

Substance use stigma

Traditional Gender Roles & Expectations:

Older women face stigma around substance use due to a combination of societal expectations, gender norms, and age-related stereotypes.

Gendered Ageism:

Older women face a unique form of ageism that combines both sexism and ageism. Substance use is seen as particularly inappropriate for older women.

Social Norms:

Substance use, particularly alcohol or drugs, is seen as contradictory to traditional roles of women, leading to greater stigma when older women engage in such behaviors.

Generational Differences:

Older women grew up in a time when there was less acceptance of substance use. Older women may judge themselves harshly for their substance use.

Underrepresentation in Research:

The lack of research perpetuates the stigma, as substance use by older women is often seen as abnormal or unexpected.

Moral Judgements:

Women are often judged more harshly for behaviors perceived as "unfeminine" or inappropriate. Older women are expected to be responsible, refined and restrained.

Reluctance to Seek Help:

Older women may be less likely to seek help, fearing that they will be judged or that their substance use will be seen as a moral failing rather than a health issue.

Dignity is the key to substance use stigma
See the whole person

- Listen without judgement – centre her autonomy, validate her experiences.
- Advocate for age-responsive harm reduction services.
- Foster intergenerational solidarity and education to help shift narratives from blame to compassion.