Abstract

Introduction: In the female population, adherence to specialist clinical treatment for psychoactive substance dependence has peculiar characteristics in terms of therapeutic approaches available to addicts in general. A smaller number of women seek specialist treatment in comparison with men. Traditionally, most health care services specializing in chemical dependence provide similar therapies to both men or women, including the use of mixed-sex groups at some facilities. Objective: To discuss the views or psychological meanings attributed by women with substance use disorders to phenomena associated with adherence to treatment at a specialist university outpatient clinic. Methods: The qualitative-clinical method was used, i.e., an approach characterized by the typically qualitative focus of human sciences adapted to health care settings. The semi-structured interview technique with open questions was used for data collection, combined with observation of the women interviewed. Data were processed using qualitative content analysis. Results: Three categories of treatment outcomes emerged: 1) significant motivations to seek and follow the treatment proposed; 2) symbolic meanings attributed to the drug; 3) psychological representations of lack of motivation to explain difficulties adhering to treatment. Conclusions: Our findings suggest that the motivations of addicted women to seek treatment vary, but highlight the fact that the substance used becomes perceived as something that causes significant losses and hinders the proper exercise of women’s role in family and social contexts. A warm welcoming is considered essential for a patient to adhere to treatment, offsetting the strong physical pleasure associated with psychoactive substance use.

Keywords

Qualitative research, patient dropout, women’s health services, women’s health, substance-related disorders, patient compliance.