



Organización Panamericana de la Salud



Organización Mundial de la Salud

OFICINA REGIONAL PARA LAS **Américas**

Drug abuse and dependency: Understanding gender difference in the management of treatment services

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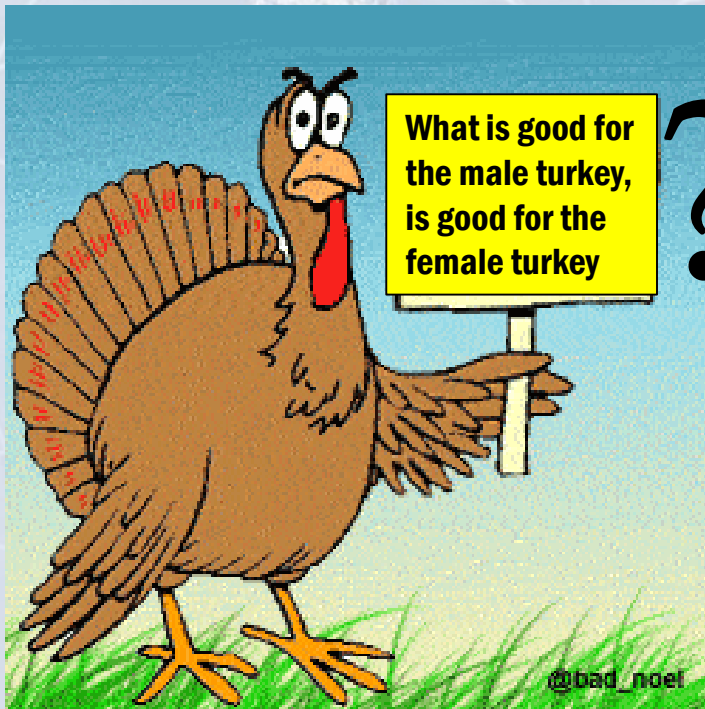
3rd COPOLAD II Annual Conference
Women and drug policy: Progress and challenges in the implementation of the gender approach and the empowerment of women as a cross-cutting matter
Sofía (Bulgaria), 19-20 June, 2018



Introduction

...

Problematic use of drugs



- Inespecific
- Neutral
- Same dynamic between men and women

Myths & beliefs



- **Masculine problem**
- **“Men issue”**
- **Treatment programs developed for men**

Difference



Disaggregated data:

- Substance use
- Disorders and associated problems
- Different moments
- Individual and contextual factors

Little is known about substance use problems in women, as well as their treatment experiences and the effectiveness of the therapeutic modalities and interventions, in different contexts

Data exclusion



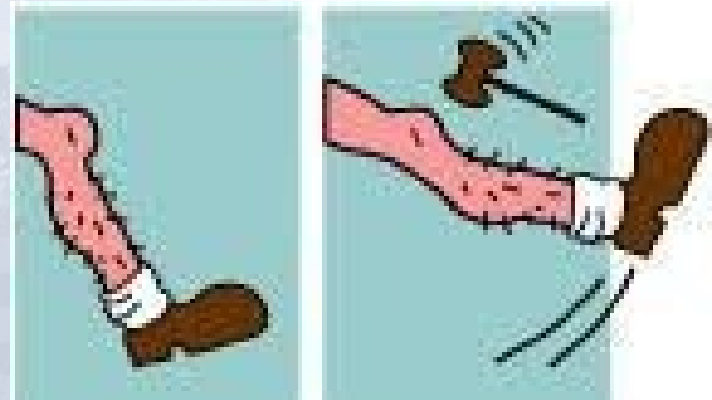
Feminine Complexity



Time limitations

“Reflex” Gender response

- **Supply of “specialized” programs for drug dependent women**
- **Variable extension and focalization**



Gender

- **“.... A multidimensional category of personhood encompassing a distinct pattern of social and y cultural differences.”**

(Roscoe, 1994)

Gender related barriers

Individual

- Language, non-verbal communication
- Prejudice that emanate from various attitudes and beliefs
- Existence of stereotypes and biases
- Stress

Organizational / Systemic

- norms, policies, procedures, programs (verbalized or not-verbalized)

Treatment (Gender response)



The whole women needs are considered in the program designing and implementation

(UNODC, 2004)



The 2 “faces” of Treatment



Problems
Needs
Treatment demand

Response
Services
Treatment supply

Biological Differences (Sex)



Hormones

Menstrual Cycle
Fertility
Pregnancy
Lactation
Menopause

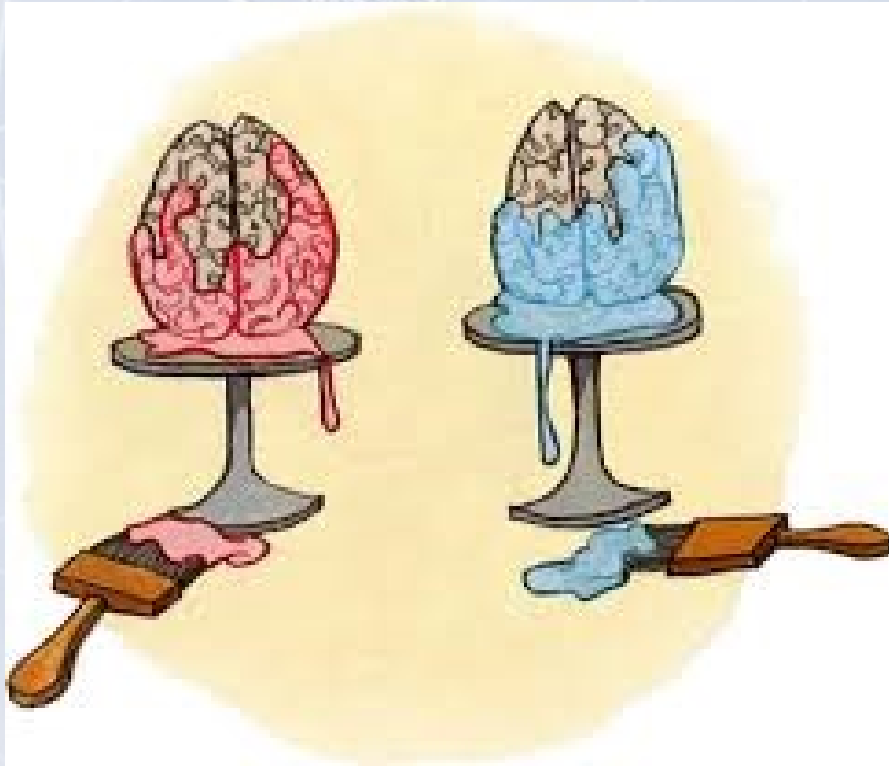
Others

Weight Control
Fatigue
Pain
Self-medication

- Variable response to stimuli
- Craving intensity
- Cardiovascular
- Neurocerebral
- Emotional

Role differences (Gender)

- Use pattern
- Context & social triggers
 - Separation and loss
 - Children's custody
 - Mental disorders (anxiety, depression)
 - Exposure to violence and abuse



Women use profile

- Higher men prevalence
- Variation depending on:
 - Type of Substance (pharmaceutical)
 - Age group (youths)
 - Social group of belonging
 - Social pressure (peers, couple)
 - Poverty
 - Occupational
 - Educational level
 - Legal context, imprisonment
 - Social valuation of drug use
 - Location



Women in treatment

- **Treatment demand at lower age**
- **Accelerated progression toward disorder and higher intensity of symptoms**
- **Family burden(children or others)**
- **History of Abuse and violence. Stigma**
- **Poverty, unemployment and low educational level**
- **Access to services through general health network**
- **Motivators: pregnancy and maternity**
- **Prostitution and infectious complications**
- **Psychiatric disorders co-occurrence**
- **Fear: Loss of children custody, legal and social consequences**

“Perfect storm”



Women who use psychoactive substances show a problem constellation which worsen their situation, treatment access, as well their chance to achieve recovery.

Barriers



Systemic

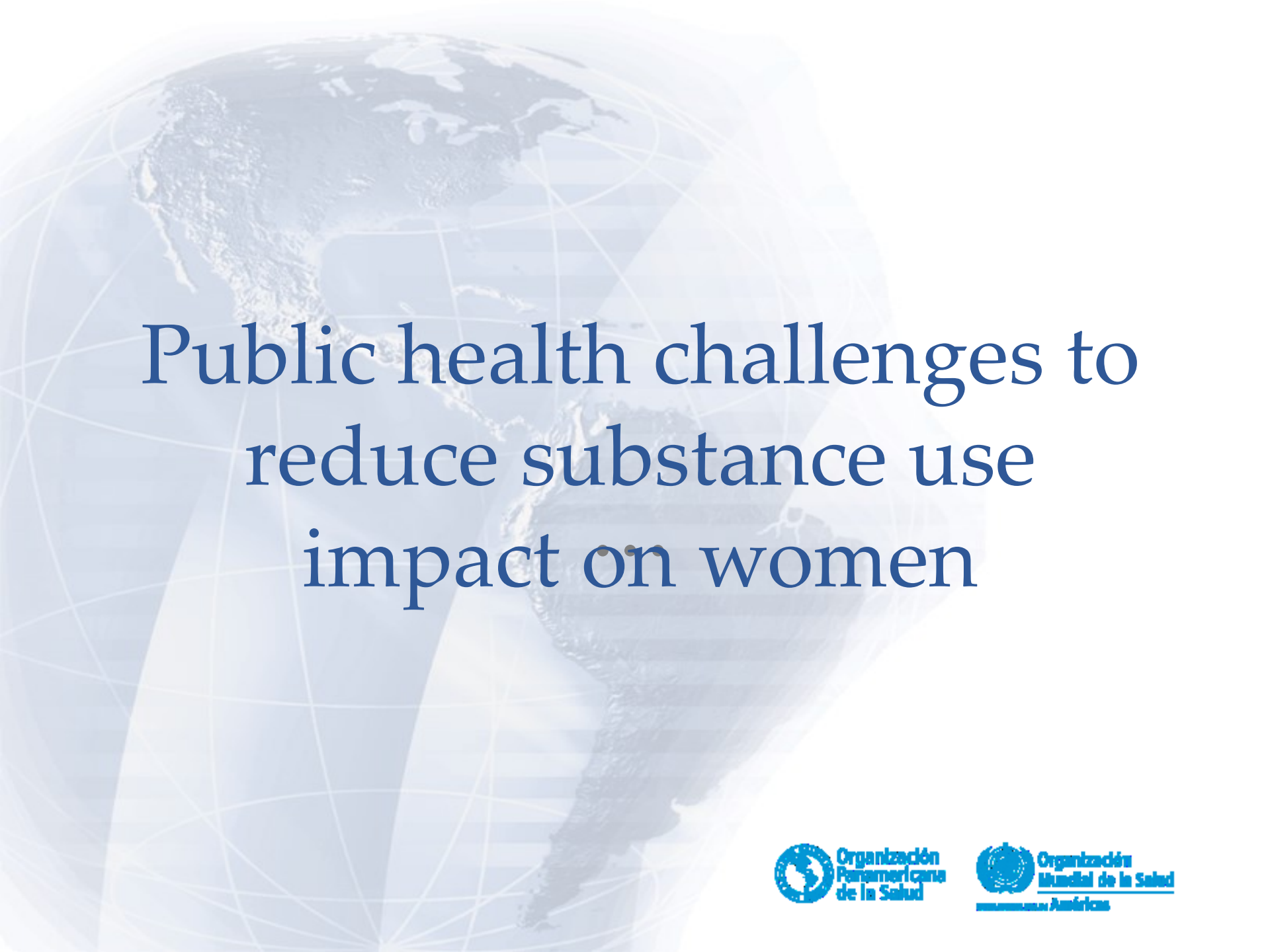
- **Women lack of decision power**
- **Ignorance about the gender differences relevance in regard of health outcomes**
- **Ignorance about drug problem and women treatment needs**
- **Lack of evidence based treatment models, with low-cost and adequate for gender approach**
- **Differences on health service organization and financement**
- **Need of an interconnected service network**

Structural

- **Children's care**
- **Services for pregnant**
- **Program cost and location**
- **Inconvenient and rigid attention time-schedule**
- **Waiting lists and immediate response capacity**
- **Exclusion criteria**
- **Physical safety**
- **Harm reduction programs**
- **Service coordination**
- **Lack of SBIRT programs**
- **Information about options**

Social, cultural and individual

- **Difficult daily life circumstances**
- **Stigma, shame and guilt**
- **Fear to loss children custody**
- **Lack of family support, specially from spouse-partner or other significative male figure**
- **Substance use as solution**
- **Lack of trust on treatment**



Public health challenges to reduce substance use impact on women

Appropriate gender response

- **Aknowledge gender differences**
- **Promote safe, respectful and worthy service environment**
- **Develop policies, plans and programs with a relational approach: which promote safe relationships with others**
- **Provide comprehensive, integrated and culturally suitable services**
- **Favor the improvement of socioeconomic conditions**
- **Promote community-based interventions**



How to improve access?

Make the problem visible



- **Public health information:
Registry
Research
Analysis**
- **Media divulgation**
- **Information about available services**

Strengthening competences

Health and Social care staff

- Screening and detection
- Orientation
- Management
- Referral



Articulating care

- **Network coordination:**
Health and social services, and other sectors (education, labor, justice)
- **Developing low-threshold and outreach services**



Services

- **Promotion of “Gender Philosophy”**
- **Organization:**
 - **Structure**
 - Physical environment
 - Safety
 - Staff profile.- Training, attitude
 - **Program**
 - Needs Assessment
 - Process and outcome monitoring
 - Recovery orientation



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THANKS

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