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Women, Trauma and Alcohol Dependency: Connections and disconnections in alcohol treatment for women

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Statement of the Problem: Women who have experienced Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) are at greater risk for physical and mental health problems including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and alcohol dependency. On their own IPV, PTSD and alcohol dependency result in significant personal, social and economic cost and the impact of all three may compound these costs. Researchers have reported that women with these experiences are more difficult to treat and many do not access treatment and those who do, frequently do not stay because of difficulty maintaining helping relationships. However, these women perspective have not been previously studied. The purpose of this study is to describe the experience of seeking help for alcohol dependency by women with PTSD and a history of IPV in the context in which it occurs.

Methodology and Theoretical Orientation: An inter subjective ethnographic study using hermeneutic dialogue was utilized during participant observation, in-depth interviews and focus groups. An ecological framework was utilized to focus on the interaction between the counselors and the staff to understand this relationship and the context in which it occurs.

Findings: The women in this study were very active help seekers. They encountered many gaps in continuity of care

including discharge because of relapse. Although the treatment center was a warm, healing and spiritual place, the women left the center without treatment for their trauma needs and many without any referral to address these outstanding issues.

Conclusion & Significance: Women with alcohol dependence and PTSD with a history of IPV want help however the health and social services do not always recognize their calls for help or their symptoms of distress. Recommendations are made for treatment centers to become trauma-informed that would help this recognition.

Speaker Biography

Deanna L Mulvihill is a Senior Nurse Therapist and a researcher who has developed a technique called Rebinding of the Body which helps people recover from trauma, learn self-help techniques and lead more productive lives. Her intersubjective ethnographic study has been published in a text called, "Women, Trauma and Alcohol Dependency, Connection and disconnections in alcohol treatment for women". She has published several articles in child and family psychiatry including an extensive literature review called "The Health Impact of Childhood Trauma". Presently, she has a small private practice and she works as a consultant for Cogenz and Thought Leadership and Innovation Foundation. She graduated from the University of Western Ontario with Doctor of Philosophy in Nursing in 2009. Her dissertation was "Seeking and Obtaining Help for Alcohol Dependence by Women who have Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and a History of Intimate Partner Violence.

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