

# **Working with Older Drinkers: Insight from Older Peoples' Addiction Services and Published Literature**

S. Wadd<sup>1</sup>, K. Lapworth<sup>1</sup>, D. Forrester<sup>1</sup>, M. Sullivan<sup>2</sup>, S. Galvani<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Tilda Goldberg Centre for Social Work and Social Care, University of Bedfordshire; <sup>2</sup>Brunel Institute for Ageing Studies, Brunel University.

## **Aims**

To identify the treatment needs of older drinkers and the most effective strategies for working with them.

## **Methods**

A mixed-methods approach which combined a literature review with one-to-one interviews and focus groups with practitioners from specialist older peoples' addiction services ( $n=15$ ) and one-to-one interviews and focus groups with older drinkers who attend these services ( $n=26$ ).

## **Results**

Our findings suggest that older drinkers may require a longer period of treatment than younger drinkers as they frequently present with complex needs and an extensive history of problem drinking. Clients should be given the option of receiving treatment at home because lack of transportation, mobility problems, high levels of embarrassment and shame and discomfort in mixing with younger substance users may deter or prevent older people attending services. Assessment should include quality of life issues and competency with activities of daily living and treatment should focus on age-specific issues such as bereavement, loneliness and boredom. A family-oriented approach may best serve the needs of older drinkers and some appear to derive great comfort from peer support groups. Evidence from the literature suggests that older people are more adherent to alcohol treatment than younger people and are just as likely to benefit from it. Empirically supported treatments in adults are generally suitable for use with older people but they may require modification.

## **Conclusions**

Older people can be successfully treated for alcohol problems but treatment strategy and approach may need adapting to address the age-related needs of this client group.

Word count excluding title and authors: 246

Corresponding author: Dr Sarah Wadd, Programme Director Alcohol and Ageing Research, Tilda Goldberg Centre for Social Work and Social Care, University of Bedfordshire, Park Square, Luton, LU1 3NJ, 01582 743454, sarah.wadd@beds.ac.uk.