

# Drugs addiction

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Literacy Skills 1212 Fall 2010 The causes of drugs addiction Prepared by:

ABDELAZIZ Under the supervision of: Dr. AHMED KABEL The causes of drugs addiction: Addiction

Nowadays, drugs addiction is considered as one of the most widespread phenomena in our modern societies. Everyone in this modern world has become aware of the dangerous consequences of being drug addicted, yet opium, cocaine, marijuana, cannabis, and many other kinds of drugs have been used for centuries and are still widely used today by a large proportion of people from different age, sex, and economic status. But, before looking at the factors that push people to take drugs, let us first define drug addiction.

According to Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research (MFMER), “Drug addiction is a dependence on a street drug or a medication. When you're addicted, you may not be able to control your drug use and you may continue using the drug despite the harm it causes. Drug addiction can cause an intense craving for the drug. You may want to quit, but most people find they can't do it on their own. ” In fact, people often underestimate the complexity of drugs addiction and the fact that it has become a contemporary illness that is similar to other chronic diseases such as diabetes, asthma, or heart disease.

Moreover, many people used to think that people addicted to drugs were just morally weak; hence, they believe that drug abusers are able to stop “this habit” if they are only willing to do so. However, recent scientific advances have allowed us to know much more about how exactly addictive drugs

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impact and change the brain, and how stopping drug abuse is very complex and not only a matter of willpower. But, the real problem is that many people still do not have a clear idea about the causes behind addiction.

For most of them, according to Hamid Ghodse, “ the cause or causes of drug dependence are not known, or more specifically, it is not known why do some people become addicted while others in the same situation do not” (10). The causes of drugs addiction are numerous and very attached with each other, but the most important factors that interact to lead to this phenomenon are: person’s biology, social environment, and age or stage of development.

It is, obviously, very important to determine whether genetic factors play a significant role in the process of addiction or not at all. Actually, finding genes which predispose to drugs addiction may undoubtedly be very helpful since it will “ aid in the identification of the biological processes involved in the addiction condition and ultimately allow the development of treatments to counteract the abnormal end-point of the processes” (Paul R. Buckland, 1769).

Therefore, countless researches, studies, and genetic approaches have been ongoing for many years in order to find any association or linkage between genetic factors and drugs addiction. As a matter of fact, many of these researches could come up with great results and very useful conclusions. For instance, Hamid Ghodse stated in his book “ Drugs and Addictive Behaviour: A Guide to treatment” that “ the discovery within the body of endogenous receptor systems for a number of psychoactive substances has revived interest in a link between drug dependency and genetic predisposition” (19).

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In addition, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), “ genes that people are born with, in combination with environmental influences, account for about half of their addiction vulnerability. ” In the same context and quoting from experts, Abramovitz, Melissa wrote in her article titled “ Addiction” that “ genetic factors that affect how the brain responds to drugs play a big part in pushing people toward drug addiction, and researches have found several genes linked to nicotine, cocaine, and alcohol addiction. Also, Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research (MFMER) reported that “ once a person has started using a drug, the development into addiction may be influenced by inherited traits. ” Therefore, most of researchers confirm the idea that genetic factors play a crucial role in the process of addiction. However, Paul R. Buckland came up with so many important results, which are in fact a little bit different from the ones stated above, by reviewing and evaluating almost all the studies and evidence that claim the existence of genetic factors in the process of addiction.

So, he found that “ the phenotype for addiction to drugs is not well defined, and the heritability of addiction to drugs of abuse is far from clear and may be small compared to that of many other complex disorders” (1773). Moreover, he concluded saying that “ many candidate genes put forward so far as susceptibility genes may be unrelated to the underlying process referred to as addiction but, rather, are related to the propensity to take drugs in the first place” (1769, 1770). But, that does not mean that there is no association between genetic factors and addiction process.

In fact, Paul R. Buckland himself has confirmed that there are some genetic studies that have reported a great number of success and could ultimately

find some linkage between genes and addiction, but he ended highlighting “ the need for even larger samples and new statistical methods or new experimental approaches to identify fully the genes involved in the disease process” (1771, 1772). Of course, genetic factors are not the only cause behind drug addiction; no one can become addicted to drugs if s/he has never started using drugs.

Accordingly, there may be other factors that affect the predisposition to drugs abuse. Actually, a person’s environment includes many different influences that seem to play a significant role in initial drug use. At the first glance, it may spring to many people’s minds that local social problems such as poverty, ignorance, unemployment, break-up of local communities, drug pushers are the main causes of drugs addiction, but according to Hamid Ghodse “ these often-repeated phrases may well be contributory factors,... but they are not the causes of drug dependence” (11).

On the other hand, the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) and the Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research (MFMER) both consider environmental factors, including one’s family’s beliefs and attitudes, exposure to a peer group that encourages drug use, the socioeconomic status and quality of life in general, as the most important influencers that shape addictive behaviour.

In fact, Hamid Ghodse, also, illustrates these factors clearly by showing us how “ peer networks can provide opportunities for drug use and support this behaviour” (16) and how “ the importance of peer networks reflect the support or lack of support that the child is receiving at home and the

importance of the parent-child relationship as a protective factor against the use of drugs” (16).

Therefore, he gives us some situations in which family may play a significant role in the initiation of drug abuse: Factors such as family disruption, criminality and drug abuse of parents and siblings have all been identified as important predisposing factors for drug abuse later on, as have inadequate or ineffective parental supervision and enforcement of rules...while satisfactory family relationships and climate, and emotional support to adolescents are influences that appear to delay or diminish initiation into drug use, they can only be developed over a long period of time and attempts to make up for their absence by measures such as a sharp increase in parental control of the adolescent’s behaviour may lead to increased rather than diminished drug abuse (16). In addition to genetic and environmental factors, the age or the stage at which a person starts consuming drugs may have a considerable impact on the process of becoming drugs addicted. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), “ Although taking drugs at any age can lead to addiction, the earlier that drug use begins, the more likely it is to progress to more serious abuse. For instance, one study concerning alcohol addiction which is almost the same as the case of drug addiction showed that “ teens who begin drinking alcohol with their friends before age 15 are four times likelier to become alcoholic than are people who wait until age 21 to drink” (National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), quoted in Abramovitz, Melissa). In the same context, Hamid Ghodse said that “ adolescent drug abuse is of particular importance not only because of the potential for drug-induced harm in a young person

but also because taking drugs in childhood and adolescence is a strong predictor for drug abuse in adulthood" (17). Moreover, observations as such, he said, " have led to theories that suggest that using one drug leads on the consumption of more dangerous drugs with a higher dependence liability" (17).

Besides, one other reason that we may discover when seeking causes that are related to the stage of initiating using drugs is prescriptions. According to Hamid Ghodse, most of drug-dependent individuals have personality disorders such as low self-esteem and confidence, high anxiety, low assertiveness, and tendency towards hypochondria, so they begin to take some sedatives and tranquillizers or even drugs as self-medication or as treatment prescribed by a doctor to overcome these problems (15, 17). The problem is that many people become addicted to these treatments by continuing using them as Jeffrey Kluger shows in his article *The New Drug Crisis: Addiction by Prescription*.

According to Kluger many people become addicted to some prescriptions such as Opioid, Oxycontin, Vicodin, and Hydrocodone while trying to find a treatment to some diseases like cancer pain. In conclusion, it is true that taking drugs for the first time may be a voluntary decision, but factors such as person's biology, social environment, and age or stage of development undoubtedly play a considerable role in the process of addiction. Genetic factors that affect how the brain responds to drugs and environmental factors, including family's beliefs and attitudes, peers' ethics and behaviour, and socioeconomic status, in addition to the culture and the age or the stage

at which a person starts using drugs all contribute in shaping addictive behaviour.

The problem with drugs is that once a person starts consuming them, s/he may not be able to give up abusing them; hence, we should all be aware that drugs addiction is not just a normal habit that we can stop whenever we want, but rather a complex illness and a serious disease that makes the consumer lose self-control and ability to make right decisions. In fact, drugs addiction is a contemporary chronic disease that can cause harmful long-term consequences not only on the user but also on those around him, but as a matter of fact we can prevent ourselves from all these troubles by just avoiding initiating its causes. Works Cited Abramovitz, Melissa. "Addiction." *CurrentHealth* 2; Sep 1999: 26. Print. Buckland, Paul R. "Will We Ever Find the Genes for Addiction?" *Addiction*, volume 103 number 11, November 2008, pp 1768-1776. Jeffrey, Kluger. "The New Drug Crisis: Addiction by Prescription". *Time* September 13, 2010: p46-49. Print. Ghodse, Hamid. "Drugs and Addictive Behaviour: A Guide to Treatment." London: University of Cambridge Press. 2002. Print. Mayo Clinic staff. Drug Addiction, *MayoClinic.com*, Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research, 2009, web. November 2010. (<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/drug-addiction/DS00183>). National Institute on Drug Abuse, Drug Abuse and Addiction, *MedicineNet.com*, *MedicineNet.Inc*, 2010, Web. 21 November 2010. ([http://www.medicinenet.com/drug\\_abuse/article.htm](http://www.medicinenet.com/drug_abuse/article.htm)).