



**“Listen”**  
**Women’s experiences of  
substance use, domestic abuse  
and support**

Sarah Fox  
Manchester Metropolitan University

Supervisory Team: Prof. Sarah Galvani, Dr. Marian Foley,  
Prof. Hugh McLaughlin

# Background Literature

- Women make up 30-40% of people accessing support for problematic substance use in England.
- 1 in 4 women experience domestic abuse in the UK.
- Women's experiences of problematic substance use and domestic abuse is associated with high levels of stigma, shame and secrecy.
- Women who experience problematic substance use are being turned away from domestic abuse refuges.
- **There are is a gap in service provision for women affected by substance use.**

# Data Collection and Analysis

- Focus on women's experiences.
- Influenced by feminist theory and hermeneutic phenomenology.
- Face-to-face semi-structured interviews.
- Purposive sample of 12 women
- Recruited through Facebook and snowballing.
- Analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis on NVivo 11



# About the women...

Laura



Michelle



Kat



Khloe



Gina



Kim



Lydia



Elaine



Holly



Lou



Jo



Dani



- 28-65 years
- 9 mothers
  - (Laura put her three children into foster care, Michelle had her six children removed from her care, Kim lost custody of her daughter until she was clean)
- 2 gay
- 4 alcohol only, 8 drugs and alcohol
- Recovery from 0 days to 13 years
- All experienced of domestic abuse
- 3 experienced of prostitution
- 11 experienced childhood trauma

# Preliminary Emergent Themes

- Childhood trauma impacting substance use
- Relationship between substance use and domestic abuse
- The role of the perpetrator in substance use
- Role of social work
- Impact of AA and NA
- Self-motivation to change
- Barriers to support

# Fear to disclose

“I would hide away from social services I wouldn’t dare want them involved and if they did get involved I’d be lying like mad.” (Kim)

“...I always think I thought, if I ask for help then for, em, the drugs, social services would get involved and they’d take my kids, so that was like a barrier for me to, to actually doing anything, em about it, em..” (Gina)

“And how are you supposed to approach them when you know your child is going to, you know they’re going to take your child away?” (Khloe)

## Disconnect between issues and support options

“I was offered em, a place in a refuge at that point, but then they said to me I would have to stop drinking, I couldn't go if I was drinking. I was drink dependent I couldn't, I felt, probably medically it wouldn't have been safe for me to stop the way I was drinking anyway. Em, I would have needed, because I was drinking everyday, I would have needed a detox or something. But all they [name of refuge] said to me, if you come, you can't drink. I thought, I can't stop...”(Kat)

# Supportive and understanding care workers

“...she got me, she believed in me. Em, she really gave me hope, that there was a way out of this, em, and yeah I felt like she was, some part of her that understood.” (Lou)

“...I liked her as well, I liked her, she was a nice woman, and she clearly, well, [...], em, she just there there wasn't any judgement there, it was about, look this is how it is, there is treatment available...” (Khloe)



# Preliminary discussion points moving forward

- Trauma informed approaches to substance use
- Gendered understanding of Addiction
- Moving away from siloed approaches of support
- Listening to women and believing in them

# Thank You

[sarah.fox@stu.mmu.ac.uk](mailto:sarah.fox@stu.mmu.ac.uk)

♀

@ms\_sarah\_fox

♀

@dawf2018

## References

- Agenda. (2016) Hidden Hurt, violence, abuse and disadvantage in the lives of women <http://weareagenda.org/wpcontent/uploads/2015/11/Hiffen-Hurt-full-report1.pdf>
- AVA (2012) "Treat me like a human being, like someone who matters" Findings of the Stella Project Mental Health Initiative Survivor Consultation <http://avaproject.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Treat-me-like-a-human-being-SPMHI-survivor-consultation-report-June-2012.pdf>
- AVA & Agenda (2017) Mapping the Maze <https://avaproject.org.uk/mapping-maze-report-launched/>
- Call, C. R. and Nelsen, J. C. (2007) 'Partner Abuse and Women's Substance Problems: From Vulnerability to Strength.' *Affilia*, 22(4) pp. 334-346.
- Harding, S. (1987) *Feminist and methodology: social science issues*. Open University Press: US
- Hesse-Biber. (2014) *Feminist Research Practice*. Sage Publications Inc: US
- Hesse-Biber S., and Leavy, P (2011) *The Practice of Qualitative Research* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.). Sage Publications Inc: US
- Maynard, M. (1994) 'Methods, Practice and Epistemology: The Debate about Feminism and Research ' In Maynard, M. and Purvis, J. (eds.) *Research Women's Lives from a Feminist Perspective*. UK: Taylor & Francis Ltd.,
- Maynard, M. and Purvis, J. (1994) 'Doing Feminist Research.' In Maynard, M. and Purvis, J. (eds.) *Researching Women's Lives from a Feminist Perspective*. UK: Taylor & Francis Ltd.,
- Miller, B. and Downs, W. (2000) 'Violence against Women.' In Goldman, M. and Hatch, M. (eds.) *Women and Health*. San Diego: Academic Press, pp. 529-540
- Office for National Statistics (2014) Intimate Personal Violence and Partner Abuse [http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20160105160709/http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776\\_352362.pdf](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20160105160709/http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776_352362.pdf)
- Public Health England (PHE) (2014). Alcohol Treatment in England 2013-2014 <http://www.nta.nhs.uk/uploads/adult-alcohol-statistics-2013-14-commentary.pdf>
- Morgan, S.T. (nd) *Epistemology and Ontology*. Located on 9-5-'17 from <http://www.stmorgan.co.uk/epistemology-and-ontology.html>
- Smith, J., Flowers, P., and Larkin, M (2009) *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis- Theory Method and Research*. Sage Publications Ltd: London
- Women's Aid (2016) Annual Survey 2015 <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/womens-aid-releases-annual-survey-2015-statistics/>