approach. A gender and age specific alcohol and drug rehab program is very effective for many who suffer from substance use disorders.

This article outlines only a few reasons why it is important to address the specific treatment needs of both younger and older adults; and the importance of a gender specific treatment facility.

Age Specific Considerations

Ask any older adult this question: **“Which would you choose?”**

“If you had a choice between going to an alcohol and drug rehab program that has mostly 18-30-year-olds; single and still supported financially by their parents,

or –

An addiction treatment program with only older adults, most of whom are either currently employed in a career (or recently were); and, who are either married (or have been married)?”

Most, if not 100% of the time, older adults would choose the second option.

Why?

Older adults may need to re-learn relationship skills, primarily with their significant other. As a rule, young adults need to learn life skills – and how to liberate from their financially supportive parents.

Younger adults may also require educational support to launch into a career – while older adults may need to protect a career already in place, or, learn how to live sober in retirement. These and other life stressors are more suitably treated in an age appropriate clinical setting where group therapy and [psychoeducation](#) are focused on the needs of the specific group.

The brain of an individual with a long-term, moderate to severe substance use disorder is handicapped in being able to self-regulate emotional states such as irritability and frustration. This often leads [resentment](#) and [angry outbursts](#) or internalized rage and [depression](#).

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Additionally, [undiagnosed and untreated depressive and anxiety disorders](#) further create emotional states that fluctuate daily – and hourly – for the newly detoxed client. The tension created by generational differences in social attitudes and behaviors between older and younger adults only intensify feelings of irritability and frustration among clients. This creates an atmosphere of “us” versus “them.” An [age specific treatment program](#) is therefore more conducive in reducing such tension in the milieu.

Gender Specific Considerations

Gender differences are more than simply physiologic. Gender differences include gender programming and socialization, familial roles, social privilege, economic differences, career and educational differences and gender based stereotypes. [Gender equality](#) training for staff is helpful.

While some gender differences are obvious, others might not be. For instance, male privilege carries over into the treatment experience. This may hinder the male’s ability to make changes in his thought process sufficient to effect much needed behavioral changes for lasting recovery. Similarly, a female’s need for relational expression might be threatened with a male in her treatment program.

Women tend to have less family support when entering treatment than men do. This is compounded when the woman has children under her care, and/or when she is pregnant. Additionally, women tend to have more severe family problems than men, which need to be addressed in treatment.

Sexual posturing between younger men and women occurs naturally as part of the growth process into maturity. When one adds a severe substance use disorder on top of an already abundant hormonal young man or woman – and, when one then removes that substance from the individual, sexual posturing becomes even more of an issue in changing behavior conducive for long-term recovery.

Generally speaking, men tend to be more [left-brained](#) oriented in their thought process and are often emotionally numb; or even more disturbing, [emotionally inaccessible](#). This directly impacts the clinical team’s ability to treat the male client, especially in a 30-day treatment program. Misogynistic attitudes must also be considered in effective treatment of substance use disorders with men; as disrespect for women may be a factor in relapse prevention.

Good clinical work coupled with a thorough fourth step inventory helps men see their part in problems in their relationships with women, and that typically means breaking down the walls of misogyny. This is only one example of the merits of a [rehab for men](#); a gender specific treatment program for men.

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For women who continue to see themselves dependent upon a male figure for whatever reason, be it financial support or emotional validation, being in a gender specific clinical setting helps them change such a belief so that they may access their true power as an independent and equal woman.

Other Considerations

There are differences in the mental health needs of men and women. For instance, while more women report mental health problems than men do, such as depression for instance, more [men commit suicide](#) than women by almost a 4:1 ratio. For this reason, the mental health component of providing treatment solutions for men must adequately screen for and identify their mental health needs. That's not always easy because men tend to hide mental illness by denying its existence, all the while self-medicating through alcohol and/or drugs.

While women and men experience early childhood trauma, men dealing with [trauma](#) tend to believe that they can be tough and "gut it out". Women are more likely to act out in negative behavior. Treating trauma for women versus treating it for men is different in how one screens, assesses and delivers evidence-based trauma treatment.

Both genders require safety in their treatment facility where professionally trained trauma-informed staff provides clinical support; especially on weekends. Sexual harassment takes on many forms. The entire staff requires education and training in order to prevent and stop sexual harassment between clients; as well as between clients and staffs.

Taking an antidepressant or a mood stabilizer may be more of a hurdle for men than women; as men tend to believe they should be able to function "normally" without medication. This is an example of gender stereotyping that needs to be debunked for the successful treatment of a mental health condition.

When treatment for [sexual dysfunction](#), [sex addiction](#), serial relationships and other sexually oriented pathologies are required, having a gender and age specific treatment program is necessary. By placing men and women who suffer from sex addiction in a coed and all-age milieu – the risk of sexual acting out behavior is increased unnecessarily.

Having separate groups and residential facilities is not enough. The actual treatment programs should be separated physically on different campuses by age and gender populations; and served by different clinicians and staff to help mitigate the risk of sexually damaging behavior.

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Summary

What is presented here is a very high level view of why gender and age specific alcohol and drug rehab programs are a very necessary option within the overall addiction treatment industry.

The benefits for the client, the client's family and the staff are immense. Prior to admitting into a treatment program, the clinical needs of the client should be carefully considered. When age and gender matters are critical to the success of addiction treatment for a substance use disorder – a gender and age appropriate program is the better choice.

Resources

Women's Gender Specific and Responsive Treatment Programs

Caron Treatment Centers	Boca Raton, Florida
The Rose at Lakeview Health	Boulder, Colorado
The Rose	Newport Beach, California
Women's Core at Northbound	Newport Beach, California

Men's Gender Specific and Responsive Treatment Programs

Arrowhead Lodge Recovery	Prescott, Arizona
Caron Treatment Centers	Wernersville, Pennsylvania
The Star at Lakeview Health	Jacksonville, Florida
Men's Core at Northbound	Newport Beach, California
Prescott House	Prescott, Arizona

Age-Specific Treatment

Older Adults	Caron Foundation – Wernersville, Pennsylvania
Older Adult Men	Arrowhead Lodge Recovery – Prescott, Arizona
Older Adults	La Hacienda Treatment Center – Hunt, Texas
Young Adults	Northbound – Newport Beach, California