



Perceived Social Network and Support function among Substance Abusers: Does the Gender Matter?

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Background

- ▶ **Social support** plays an important role in the recovery of substance abuse (Cano et al., 2018; Duffy & Baldwin, 2013; Min et al., 2013)
- ▶ **Gender is a factor that affects the outcome of recovery** (Vigna-Taglianti et al., 2016);
- ▶ Previous studies have shown that males have more support from their family while women have less (Grella & Joshi, 1999; Grella, 2009) during the treatment.
- ▶ **Women who were ex-offenders** have multiple service needs, such as mood and anxiety disorder; they are also at higher risk following their return to the community (Alemagno, 2001; Sacks, 2004).



Purpose of this study

- ▶ This study aims to examine the perceived size and composition of social network, and the functions of social support between male and female substance abusers in their recovery process.



Methodology

- ▶ Surveys were conducted at different times in 7 non-government treatment communities of Taiwan with 2 interviewers each time.
- ▶ A series of questionnaires, including **self-reported mapping of social network size** and a **16-item measure of perceived social support function**, were conducted with the participants.
- ▶ **120 males and 20 females** with a drug and alcohol abuse history participated in this study.
- ▶ Anonymity was assured.

Dependent variables

- ▶ **Social network size:** Asked the respondent to think of their important supporters in the last 3 months (up to 15 persons).
- ▶ **Social network composition:** those participants who listed 1-15 persons in their network were asked to categorize the listed people into different sets of connection, including family members, classmates or coworkers, friends, people belonging to church or associations, peers of the current community, pastors or instructors of the current treatment community, professional workers (social workers or counselors)
- ▶ **Functions of family support:** Asked the respondent about the extent to which their family members who provided them with emotional support, concrete support, and informational support. 13 questions were included.



Independent Variables

- ▶ **Gender:** Male vs Female
- ▶ **Record of criminal history:** With vs without criminal records

Participants Characteristics

Variables		N	%	Mean	SD	Range
Age		149	—	38.5	11.15	18-65
Network Size		150	—	7.75	4.29	1-15
Gender	Male	130	86.7	—	—	—
	Female	20	13.3	—	—	—
Education	Elementary	8	5.3	—	—	—
	Junior high	67	44.7	—	—	—
	Senior high	56	37.3	—	—	—
	College	19	12.6	—	—	—
Marriage	Single	85	56.6	—	—	—
	Married & Cohabiting	10	6.7	—	—	—
	Divorced	48	32.0	—	—	—
	Other	7	4.7	—	—	—
Welfare recipient	No	108	72.0	—	—	—
	Yes	37	24.6	—	—	—
Criminal History	No	55	36.6	—	—	—
	Yes	94	62.6	—	—	—

Findings: t-test of Gender and the Social Network Size & Composition

Variables	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
number of people in social network	Male	130	7.53	4.22	-1.490	0.149
	Female	20	9.15	4.57		
family	Male	130	2.62	1.75	0.765	0.452
	Female	20	2.25	2.02		
Classmates or colleagues	Male	130	0.88	1.32	-0.197	0.845
	Female	20	0.95	1.57		
friends	Male	130	0.69	1.19	-0.815	0.424
	Female	20	1.20	2.75		
church, helping alliance, association	Male	130	0.45	0.81	-0.233	0.818
	Female	20	0.50	0.83		
peers	Male	130	0.90	1.17	-2.433	0.024*
	Female	20	2.05	2.06		
professional workers	Male	130	0.28	0.61	-2.090	0.049*
	Female	20	0.75	0.97		
pastors or instructors	Male	130	1.71	1.58	0.812	0.423
	Female	20	1.45	1.28		

*p<.05 ; **p<.01 ; ***p<.001

Findings: t-test of Gender on the Function of family support

- ▶ A independent t- test was performed to compare the mean scores of family support for the male and female participants.

Variables	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Family support	Male	117	44.31	7.22	2.198	0.42
	Female	15	39.20	8.62		

Mean comparison of family support (with different functions (gender*criminal history))

	Gender	ex-offender	N	Mean	SD	F	Sig.
Family sum	Male	exoffender	72	47.5278	8.0526	2.428	0.68
		Non-exoffender	43	48.2791	6.6738		
	Female	exoffender	6	40.6667	13.3965		
		Non-exoffender	9	43.4444	5.6150		



Findings

- ▶ There was no significant difference in **social support size** and **number of family supportors**.
- ▶ Female participants perceived that significantly more supportors **from their current treatment community** and **from professional workers**.
- ▶ The average number of supportors from their peers of the current community and professional workers for female participants was **2.05** and **0.9 for females participants, respectively**; **0.75** and **0.28** for male participants, respectively.

Findings

- ▶ A significant difference was found in **the functions of family support between** male (Mean=44.3, SD=7.22) and female participants (Mean=39.2, SD=8.62).
- ▶ Analysis of variance was conducted to compare the mean scores of family support functions **among four groups** (male ex-offenders, female ex-offender, male non-ex-offender, and female non-ex-offenders). **Marginally statistical difference** was found at an alpha level of .68.

Discussion

- It was found that there was no significant difference in social network size, and number of family supporters between male and female drug abusers.
- However, there was a significant difference in the perceived functions of family support between male and female participants; females perceived weaker functions of their family support, compared to males.
- Female drug abusers reported that peers in the current treatment community as important sources of their support system.
- Female participants who were ex-offenders perceived that they received the least family support, compared to female non-ex-offenders and male participants (ex-offenders and non-ex-offenders).

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