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### Drug Addiction & Mental Health

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Drug Addiction & Mental Health

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Composition 200

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Abstract: Drugs have a serious effect on our mental health, and mental health has a major effect on drug abuse and addiction. There is a reason so many drug users usually need to keep going back to rehab. It is because drugs affect mental health to a point where you aren't the same person during and even after drug addiction. Poor mental health also can be a major cause influencing people to start doing drugs. People with depression, anxiety disorders, mood disorders are more prone to drug use. That is why we need to make it a public policy to screen the mental health of young adults all over the world. We need to treat them with therapists/psychiatrists before they start to self-medicate. I believe if we improve rehabilitation center's funding, screen mental health, and start new studies on mental health's correlation with drug use, then we can officially make a big improvement within drug addiction and the effects it has all over the world.

Key Words: Drugs, Addiction, Mental, Health, Depression, Opioids

Tyler Burkholder

## Drug Addiction & Mental Health

Drugs have a serious effect on our mental health. In turn, mental health has a serious effect on drug use. It is a constant battle for drug addicts, and I think it's time we step up to help them not fight it alone.

My best friend struggled with addiction and unfortunately, he did not win. He passed away at the age of 17 from a drug overdose. He was just about to turn 18 and he was planning on going to college. He was a great person and an even better friend. The only thing is, addiction doesn't care who you are. I bet there are a lot of people who are reading this who have known or have been friends with people who have struggled in the same fight. Yet, most of us don't have any idea what it's like.

A wicked problem is a problem that is difficult or impossible to solve. According to Horst W.J. Rittel and Melvin M. Webber (1973) "Wickedness isn't a degree of difficulty. Wicked issues are different because traditional processes can't resolve them" Jon Kolko defined a wicked problem in 2012 as "a social or cultural problem that is difficult or impossible to solve for as many as four reasons: incomplete or contradictory knowledge, the number of people and opinions involved, the large economic burden, and the interconnected nature of these problems with other problems" (Kolko p.1). Drug addiction affects mental health and mental health affects drug addiction, this is a wicked problem because it is so hard to find the right solution or the easy answer. That is because there simply is not a set and forget it way to solve this problem.

Drug addiction causes mental illnesses in people all over the world. For people who have used drugs/nicotine for a while, it can cause mood disorders, anxiety disorders, or depression. In David S Fink's study done in 2015, he asserts that "polydrug use (people who take multiple drugs at once) and alcohol disorders were more pronounced with people who had both depression and nonmedical use of prescription opioids than persons with only one or the other" (p.1). Addiction can affect the human brain in several ways. The National Institute on Drug Abuse published an article in 2020 that asserts "Drugs interfere with the way neurons send, receive, and process signals via neurotransmitters. Some drugs, such as marijuana and heroin, can activate neurons because their chemical structure mimics that of a natural neurotransmitter in the body. Although these drugs mimic the brain's chemicals, they don't activate neurons in the same way as a natural neurotransmitter, and they lead to abnormal messages being sent through the network" (p. 5). This can cause mental health issues and change how a person interacts with others. In an article published February 2021, Elizabeth D'Amico compares people who misused opioids at ages 18-20 to when they are 21-22. They wanted to see what effect it had on risk behaviors, health, social functioning, and emerging adult roles: "Participants were surveyed from 2008-2019. Only about 4% reportedly misused opioids, although that 4% also reported more negative consequences from alcohol and cannabis use and greater odds for prescription drug misuse at age 21-22 than those who didn't misuse opioids." Another article was written by Naomi Breslau in 1991 the purpose is how nicotine dependence can lead to major depression and anxiety and also other drug use. They wanted to separate people with nicotine dependence from the larger class of persons with a history of smoking to examine the prevalence of psychiatric disorders among people with nicotine dependence and non-dependent smokers. Their findings included people who had nicotine dependence also had higher rates of major depression and

anxiety disorders (p.1). These findings show how effective an addiction to nicotine or drugs can have on a person's mental health.

On the flip side, mental health is a reason people start abusing drugs, and it's also a reason that it is so hard to quit. Rehab Centers need more assistance because according to American Addiction Centers in an article published earlier this year "About 38% of adults in 2017 battled an illicit drug use disorder" and that is a percentage that is way too high.

Rehab Centers are doing everything they can, although the American Addiction Center earlier this year stated that "The therapeutic community claims a 30% success rate, but they only count people who complete the program" (p. 13). This is a wicked problem because there is no exact easy solution to this problem. Although, there are easy ways to help start to solve this problem.

There are several articles proving drugs have harmful effects on one's mental health. In S. Martin's 2012 study, he states that they found non-medical use of prescription opioids was associated with the incidence of any bipolar disorder, major depressive disorder, and any anxiety or mood disorder. I believe young adults should be screened for mental health disorders before adolescence. This should also be made a public policy and be done all around the world. The National Institute on Drug Abuse states "It is also true that having a mental disorder in childhood or adolescence can increase the risk of later drug use and the development of a substance use disorder" (p.6). They also imply in the same article that 1 in 4 people who have a serious mental illness also have a substance use disorder. This would cause teenagers to know that they have a mental health disorder and get medicated/treated before they take it into their own hands and self-medicate. I was reading an article by Barton, Allen published earlier this year that tested typologies of opioid use at the onset of early adulthood. They used a statewide sample of high

school students. “Two different sets of students who have used opioids and students who haven't. This was to find differences in personalities between the two sets. They found that opioid use during adolescence is a likely indicator of mental health issues” (Allen p.2).

Drug rehab centers also need to do more research. There was a study published in January earlier this year by Natalie Lowry. It was to see if induced imagery has effects on people who are addicted to cocaine. They used cue exposure of cocaine addicts handling cocaine paraphernalia and watching videos of drug preparation, followed by 5-minute self-guided and verbally described imagery. The research was shut down early, although it did prove that there was less craving for cocaine than normal in the brain (Lowry p.5). I think there should be more studies such as this to try and find a better way to treat drug-addicted individuals. I also want to reiterate what I said in my last paragraph for screening young adults for mental health disorders. As this would decrease their chances of drug use. This problem isn't simply just going to go away, we collectively need to bring awareness to this problem.

There needs to be a better way to treat drug-addicted people. Drug addicts need a better plan to help guide them through recovery. Drug rehab centers require funding. Suzette Gomez mentions in an article that luxury rehab centers charge anywhere from \$30,000-\$100,000 for one month. While standard rehab centers charge anywhere from \$5,000-\$20,000 for one month (p.3). In most circumstances, a drug addict cannot afford those very high prices. And addicts need more than one month of recovery. David Hampton mentions in an article that the 90-day treatment programs for rehab have the highest rate of success (p.12). Although, 90-day programs are the least sought after because of their high prices.

These solutions would mitigate some effects of this problem. If government funds were given to help rehabilitation centers, it could change the realm of addiction. If drug addicts didn't

have to pay near as much for rehabilitation there would be many more people willing to try it. According to Narconon.org, 23 million people live with addiction in the United States. And of those people, only 4.5% of them seek treatment. Also, the reasons that they did not seek treatment mainly stem from not wanting to stop obviously, but also not being able to afford it or it affecting their job. A graph from their website shows this in better detail.

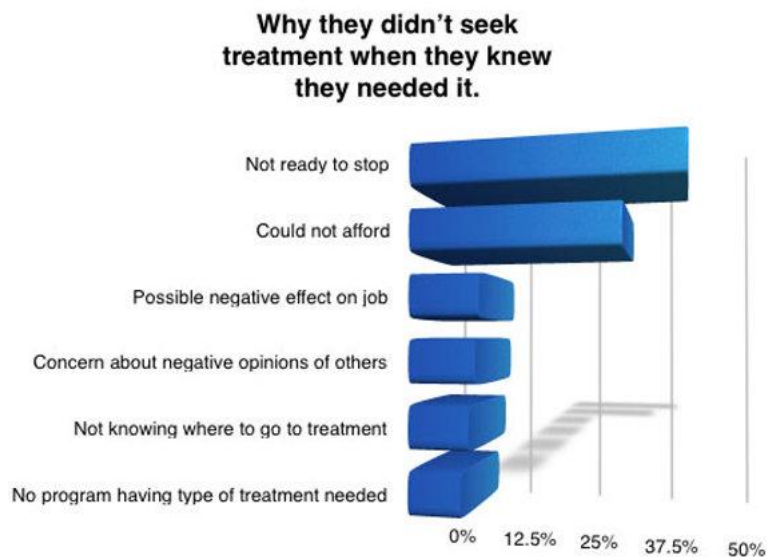


Figure 1: *When they didn't seek treatment when they knew they needed it* (Narconon.org)

Government funding of rehab centers could hopefully save many, many lives. Also, it would allow addicts to be able to try the 90-day program. It has the highest rate of success, people would jump at that opportunity considering around 30% of people don't go to rehab because of the price as shown in Figure 1. Also if only there could be more research done on a possibly better way to help patients during drug rehabilitation. Similar to what I mentioned earlier about the induced imagery to help with cocaine addiction. Studies need to be done to try and find the way they can improve mental health to the point where people do not need to come



back to rehab. We need a way where stimulation of the brain is possible to reduce drug craving. AbNewsWire published an article earlier this year about this one rehab center that caught my eye. It is called Kemah Palms Recovery located in Texas. Kemah Palms states that “any kind of chemical dependency critically affects a person’s life. It stops people from achieving their goals and dreams and breaks their hopes for a better future” (p.1). They are trying a wide range of services such as massage, music, meditation, yoga, writing, motivational enhancement, and more. They also have 5-year contracts with their patients so they can come back at any time and do outpatient treatment with them. The National Institute of Drug Abuse defines motivational enhancement as a form of counseling “that helps individuals resolve their ambivalence about engaging in treatment and stopping their drug use. This approach aims to evoke rapid and internally motivated change, rather than guide the patient stepwise through the recovery process” (p.1). It isn’t a conventional method, but I believe trying new things to help patients is very inspirational and evokes change.

A better understanding of the wicked problem outlined above leads us to definite responses and solutions. The problem is that drug addiction causes mental health disorders and also that mental health disorders can cause drug addiction. Although, the wicked problem is that there is no definite solution. That is why I believe we need to make these solutions very known throughout the world. Even though there is no definite answer these ways can help a lot of drug addicts around the world. As I mentioned earlier there are about 23 million people addicted to drugs in the United States. That is over 23 million people we could help. If everyone reads this could spread the word that there are ways we can make a difference, I know it’s possible. I know a lot of people reading this have known someone who has been plagued by addiction. That is why I wrote this research paper, to try and evoke change and try these new solutions! If there is

public policy made for people going through adolescence to have their mental health screened, it could make a huge impact. Also, government funding and testing mental health stimulations for rehab centers would prove to be a worthwhile investment. I know a lot of the readers out there understand what it is like to have someone fighting the battle of addiction and I believe it is our responsibility to try these solutions and help the mental health of over 23 million people in America.

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