



Insight into the relations between binge eating and binge drinking

INVESTIGATORS: Sherry H. Stewart
Department of Psychology
Dalhousie University

Catrina Brown
Maritime School of Social Work
Dalhousie University

Counselors working with women who have alcohol problems have noticed that women who abuse alcohol by bingeing often have a similar problem with food. They are both binge drinkers and binge eaters. Counselors' anecdotal evidence and experience, as well as prior research showing high rates of co-occurrence of binge eating and binge drinking, has led Drs. Sherry Stewart and Catrina Brown to conduct a research study exploring the implications of this problem, particularly with regard to treatment possibilities.

The two used a set of validated and standardized psychological questionnaires to assess the levels and severity of binge drinking and binge eating, to examine the situations in which each behavior occurs, and to explore the personality factors that might be related to each behavior. In addition, Drs. Stewart and Brown interviewed women clients at Nova Scotia Drug Dependency services to get these women's own perspectives on the types of relations that exist between their binge eating and binge drinking problems.

Although both data collection and analysis is still under way, the evidence already indicates that the development of more comprehensive community-based harm-reduction treatments are needed to better assist women struggling with binge eating and binge drinking problems.

"Women alcoholics receiving services at Drug Dependency show a very high rate of binge eating," the researchers note. "Our data suggest that more than two-thirds of these women are binge eaters, the large majority of whom are 'severe' in their binge-eating patterns."

They also note that "the binge eaters are younger and may be more likely to experience negative emotions such as anxiety and depression than the non-binge eaters."

Finally, their preliminary findings suggest that women use binge eating and binge drinking for similar reasons. For example, those women who use binge eating to cope with stress also tend to use binge drinking to cope as well.

This one-year project is intended to be the first phase of a more comprehensive program of research on the co-occurrence of binge drinking and binge eating in women. The research team expects eventually to develop and test harm-reduction treatments that are informed by their research findings.

-30-

CONTACT INFORMATION

Sherry H. Stewart
Department of Psychology
Dalhousie University
Phone: (902) 494-3793
Email: sherry.stewart@dal.ca