

Safe Babies Foster Parent Training Program

Module 2: Understanding women and addiction

Learning outcomes:

- Reflect on our personal attitudes and judgments about pregnant women with a substance abuse issue
- Understand how the addiction experience for women may differ from the addiction experience of men
- Be aware of many other factors that influence the health and well-being of mother and baby



Learning outcomes(Continued)

- Understand the impact of a history of trauma on women's current circumstances
- Identify ways in which foster parents can support women who are experiencing addiction, mental health challenges and violence/trauma

Essential concepts

- Cycle of dependence
- Stages of change theory
- Harm reduction
- Trauma-informed care
- Barriers to treatment



Truth or Myth?

- Alcohol or drug dependency is the result of moral failure or character weakness.
- People with alcohol and drug problems usually have personal troubles long before they have a problem with alcohol and drugs.
- Most people who use alcohol or drugs have no desire to stop using and have only themselves to blame for their problems.

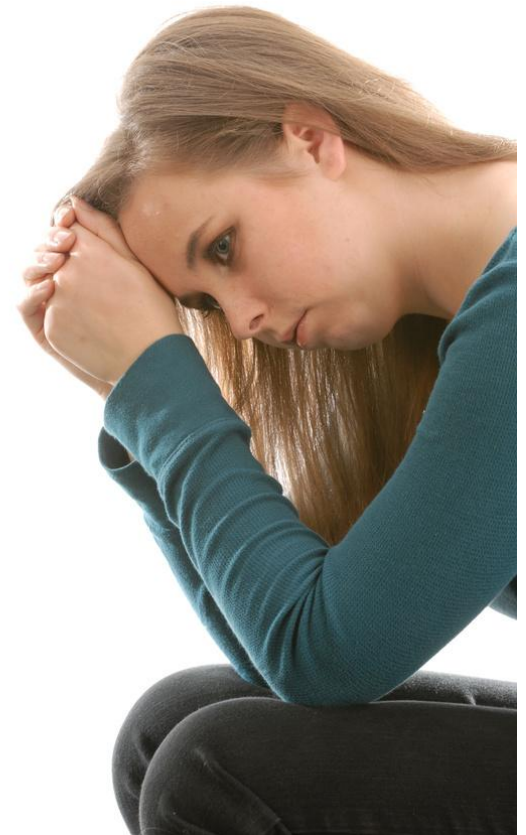


Truth or myth?(Continued)

- People who relapse have failed because they are not sincerely motivated.
- Nothing can be done until a person is dependent on alcohol or drugs and is ready to ask for help. The person has to “hit bottom” first.
- People with alcohol or other drug problems should be forced into treatment.

Why do women use drugs and alcohol?

- Cope with history of mental health problems and/or abuse
- Cope with stressors of poverty and racism
- Cope with problems/stress eg. violence, family separation
- Cope with feelings of lack of self-worth or inadequacy



Why do women use drugs and alcohol?(Continued)

- Influenced by substance use of partners
- Control weight gain
- Desire for recreation
- Control withdrawal symptoms

High risk groups of women

- History of abuse (physical, sexual, emotional)
- Low income status
- Young age with little or no support
- Unplanned and unwanted pregnancy
- Previous child with developmental delay
- History of mood/anxiety disorder or eating disorder

Other issues for women with addictions:

- 1 in 4 women who use substances are currently being abused
- 8 in 10 women who use substances have suffered from post traumatic stress disorder, anxiety or depression
- 100% of women have been seriously abused – physical, mental, or sexual
- 80% of women live with partners who don't want them to stop using substances

Studies of birth mothers of 160 children with FAS (Seattle)

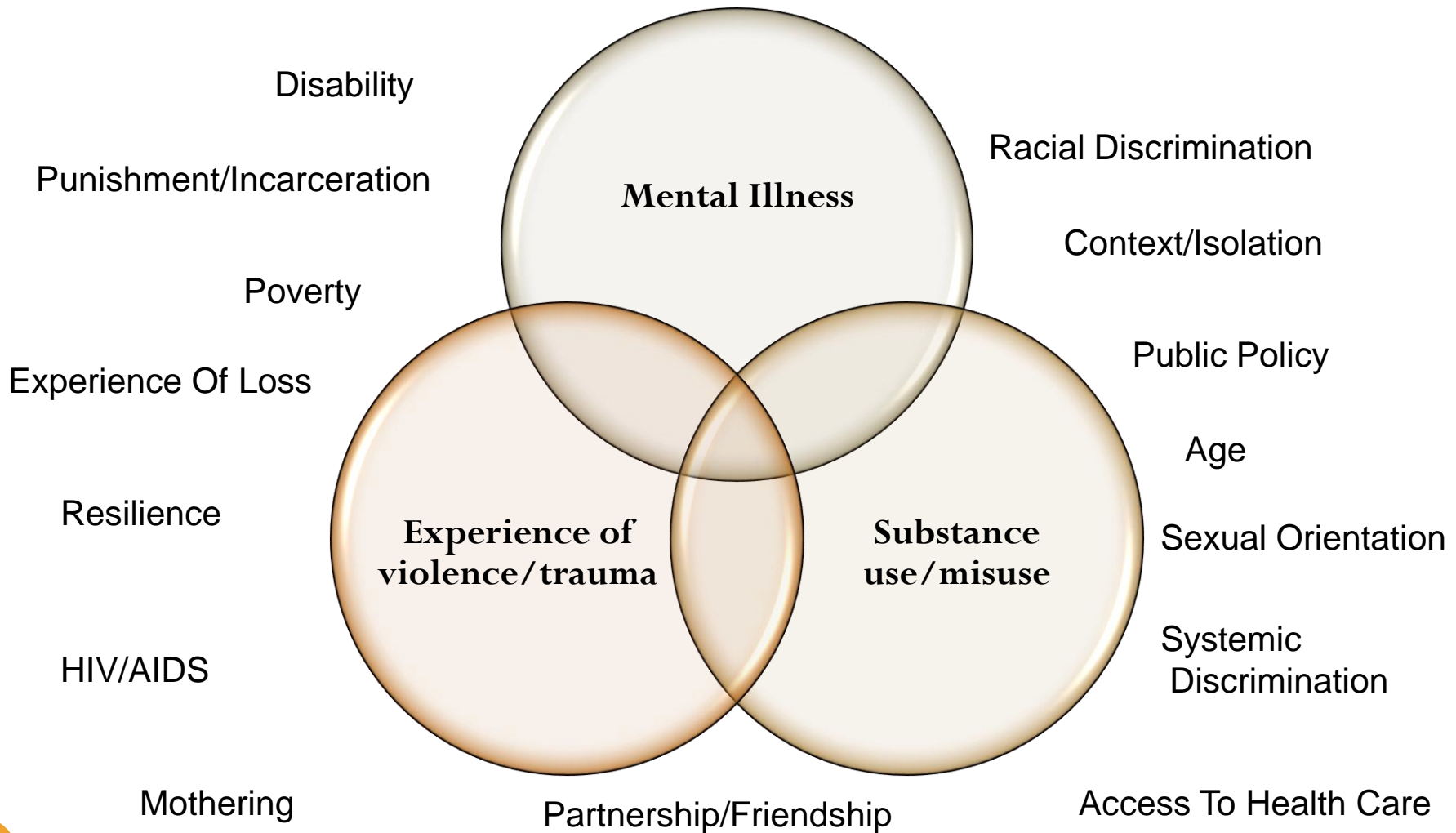
- 40 could not be contacted due to confidentiality issues
- 40 had died or disappeared and were presumed dead

Of the 80 interviewed:

- 80% - major mental illness
- 100% - seriously sexually, physically or emotionally abused
- 80% lived with men who did not want them to stop drinking
- 60% had phobias – most common agoraphobia – reluctant to leave home for help

Intersections – A view of the complexity

(Poole, 2004)



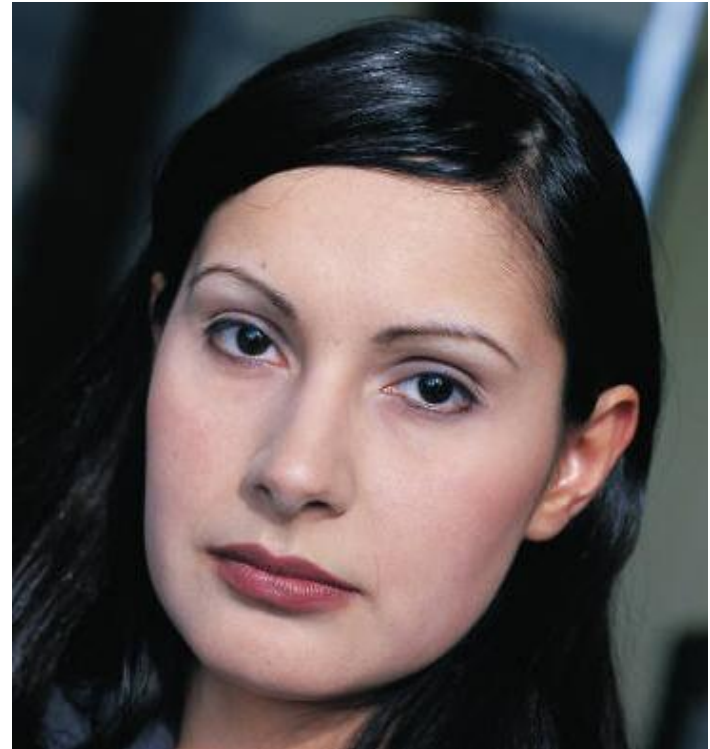
New models of treatment:

- Woman-centered
- Safety and reduction in harm
- Support
- Strength based



New models of treatment (Continued)

- Empowerment
- Culturally safe
- Issues addressed within the context of health
- Link between violence, mental health and substance use (trauma informed)



Harm reduction:

- Provides services without punishing people with labels or presenting road blocks
- Provides information, education and resources
- Practical – client-centred, noncoercive or judgmental
- Respects self determination

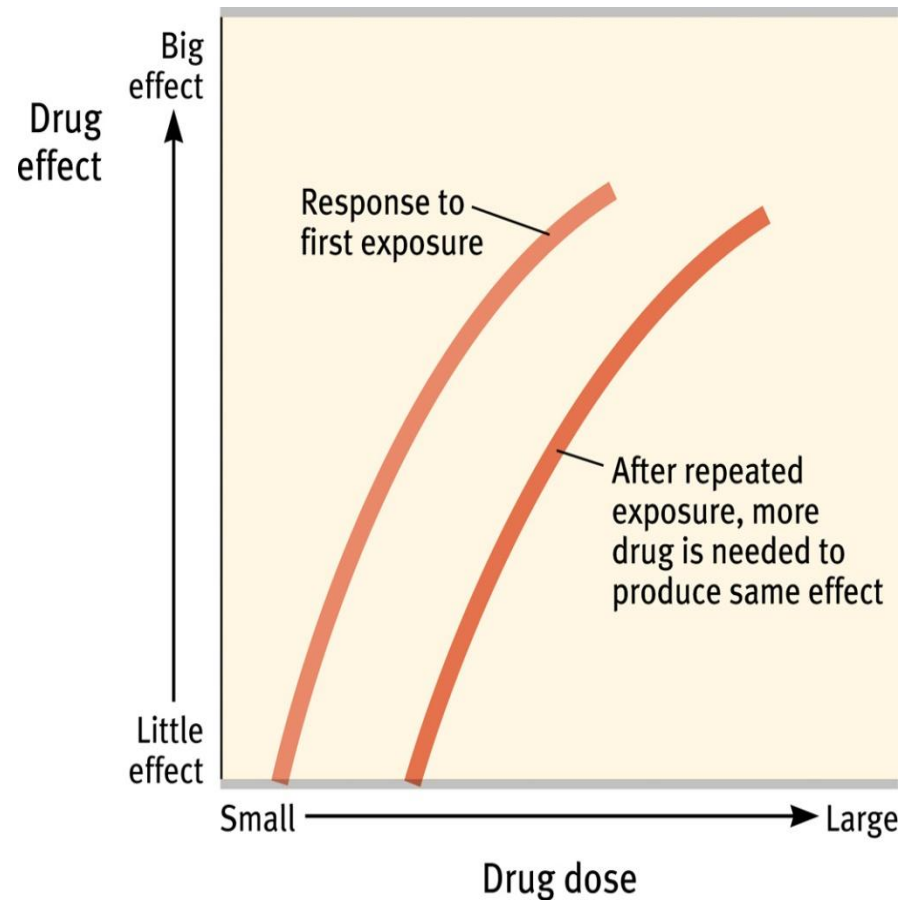


Cycle of dependence



Dependence & Addiction

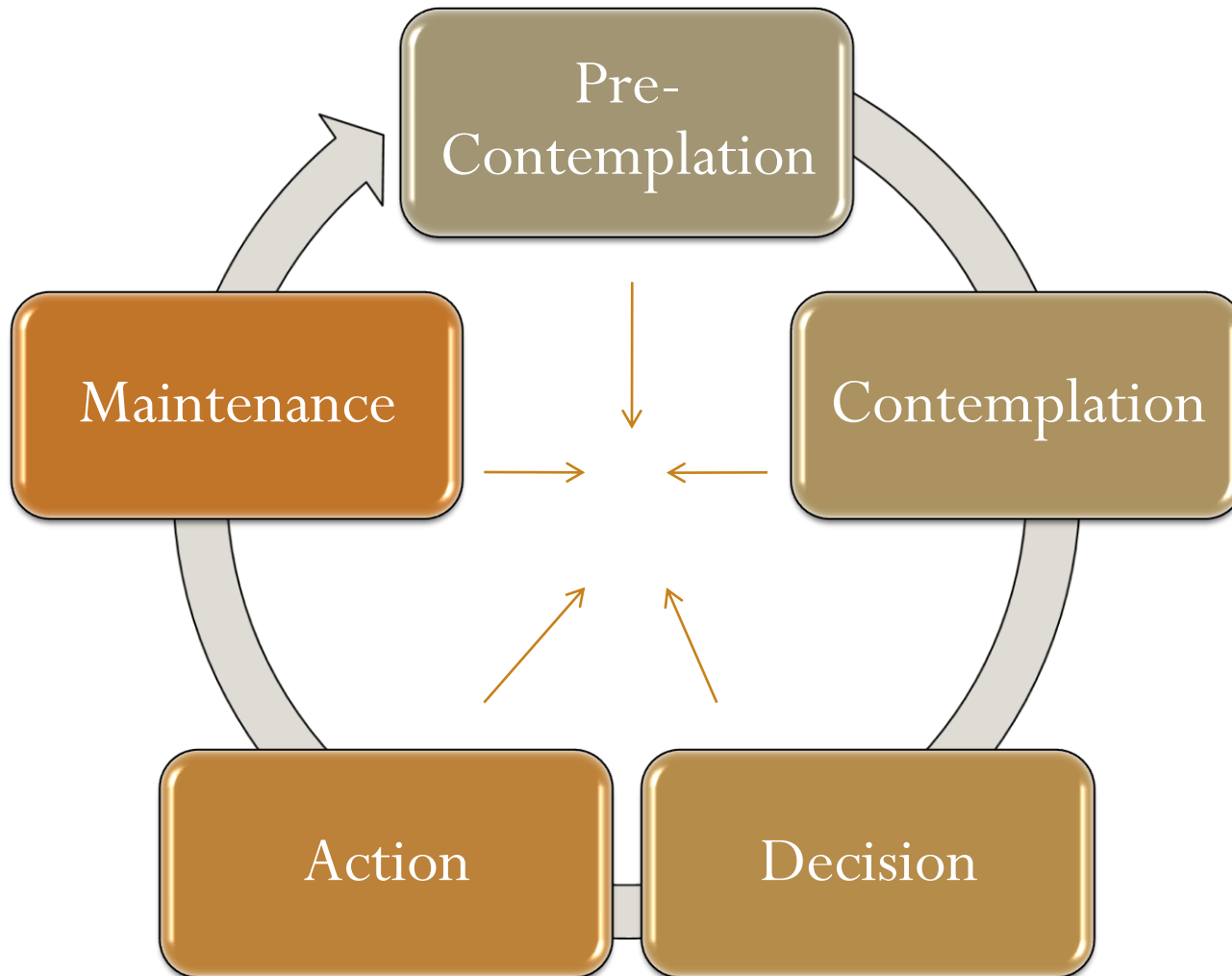
- Continued use of a psychoactive drug produces **tolerance**.
- With repeated exposure to a drug, the drug's effect lessens.
- Thus it takes greater quantities to get the desired effect.



Withdrawal & Dependence

1. **Withdrawal:** Upon stopping use of a drug (after addiction), users may experience the undesirable effects of withdrawal.
2. **Dependence:** Absence of a drug may lead to a feeling of physical pain, intense cravings (**physical dependence**), and negative emotions (**psychological dependence**).

Stages of Change Model



General barriers to treatment:

- System level (service integration)
- Program level (agency policies, narrow programming, transportation, child care)
- Personal and social (fear, trust barriers)



Specific barriers to treatment



- Shame (66%)
- Fear of losing children (62%)
- Fear of prejudicial treatment (60%)
- Depression (60%)
- Believe they can handle the problem on their own (55%)
- Waitlist for treatment services (53%)
- Lack of information (55%)

[Poole & Isaac (1998). BC Centre of Excellence for Women's Health]

Where do women find support?

- Professionals (77%)
- Supportive family members (68%)
- Friends and recovery group members (47%)
- Children as motivation to get help (47%)
- Health problems as motivation to get help (32%)



Working with birth families

- Non-judgmental approach
- Honesty
- Respect
- Cultural sensitivity
- Inclusion of parents as part of team (also according to their wishes and abilities)
- Support of their relationship with their infant



SMART guide:

- Have I been impacted personally by the use of alcohol or other drugs?
- If so, does this impact my ability to work with mothers and families?
- Am I able to remain non-judgmental, empathetic, supportive and respectful when I work with mothers and families?
- Can I stay hopeful?



Woman-Centered practice:

- Put safety first
- Focus on empowerment
- Recognize diversity and complexity of women's lives
- Respect her choices
- Believe her
- Be honest
- Support her decisions



Reflection

Do you have any
questions or comments
that you would like to
share with the group?



*Thank you for
participating.*



*Please remember to complete
your evaluation form.*