

Substance Abuse: A Global Health Issue

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Substance abuse involves overuse of alcohol, tobacco or other drugs. Substance abuse can also be called substance use disorder. Substance use disorder is a disease where a person's brain and body change due to the use of a substance to the point that they are no longer able to function without or control their use of a specific substance. A person with substance use disorder uses a substance so much that their body becomes dependent on it and they are unable to stop its use on their own. This disorder is often referred to as addiction. There are many different substances that can be a part of substance use disorder.

Common Substances are :

- i. Alcohol
- ii. Cigarettes (Tobacco / Nicotine)
- iii. Prescription Medications (Sedatives, Anti-anxiety, Hypnotics and Psychostimulants)
- iv. Illegal Drugs (Caffeine, Cannabis and Opioids)
- v. Inhalants
- vi. Solvents.

Anything that can give the euphoric feeling of being 'high' can be the substance used in substance use disorder.

Substance abuse is a serious global health problem affecting usually adolescents and young adults. It affects both males and females and it is the major source of crimes in youth and health related problems in many communities.

Substance abuse is a chronic debilitating disease with significant morbidity and mortality which affects individuals and their families. About 250 million people between the ages 15 and 64 years were estimated to have used an illicit drug.¹ One-tenth of people who use illicit drug suffer from drug or substance use disorder like drug dependence. Large number of drug dependents use intravenous drugs and more than 10% of them contract HIV with majority of them suffering from Hepatitis C.²

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder-IV (DSM-IV), Substance abuse is the recurrent use of substance that may cause physical or social harm to the user or others but not associated with any symptoms when the substance is stopped. However, Substance addiction (or dependence) is defined as a compulsive pattern of substance use characterized by a loss of control over the use of the substance and continued use despite the significant substance-related problems and the emergence of a state of physiological need such that a physiological signs and symptoms, known as withdrawal symptoms, occur when access to the drug is prevented.³ Generally, three things are usually associated with addiction: Inability to stop, tendency of increasing dosage or behavior and withdrawal symptoms, those symptoms that develop following abstinence of drug.⁴

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There are Basically Four Stages of Drug Addiction:

- i) Experimentation: Voluntary use of the drug without behavioral change.
- ii) Regular use of the substance: The individual seeks the euphoric effects of the drug, establishes a reliable drug source.
- iii) Abuse: Indulges in daily use of drugs. Here warning signs of addiction will begin to appear such as craving, preoccupation with the drugs, depressive symptoms.
- iv) Addiction: Physical and/or psychological dependence in which there is the compulsive use of the drug despite severe negative consequences with occurrence of withdrawal symptoms.⁵

Various factors were implicated in patient with Substance addiction, and these include: Genetic predisposition, Psychological factors such as stress, personality traits like high impulsivity, depression, anxiety, eating disorders, personality and other psychiatric disorders, Age at first exposure, Self-medication, Impairment and Environmental factors like availability of drugs, social status, peer pressure, drug awareness like advertisement, sexual abuse or addiction in the family.⁶⁻⁷ However, certain factors like Self-control, Academic competence, Antidrug information, Strong neighborhood attachments, Some genetics, Parents and Enriched environment were shown to have protective effects against drug abuse.⁸

In Brief, many treatment options are available for addictions and substance abuse. These range from counseling to hospital treatment.

Treatment depends on which substance is involved and how much dependent you are on the substance. It may also depend on your level of risk and how much support you have at home.

Treatment Options Include:

- i. Lifestyle changes
- ii. Individual or group counseling
- iii. Peer support
- iv. Rehabilitation programs
- v. Residential or hospital treatment
- vi. Social support.

Withdrawal or detoxification means stopping or reducing intake of the substance. It may need medical treatment as well as counseling, support and rehab to help during or after withdrawal. Sometimes medicines are given to reduce cravings. For people who have a substance use disorder and a mental illness, treatment needs to address both conditions at the same time.

Substance abuse is a global problem that usually affects youths and young adults causing serious physical, social and health related problems. There are many forms of abused drugs but cannabis remains the most commonly abused drug. Social and economic problems with easy availability of the substances are increasingly contributing to the menace of substance abuse especially among adolescents. Multiple strategies like public enlightenment campaigns, educational approaches, school-based and community-based programs are usually adopted in addressing the problems of drug abuse. However, in-patient management may be required in individuals that are physiologically drug dependents.

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