Recent research suggests that alcohol and drug treatment programmes that take into consideration specific treatment needs of women are better able to attract and retain women clients. Clinicians are a significant component of any alcohol and drug treatment programme offered in New Zealand.

The aim of this study is to survey New Zealand alcohol and drug clinicians about their beliefs and service provision to women with alcohol and drug problems. More specifically the objective is to investigate whether clinicians consider women have different treatment needs to men, to also identify the specific treatment that clinicians provided to women with alcohol and drug problems and to ascertain whether various clinician variables, are related to differences in beliefs and treatment provision.

The questionnaire items for this study were included in the National Centre for Treatment Development (Alcohol, Drugs & Addiction) (NCTD) New Zealand wide telephone survey of alcohol and drug clinicians. The NCTD employed independent interviewers to survey 217 clinicians. Fifty nine percent of clinicians were women and 41 percent men. Clinicians were first asked whether they believed women with alcohol and drug problems have differing treatment needs to men. Those clinicians that did believe women have different treatment needs to men were then asked to identify the differential treatment they provided to the women. Clinician responses were compared with various clinician socio-demographic characteristics (gender, age, ethnicity, professional group, years working in the alcohol and drug treatment field, work setting, qualifications / courses attended, location, and personal alcohol use).

Key findings are that the majority of clinicians (76%) do believe that women have different treatment needs to men. Most of the clinicians that supported this view were able to give specific examples of the different treatment they had provided for women. Furthermore, results from this study suggest that significant differences exist in relation to clinicians’ practice in New Zealand in relation to clinician, gender, work setting (Crown Health Enterprise and non-Crown Health Enterprise; outpatient and residential), and gender mix of caseload (high versus low number of women worked with therapeutically).

The need for further research is identified. A more in-depth qualitative study is required to investigate more specifically the actual treatment provided to women clients by clinicians, and clinicians’ attitudes and beliefs that influence treatment provided to women.
Implications for service improvement include the development of a co-ordinated range of treatment options and approaches, which are best suited to meet the needs of women with alcohol and drug problems.