

Free research paper on how opiate abuse affects society: the application of confl...

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Introduction

The topic of this paper presents a study from a sociological perspective on how the abuse of opiates affects society. The viewpoint renders its gaze from the application of conflict theory. The progression of this research paper posits its analysis through several stages. Beyond the introduction herein, the conversation moves into a bit of history, and thereafter assesses a reasoning section prior to approaching a conclusion. What is conflict theory and how may it be defined? According to the ' Sociological Guide' conflict theory may be defined as a collection of several ' conflict theories,' however the prominent one links to the Karl Marx model. The Marxist model of conflict theory assumes stratification in societies, with divisions of " two major social groups," of the " ruling class" and the ruled-over - or subject class (" Conflict Theories"). The ruling class segment sits in the role of powerful governance, wielding oppression and exploitation of the feudal-like masses. According to the same source, the power structure of the ruling class utilize the tools and instruments of politics and the legal system to carry out its wishes, and implementation of social control and dominance.

The New World Encyclopedia adds a dimension to the definition of conflict theory. In sociological terms, this source defines conflict theory wherein a " society or organization functions so that each individual participant and its groups struggle to maximize their benefits, which inevitably contributes to social change" in political forms, like revolution for example (" Conflict Theory"). You must think in terms of class struggle, competition, and opposing interests between parties. A further point of interest, particularly when considering the topic of opiates usage, abuse, and access points to the

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Karl Marx concept of the theory as arguably upholding “ property” by the state. The idea places owners and renters, “ capitalists and workers,” and other such groups at odds against each other (“ Conflict Theory”). Lehmann and Young (1974) have posited an interesting sociological expansion of conflict theory. The researchers Lehmann and Young (1974) suggest “ a broader context of conflict methodology in terms of the development of American sociology” (p. 15). The idea considers a post-industrial society in sort of a crockpot of confusion. In other words, no easy answers meet the face of a myriad of complex problems, whereby the discipline could no longer be simplified into an easily resolved achievement based upon past research assumptions. The aspect of this idea of conflict theory must be applied to the topic of how opiates abuse affects society.

History

The history of conflict theory does not begin with Karl Marx. Its roots extend back, according to the New World Encyclopedia (2014), to the days of prolific thinkers such as “ Machiavelli or Thomas Hobbes, both of whom viewed humanity cynically” (“ Conflict Theory”). This aspect is key as the reader regards the intellectual journey to consider opiate abuse in society. The way such theories emerged evolved an attempted systematic manner to categorize and explain societies’ traditions, and customs, which seemed to forever be in conflict with various groups. One way this sources describes its historical essential view is to picture in your mind a pyramid shape, in which the ‘ top-elite’ of the structure “ dictates terms to the larger masses” thus epitomizing the classically broad vision of its meaning (“ Conflict Theory”).

Think in terms of laws designed to dominate, exploit, and control in hegemonic manners utilizing law, and war powers on one hand - and labor union representative organization fighting for workers' and laborer's rights and interests. See the concept?

So the classic conflict theorist would present an argument that says different groups within a society naturally will engage in struggles of conflict, and competition. The situation portends an established role. One might think of it as an inescapable arrangement of assumptions in the modern world. The historical development therefore grew to expand upon various elements of conflict theory, yet again according to the New World Encyclopedia (2014) as: (a) competition, (b) structural inequality, (c) revolution, and (d) war.

Returning to the scholars Lehmann and Young (1974), whose comprehension was greatly and profoundly influenced by the socio-political changes and upheavals of the 1960s, allocates a certain depth of the phenomena. The sixties generation in America saw feminist conflict, the rise of Black pride rebellion and awareness, the hippie movement of drug and sexual experimentation, and massive protests over the Vietnam War by college students nationwide. It is with this backdrop in Lehmann and Young (1974) had in mind when discussing conflict theory as a "revolutionary science" manifesting a "sharp break from normal science" (p. 15). In other words the notion was far from clearcut.

It is imperative to view narcotics usage or abuse of opiates in this manner. During the sixties for example, famous rock musicians such as Jimi Hendrix and Janice Joplin were widely rumored to be addicted to the opiate of heroin. As the discussion moves into the area and section of reasoning the

sociological inquiry herein must insist upon sticking to the paradigm of conflict theory as defined so far. The version of conflict theory so presented, shall be applied to how opiates affect society. Before delving into the next section, " Reasoning," a few more sentences of explanatory language help drive home the point of view how conflict theory shall apply. Opiates, or heroin (as words) conjure different thoughts. If a person is said to utilize opiates for the treatment of pain as legally administered by a physician, or pharmacist - presents an entirely different perspective than saying a person is a heroin, or opiate addict or abuser. This sidebar is critical to the discussion. The reason why is because the power elite, representing legitimacy, use language to accomplish extensions of maintaining powerful position. Throughout the following reasoning pathway the reader should be directed to how the discussion unfolds.

The sixties situation of the widespread, loose use (and primarily abuse) of opiate drugs heralded a new age in American society. This new era ties into a historical view of conflict theory - in a specific time frame - whereby a revolution of sorts (music and sex) drove an opposition which recognized vast differences of inequality. Once again, language plays an active role. Consider the phrase of that time: Can you dig it, man? Black power! Peace, love, sex, and drugs! Conflict theory is bound up in the very language. The power structure would use language differently to describe opiate abuse, versus drug experimentation. See the difference?

Reasoning

Now the reason for choosing conflict theory to apply to looking at how the world opiates abuse affects society is because it offers a chance to view the situation more explicitly, yet perhaps give the topic a better accuracy for scholarship. Regardless, the bottom line is that looking at the abuse of opiates' impact upon society is much more interesting when expanding the boundaries as discussed so far. The first main way to apply conflict theory to the subject matter of opiates abuse in American society is to divide the inequality of the situation. What is meant by that? The elite power structure might refer to one of their ' friends' as having prescription drug episodes or under pain medication treatment. Whereas people who represent the cultural lower classes, or unacceptable underbelly of ' society' might be thought of as (and referred to) as drug addicts, heroin junkies, opiate abusers, having bad habits, criminally addicted, or mentally ill. See the difference?

Noting the differences in language does not justify the heroin, or opiate abusers from either side of society. A drug addict is a drug addict. A heroin ' junkie' is a heroin junkie. Narcotics, opiates, morphine, heroin, smack, junk, or methadone - whatever you call it - all are highly addictive derivatives of the opium poppy (*Papaver somniferum*) plant. This sixties generation ushered in mass a tremendous wave of opiates abuse popularized by the will to rebel against the so-called establishment. A careful consideration how conflict theory links to three main aspects how opiates abuse impacts society highlights: health and dependence (physical addiction), crime, and mental illness. These consequences are fingers of the hand which slaps a mean

impact upon society, in terms of conflict theory. The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) (2014) reports that opiates abuse can be legal or illegal, and that these highly addictive substances (derived from the particular poppy plant aforementioned) share “ certain chemical properties” (“ Opiate Use and Mental Illness”). The report designates some forms include morphine, Oxycontin, codeine, and “ hydromorphone [Dilaudid]” as prescribed medications wherein “ approximately 100, 000 Americans will use” these drugs each year for the first time (“ Opiate Use and Mental Illness”). The consequences of physical addiction impacts the individual’s health in their body and mind.

According to NAMI certain things happen to people who abuse opiates. They may become seriously depressed and experience similar negative moods, with more frequency. Initially the opiates drugs cause feelings of euphoria, extremely pleasantness, such as feeling very “ happy or relaxed” (“ Opiate Use and Mental Illness”). This is a result of the bio-chemical interaction with brain function. Obviously then, common sense tells you if you continue to abuse opiates the brain-body function will not be able to operate properly. Regular abusers of opiates may experience addicted withdrawal symptoms, “ intense physical and psychological distress,” restlessness, “ muscle and joint pain, runny nose, tearful eyes,” or an upset stomach pattern (“ Opiate Use and Mental Illness”). The problem of an impact upon society kicks in rather strongly when such individuals are no longer able to work and become so ‘ strung-out’ and are led to commit crimes to be able to afford to buy the street opioids. As you may have guessed. These substances are not cheap. Beyond the physical sickness of individuals who so engage in opiates abuse,

the consequence of increased criminal activity impacts upon society.

One thing may lead to another. For example, a woman may be driven to prostitute herself on the street. Men or women may become involved in petty crimes (or bigger felonious infractions) to support their opioid drug habits. The ensuing effects of crime upon society as a result of opiates abuse raises insurance rates, cause more cases for law enforcement to deal with, and clogs up the court system - adding to legal troubles system wide. The personal impact can ruin a person's clean record, cause them to serve long prison sentences or repeatedly end up in-and-out of jail. The consequences of crime may lead the person to become permanently cut off from his or her family, unfortunately. Zembroski (2011) quotes other researchers in his article stating " Beginning in the early twentieth century, theories about the causes of crime began to move away from biological and psychological causes of human behavior toward social environment explanations, such as slum life and the society at large" (p. 240). The conflict theory of opiates abuse and effect on society would certainly apply. The health consequences are also equally as devastating to individuals and represent a heavier load on society's medical infrastructure.

NAMI gives an account. If the heroin or opiates abuse was done intravenously (as with a needle) the specific health risks include contracting the HIV/AIDS virus disease, " in America and the most common means of contracting hepatitis C, a potentially deadly liver disease" (" Opiate Use and Mental Illness"). Even though clean needle usage is much safer their bodies are still at risk for collapsed veins, " blood vessel disease" or the possibility of " developing severe infections (including endocarditis and tuberculosis)"

(" Opiate Use and Mental Illness"). So where does conflict theory fit into all this? For one thing the person who is an opiate addict has set him or herself up to be in permanent conflict with many legitimate aspects of society. While it may be true that nurses or a team of hospital physicians may seek to intervene and assist the addict to a full recovery, in terms of a drug-free state, the person may experience a greater lack of power - in terms of law and policy. Recall the language part of our theory as presented earlier. If a lower-class person (or one so perceived) becomes a drug addicted opiates abuser society will be more likely to use law and policy to criminalize that individual. Particularly if the person is perceived as the worst sort of human element, for example, if they experience added animosity due to a racist attitude as might be held against a black person.

The point is that drug addiction to opiates connects in conflict theory ways adversely, and negatively, to crime, law, and policy. Keep in mind the conflict theory will apply to different members of persons, depending upon their socio-political status. A rich white person, or wealthy female hooked on heroin or legally prescribed morphine medications will not have to commit street crimes. Therefore these types of persons would not even be seen or viewed as criminals, but perceived on the ' righteous' side of the legal system simply because their ' pain medications' were legally prescribed. This is not to suggest that a person who may have to endure the pain and suffering of cancer is not entitled to legitimate drug therapy for pain. But the fact of the matter is that opiates are highly addictive substances. In terms of conflict theory a clear connection to the era of the sixties helps to portray the situation. For example, Zembroski (2011) states " As such, conflict

theory questions traditional values and views laws as existing to maintain the interests of specific groups who hold political power. Conflict theory is primarily concerned with the concept of power and has its roots in rebellion, class conflict, and the philosophy of Marxism” (p. 249). Zembroski (2011) has actually quoted researcher Shoemaker, from the 1990s in his remark. This discussion can also draw clear parallels to the situation of mental illness caused by opiates addiction.

Zembroski (2011) agrees with Karl Marx that crime has been instigated by a capitalist society. One tiny illustration in support of how conflict theory adheres to this factor is the following. Consider the common knowledge of the world-famous singer and genius Ray Charles, emerging to heights of popularity from before (and slightly beyond) the sixties era. Charles was a known heroin addict. Yet he could afford to pay for his narcotics – whether in intravenous and pharmaceutical forms or pill format. Common knowledge recalls that Charles was arrested at a point, although released from jail due to his money and status of fame. However, his mixed status as also being black may have had an effect on certain treatment in society. But the chief point is this: the capitalist elite outlawed heroin and opiates. Had they not been outlawed, most anyone could use opiates freely as long as they would prove affordable. The rulers make the laws and control the legal and political systems, making a double standard for their convenience.

Another illustration could be when the wealthy have used the cocaine powder drug, while the street-poor people used a much contaminated ‘version’ of the drug known as crack cocaine. Everybody is mostly aware that the criminal sentences for possession and use (abuse) of ‘crack’ cocaine

carries a far stiffer penalty before the courts and judicial systems. Basically Zembroski (2011) breaks down six concepts of Karl Marx connected to conflict theory. They are:

- Interdependence of social system units
- Unequal distribution of power
- Latent conflicts escalating violence
- Dominating polarization of segments of society
- Increasing polarized results and violence, and
- A cycle creating new class groups (ruling and subjugated) (p. 249). The

mental illness connection to opiates abuse and addictions persists in society.

The NAMI report is also quite useful to describe it. Their report states “ The relationship between opiate abuse and mental illness is complex, and the treatment of both is more complicated than the treatment of either condition alone” (“ Opiate Use and Mental Illness”). Once again, pay careful attention to the language. The government report stated that mental illness is complex. In other words, this gives elites the excuse under the assumption of conflict theory, that they can decide what complex means - when or as applied to certain groups. See how the game of language is played? The NAMI article continues with “ Certain groups of people with mental illness—including males, individuals of lower socioeconomic status, military veterans and people with other medical illnesses—are at increased risk of abusing opiates” (“ Opiate Use and Mental Illness”). The speech under the rubric of conflict theory can be very subtle, so subtle in fact that the average person could miss it. But the fact remains that such language disparities are used all

the time. What is also quite interesting, is in the very next sentence the NAMI article proceeds to discuss 'scientific' data linking opiate addiction and abuse to lower socio-economic persons. While this may be statistically true, the conditions of definitions, access to resources (capital) and criminalization lead to differing consequences under the legal system. See how it works?

Conclusion

In some cases, the legal system and policy may try to give the impression of fairness or equality under the auspices of the law as applied by the courts, in terms of a recognition of conflict theory and opiates abuse as affecting society. For example, this is not to say that the courts have gotten more 'understanding' and gained lenient attitudes towards narcotics abuse of opiates. Quite the contrary, but there have been an increase of the need and awareness for pain treatment centers across America. The 'North Carolina Medical Board' has a policy since 2004 for the "Use of Controlled Substances for the Treatment of Pain" (p. 1). This allows legal usage for opioid drugs to treat painful medical conditions, yet once again (at the risk of sounding redundant) pay attention to the language. 'Controlled substance' speaks volumes. Are they so 'controlled' to prevent 'mental illnesses,' or crime? Or are the elite simply pandering to the wealthier classes to have access to alleviation from seriously painful medical conditions? These are questions one might draw in looking at the way opiates abuse affects society.

You might also be able to say that society affects the usage or abuse of opiates. This flipping of the concept does not condone abuse of this serious

substance, however the status of conflict theory in relation to opiates abuse can provide a variety of different meanings to the condition of society as a whole. One solution might be not to criminalize drug abusers' habits of addition to opiates and provide treatment centers for recovery - instead of jail time. In this way, people could get healthier and try to rebuild their lives to a useful status by impacting society in positive ways.

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