



Stephanie Williams, MA, LPC, Counselor
(847) 742-3545 www.RenzCenter.org

Why Gender Specific Treatment Works and the SUPPORT Program

Research shows that addiction is rarely, if ever, a single-dimension issue for women. Addiction is a part of a larger picture that includes a woman's individual history and the social, economic, and cultural factors that create the framework of her life. Research also indicates that gender-specific addiction treatment that addresses women's specific issues are more effective for women than are traditional programs, which were originally designed for men.

When women come to treatment, they usually have experienced problems that men most likely do not experience or experience on a smaller scale. The common bond in examining the histories of addicted women is that there are two elements that many women share in addition to their dependence on substances: the lack of healthy relationships and the experience of trauma (for example, physical abuse, sexual abuse, poverty, racism). These elements create multiple issues that are consistent in women's lives and need to be considered when assisting a woman into recovery. Some of the main differences between men and women in treatment include:

- Sexual or physical trauma with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is more common among women in treatment than men.
- Women are less likely than men to be financially independent.
- Only women are capable of pregnancy and need care around this condition as necessary.
- Women are usually the primary care givers. Therefore, they may have child care needs or concerns that men do not experience.

A history of abuse also drastically increases the likelihood that a woman will abuse alcohol and other drugs.

- 74 percent of addicted women reported sexual abuse
- 52 percent of addicted women reported physical abuse
- 72 percent of addicted women reported emotional abuse

Trauma is not limited to experiencing abuse. It includes witnessing violence as well as stigmatization because of gender, race, poverty, or sexual orientation. Therefore, in treating the addiction, clinicians need to understand that they also are most likely treating a trauma survivor. By separating the women from men in substance abuse treatment, women can feel more comfortable discussing issues specific to women without fear of criticism or harm. Gender-specific treatment is also more effective because women can speak to other women who are going through similar situations. That helps them to be more connected and feel like they are not alone, resulting in better outcomes with regard to sobriety and overall better mental health.

At Renz Addiction Counseling Center, we recognize the impact of trauma on minority females and the barriers to substance abuse treatment, mental health treatment, HIV prevention, primary healthcare and support services. The SUPPORT (Sisters Unite in Prevention and Protecting Ourselves by Recovering Together) program offers specialized services to Hispanic, African American and other minority women who are 18 and over and are struggling with alcohol and/or other drug use or have concerns about their mental health and substance use.

As apart of the SUPPORT program at Renz Center, minority women can receive substance abuse services at no cost. SUPPORT program women are also assisted with:

- Access to childcare while in group or individual sessions
- Access to transportation
- Long-term supportive care
- Coordination of medical care
- Testing for HIV and Hepatitis
- Coordination to sexual assault and domestic violence counseling
- Access to other supportive services, i.e. GED, public aid, social security, etc.
- Employment counseling
- Incentives for accomplishing personal goals

Sources:

1. Futures of Palm Beach Treatment Center
2. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism-Gender and Use of Substance Abuse Treatment Services
3. Helping Women to Recover: Creating Gender-Specific Treatment for Substance-Abusing Women and Girls in Community Correctional Settings