

Revealed: alcohol's relentless grasp on women

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New research from the University of Western Sydney has revealed that women in recovery from alcoholism are at a high risk of relapsing as they reach midlife.

PhD researcher Ms Janice Withnall, from the UWS School of Education, has just completed the first three years of her Australia-wide study of the experiences of women who are recovering from alcohol dependency.

The results reveal that women recovering from alcoholism require many years of treatment and self-managed care; and the pressures imposed on many of these women as they reach midlife can impair their recovery abilities.

"Many women in the midlife period, between the ages of 35 and 55, are pulled in many directions with increased family and work commitments," says Ms Withnall.

"For those who have succeeded in abstaining from alcohol for more than five years, there is a risk that they will not continue their treatment for this chronic illness and succumb to alcohol when these pressures become too great."

According to Ms Withnall, it is crucial for women in recovery from alcoholism to maintain complete abstinence throughout this difficult period of their lives.

"Many people do not understand the extreme and devastating effects that alcohol abuse has on women's bodies and sense of self," says Ms Withnall.

"Alcohol inflicts more damage, more quickly on women than on men. For those who have already had a problem with the misuse of alcohol, relapsing can have dire consequences."

In 2009, Ms Withnall is continuing her PhD research to ensure that more women can effectively sustain their recovery from alcohol and avoid the risk of relapsing in midlife.

Women aged between 35 to 55 years who have maintained abstinence for more than five years and health practitioners with more than seven years experience in alcohol recovery, are being asked to take part in this final stage of the study.

Participants from all regions of Australia are welcome to participate.

Provided by University of Western Sydney

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