



OSAM-O-GRAM



DATE: January 2007

DATELINE: Ohio

Wright State University & the University of Akron

Targeted Response Initiative on Substance Abuse among Older Adults Part V: Substance Abuse Treatment Issues

Social service providers and treatment counselors reported low levels of substance abuse treatment engagement among older adults, despite the perceived need for such services. For example, a case manager from Dayton commented, "I haven't had anyone [older adults] yet make it to treatment. I've made a ton of referrals, but no one making it there." Similarly, an older-aged substance abuser from Toledo indicated, "I know a few 60+ that would like to clean up their act, but they don't wanna go to no treatment or nothin' because it's like worse than bein' locked up in jail, they say..." These reports were supported by statistical data. For example, in 2006, only about 1% of the total number of people assessed at the centralized intake unit in Dayton (n= 4,891) were over the age of 60.

Service providers and seniors discussed a range of barriers to substance abuse treatment among older-aged people. Among some seniors, reluctance to enter substance abuse treatment is related to their **fear** of losing independent living. The **stigma** associated with substance abuse treatment and **pessimistic attitudes** regarding treatment success in older age were also viewed as significant treatment barriers in this population. For example, participants commented:

When they're thirty, there's still room for change, and there's still motivation to live or make some change. It seems when they're after 60, there's lack of motivation and hopelessness.... (Treatment provider, Columbus)

Once you've used for a certain amount a years, I don't think you're ever gonna stop. If you're up around sixty and you're still usin' heroin, you're not gonna quit. (Heroin user, Dayton)

Older clients may dislike being included in treatment programs with much younger clients because of **generational differences**. Treatment providers indicated that treatment approaches that work for younger individuals may be less effective for older-aged people.

So they're thinking about death and dying, and we're [treatment providers] talking about, 'What did you do with your childhood?' So even finding their niche, I think it's a challenge.... Finding meaning for them [elderly clients].... (Treatment provider, Columbus)

I'm sittin' in there with somebody my grandchild's age.... Because of the long history of using, my nerves can't take a lotta noise and movement... When you get in with a lotta younger people, I mean it's so overwhelming.... They disrespect you every chance they get.... (Older-aged substance abuser, Toledo)

Waiting lists also present significant obstacles to older individuals. Senior clients may experience health crises while waiting to get into treatment. This can result in substance abuse treatment providers losing track of older adults while they are transitioning between independent living, hospitalization, and nursing facilities. Some treatment services are not able to accommodate seniors with disabilities or other **medical problems**. Social service providers indicated a need for **in-home treatment** services for some clients with alcohol and/or other drug problems, particularly those who lack mobility. Participants discussed a need for outreach programs to **identify** older adults with substance abuse problems, including additional training for physicians and other medical professionals about the warning signs of alcohol and other drug abuse among older-aged people.

OSAM-O-GRAMS report key findings of the Ohio Substance Abuse Monitoring (OSAM) Network. Informants located throughout the state use qualitative and quantitative data to provide semiannual monitoring of substance abuse trends. The OSAM Network is funded by the Ohio Department of Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services by contract to Wright State University and by subcontract to the University of Akron. This OSAM-O-GRAM is based on the January 2007 OSAM Network meeting.

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