

DUAL DIAGNOSIS IN OLDER ADULTS: PREVALENCE IN AN INNER MELBOURNE COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE

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Introduction / Issues: Older adults have been defined in the literature as “invisible addicts” due to difficulty in assessing and detecting alcohol and other drug (AOD) use in this population. Studies in this cohort have indicated a high degree of comorbid mental health problems, predominantly mood disorders such as depression. A lack of treatment services specific to older adults makes engaging and treating this population in contemporary treatment settings difficult. Due to these issues, a number of older adults are presenting at mental health services where addressing AOD use may be a secondary goal in treatment planning.

Method / Approach: This study employed a retrospective file audit to determine the prevalence of co-occurring alcohol and other drug use in consumers (n=593) assessed by an inner Melbourne community older adult mental health service over a two-year period.

Key Findings: Assessments found 15.5% of consumers reported co-occurring AOD use, a lower figure than found in previous studies of this nature. Alcohol was the predominant substance used. Written notes indicated a poor understanding of guidelines around safe alcohol consumption, and little referral to specific AOD services.

Discussions and Conclusions: Research indicates that the ageing baby boomer generation is likely to result in an increase in presentations to both mental health and AOD services. Given the co-occurring nature of both mental health problems and AOD use in older adults, it is essential that collaborative relationships are established between these services to ensure responsive, appropriate care to the older adult cohort.

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