

SEVERITY, COMPLEXITY AND GENDER DIFFERENCES IN A COHORT OF ADOLESCENTS ATTENDING YOUTH-SPECIFIC DRUG AND ALCOHOL SERVICES

Kutin JJ^{1,2}, Mitchell PF^{1,3}, Daley K4, Best D5, Bruun AJ^{1,6}

¹Youth Support and Advocacy Service (YSAS), Melbourne, Australia

²School of Economics, Finance and Marketing, RMIT University, Melbourne Australia

³Centre for Mental Health, Melbourne School of Population and Global Health, The University of Melbourne, Australia

⁴School of Global, Urban and Social Studies, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia

⁵Turning Point, Melbourne, Australia / Department of Law and Criminology, Sheffield Hallam University, Collegiate Crescent, Sheffield, UK, S10 2BQ

⁶Department of Psychiatry, The University of Melbourne, Australia

Introduction and Aims: Substance use severity and psychosocial complexity are important dimensions in the development of treatment services for young people seeking assistance from specialist AOD agencies. This study aimed to determine the gender differences in severity and complexity in young people engaged in AOD treatment in Victoria.

Design and Methods: On Thursday 6 June, 2013, workers at 36 AOD services (1,188 current clients) completed for each client, an online 30 item questionnaire, as part of a snapshot review of youth services in Victoria, Australia. This method achieved a representative sample, while simultaneously yielding high completion rates on a comprehensive set of fields.

Results: Surveys were completed for 1,000 clients aged 8 to 27 years, and 34% (n = 339) were female. There were no gender differences for primary drug of concern (37.7% cannabis, 25.5% methamphetamine, 21.7% alcohol). There were no gender differences when comparing rates of daily drug use or severity. Gender differences were more prominent for recent psychosocial issues and worker rating of complexity. Lifetime prevalence of attempted suicide, self-injury, neglect, emotional, physical and sexual abuse were also higher for girls compared to boys. Boys however, were more likely to be involved in the criminal justice system and criminal activity.

Discussion and Conclusions: Clients engaged with youth AOD services were found to have significant and many gender differences when examining psychosocial complexity factors, and few differences when substance use type and harms were examined. Treatment services need to take into account the higher psychosocial needs of young women.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: The authors were at the time of the study employed by Department of Health AOD publically funded treatment agencies (YSAS and Turning Point).