A. Background Issues
B. Gender comparisons
C. Treatment discrepancies
D. Screening and assessment
E. Treatment options
Background Issues

- Alcohol use problems are significant among women, despite the greater frequency among men.

- Frequent, heavy drinking in women:
  - 7 or more drinks in one week, or…
  - 5 or more drinks on one occasion

12.6% of Women Report Frequent Heavy Drinking

- 13% of women report frequent heavy drinking.
- 87% of women report less frequent or moderate drinking.
Background (cont.)

Frequent Heavy Drinking by Age: White Women 1984-1995
Between 2.7 and 4.5 million women over age 12 in U.S. are alcohol abusers or alcoholics (Blumenthal, 1998; Straussner & Attia, 2002) (Blumenthal, 1998; Straussner & Attia, 2002)
Heavy alcohol consumption affects:

- Brain, CNS, mental functions
- Heart health
- Liver (cirrhosis), GI system (ulcers, pancreatitis)
- Risk of some cancers (e.g., throat, bladder, breast?)
- Weight, nutrition, absorption
- Reproductive health
- Injury (falls, accidents)
Alcohol and HIV/AIDS among women: Women are more likely to engage in risky sexual behavior when intoxicated (Testa & Collins, 1997)
Alcohol affects women’s perceptions of risk from partners (Murphy, Monahan, & Miller, 1998; Testa, Livingston, & Collins, 2000)
Sexual coercion & unwanted sexual activity are statistically related to women’s alcohol abuse
Gender Comparisons

"Telescoping Effect"

Women progress to dependence more quickly and experience more physical sequelae with fewer years of drinking.
Gender Comparisons (continued)

For women…
Less alcohol required for intoxication
Differential body mass
Different absorption rates
Different stomach enzymes
Different body fat to water ratio
Differences in amounts of dehydrogenase
(metabolism)

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Gender Comparisons (continued)

For women...

- Different degree of impact on organ systems (e.g., liver, cognitive function)
- Risks to fetal development
- Compromised parenting capabilities
Gender Comparisons (continued)

- Differences in socio-environmental risk factors
- Family of origin alcoholism, history of loss, childhood physical and/or sexual abuse
Gender Comparisons (continued)

- Alcohol-related fatal crashes increased since 1982 for girls aged 15-20, while dropping for boys (Center for Behavioral Health, 2002)
- Women’s alcohol problems are significant because of the numbers of women involved, and their social roles and contexts which are affected (Smyth & Miller, 1997)
Treatment Discrepancies

- Low social support for treatment
- Role-related barriers (e.g., childcare)
- Alcoholic partners
- Co-morbidity (anxiety, depression, suicide attempts, victimization)
- Other barriers: stigma, self-esteem, guilt, social withdrawal

% psych disorders among women
Treatment Discrepancies (cont.)

- Poor “fit” between women’s needs and program
- Vulnerable to legal and child welfare systems

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Screening and Assessment

Screening
• TWEAK score of 3 or more indicates heavy or problem drinking
• Should lead to further assessment of alcohol use and women’s issues
• Some women prefer a same-gendered interviewer

Assessment Issues
• Intimate partner violence (current)
• Child maltreatment
• Current or past sexual and/or physical abuse
• Past and current psychiatric disorders and mental health needs
• Family of origin alcoholism
• Parenting concerns in current family system
• Partner/spouse drinking and/or drug abuse
• Need for legal services (child custody, divorce, family violence, criminal justice system issues, etc.)

• Barriers to successful treatment outcomes:
  - lack of social support
  - social resistance to seeking
  - help child care concerns
  - no resources/low income
Treatment Options

- Individual counseling
- Group counseling
- Family counseling
  - Whole family
  - Couples counseling
  - Children counseling
  - Substance abuse prevention
• Assertiveness training
• Coping skills development
• Trauma treatment
• Coping with partner’s drinking
• Support groups
  - Women for Sobriety
  - Women-only AA meetings
• Parenting groups
• Women-only treatment contexts
Appendices: Additional Slides
Summary

• Many women experience guilt, shame, and feelings of inadequacy as women and mothers
• Treat women with empathy, compassion, sensitivity, and respect
• Focus on women’s self-perceptions and life experiences
• Take a strengths approach to assessment and treatment
• Consider the interplay of biological, social, psychological, and environmental factors
Historical Background

Prior to the Civil War, women drug addicts outnumbered men who abused substances – 60-75% of opium-morphine addicts were women

(Blumenthal, 1998 cites Cartwright, 1982)
“The history of women’s use and abuse of alcohol in the United States is intertwined with the political movements of temperance, prohibition, and suffrage and with the ever-changing role of women in political and family life.”

(Straussner & Attia, 2002, p. 4)
Historical Background (cont.)

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IN A POSITIVE CURE
For all those painful Complaints and Weaknesses so common to our best female population.

It will cure entirely the worst form of Female Complaints, all Ovarian troubles, Inflammation and Ulceration, Falling and Displacements, and the consequent Spinal Weakness, and is particularly adapted to the Change of Life.

It will dissolve and expel tumors from the uterus in an early stage of development. The tendency to cancerous humors there is checked very speedily by its use.

It removes faintness, flatulence, destroys all craving for stimulants, and relieves weakness of the stomach. It cures Bloating, Headaches, Nervous Prostration, General Debility, Sleeplessness, Depression and Indigestion.

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Historical Background (cont.)
Historical Background (cont.)

Women's Minor Ills come from one cause

Women are so accustomed to finding themselves constipated that they get to make matters worse by inactivity. Unfortunately, many seem to think that it is easier to give the appearance of health with enemas, or with a medicine with the excuse of removing the real cause for taking a good laxative.

The gift habit, of course, is not to be recommended, but many women can take such a medicine with profit. A.V.P. is a safe and effective medicine and does not cause any harm.

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