

## Gaining Insight Into Co-Occurring Disorders

Substance use and mental health conditions commonly occur at the same time for many individuals. This occurrence was formerly referred to as dual diagnosis, but is now identified as co-occurring disorders. Research by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) indicates that 8.9 million people have co-occurring disorders. The relationship between mental health and substance use disorders is complex and multi-faceted. Alcohol and nicotine are the substances of use most commonly noted while depression, anxiety, and eating disorders are the most commonly noted mental health diagnoses. The experience of co-occurring disorders requires treatment of both conditions in order to help improve an individual's success with recovery. It is not uncommon to have either a substance use or a mental health disorder go undiagnosed due to agencies focusing treatment on the presenting issue to the exclusion of other diagnoses. As a result, individuals who experience co-occurring disorders are at risk for being bounced back and forth between the mental health and substance use treatment systems.

There are three formats for providing co-occurring disorder services: sequential, parallel, and integrated. Sequential treatment services involve the treatment of only one condition at a time such as an individual completing a mental health service before participating in a substance use service, or vice versa. The challenge with sequential services is that treatment is not addressing the needs of both conditions and attention is not able to be directed to the dynamic relationship between the mental health and substance use conditions. Parallel treatment services seek to treat both the mental health and substance use conditions; however, these services are provided often between two different agencies or specialists. The most effective approach for treating co-occurring conditions is Integrated treatment services. Integrated treatment services allow for the simultaneous treatment of both mental health and substance use conditions by a professional who has training and experience in treating both conditions.

While both men and women experience co-occurring disorders, women have unique risk factors and characteristics that need to be acknowledged in order to enhance the development and provision of treatment services. Women more commonly are treated for mental health concerns than for substance use issues; and, as a result, substance use may continue without treatment and cause more consequences on health. Furthermore, women are at a greater risk for experiencing trauma, domestic violence, and victimization. As a result, trauma informed services are critical to effective treatment. Also, women are at an increased risk of additional barriers to participation in treatment including limited financial resources, housing issues, and limited childcare services.

If you or a loved one is experiencing co-occurring disorders, it is important to seek out information, treatment, and support. With treatment, individuals with co-occurring disorders may be helped to reduce their symptoms, experience a greater sense of efficacy in managing their conditions, and feel more satisfied with their lives.

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