

Effects of drug abuse and alcohol addiction research paper examples

[Health & Medicine](#), [Alcoholism](#)



Introduction

Most educated people are aware that substance abuse – using recreational drugs or regularly consuming excessive amounts of alcohol can lead to addiction and/or cause a number of harmful effects. This paper discusses those effects which are wide ranging, can affect the health and the safety of the subject and the subject's family and friends, and can lead to criminal activity and even the death of the subject.

The Research

- General definition of the problem.

Excessive use of drugs and/or alcohol is collectively termed “ substance abuse” – a recognized disease. A Florida Institute of Technology article “ Facts about Alcohol and Drug Abuse” (n. d.) reminds readers that although we may often drink with dinner, after work, or at a ball game, it can be a problem if a drinking pattern emerges. It also points out that drugs use in the USA is now more common. Over 90 percent of teenagers have tried alcohol, marijuana more than 50 percent, cocaine 17 percent and hallucinogenic drugs 12.5 percent.

The same article gives some of the more common reasons why people do turn to drink or drugs, such as for social reasons: feeling the need to join in with drinking or experimenting with drugs at parties and other social gatherings; to cope with some form of stress, perhaps work or school-related, or marital / relationship stress, or stress caused by a physical illness; as a substitute for personal or work challenges or a personal relationship; or to compensate for feelings of diminished self-esteem, shyness, guilt, etc. It

also explains that turning to drink and/or drugs to cope with life's problems can lead to addiction, and that because alcohol and certain drugs are now more available and more acceptable in a social context, it is easier for young people to experiment with them. To underline the seriousness of the consequent problems, the article lists key facts, including:

- Age of first-time trying drugs in the U. S. averages 13; even lower for alcohol;
- In the U. S., alcohol is the widest-used drug and the third largest cause of death, after heart disease and cancers;
- Drugs and alcohol contribute to over half of all suicides, more than 50 percent of violent crimes and over 60 percent of emergency hospital admissions;
- In excess of 50 percent of traffic accidents involve drugs or alcohol use;
- Drugs or alcohol are factors in circa 80 percent of domestic violence incidents;
- Circa half of all sub-standard job performances and industrial accidents can be attributed to drug or alcohol use;
- Driving While Intoxicated (DWI) arrests between 1986 and 1996 were highest for drivers aged 21, and over a third of all alcohol-linked traffic accidents involved young people between the ages of 16 and 24;
- Alcohol is a factor in over 95 percent of campus violence, and over 40 percent of students experiencing academic difficulties are users of alcohol.
- Effects on Health.

The Bowles Center for Alcohol Studies at the University of North Carolina published an article entitled “ Alcohol & Drug Abuse Prevention” with a

section on the effects of abuse on health, sub-divided into Alcohol and Drugs parts.

Alcohol. The article cautions that alcohol consumed goes straight into the bloodstream, producing physical effects throughout the body and causing illnesses and other health problems, including:

- Hangovers: excessive drinking causes headache, nausea, general pain, etc;

- Gaining weight: alcohol – unlike water – contains calories termed as “empty” calories because they provide little nutrition. (A beer is about 150 calories);

- Raised blood pressure: coupled with weight gain, heightened blood pressure is the cause of various more serious health issues;

- Impaired immune system: increases risk of viral diseases such as influenza;

- Cancers: various cancers more likely due to alcohol consumption;

- Liver disease: because the liver can only cope with one drink per hour, excessive drinking can cause hepatitis, cirrhosis and cancer of the liver;

- Alcohol poisoning: unconsciousness and death can follow heavy drinking, due to alcohol poisoning. The breathing rate slows and the skin may turn blue. If this happens call 911 and do not let the person fall asleep;

- Respiratory or heart failure: a most serious reaction to heavy drinking.

The article also notes that longer term effects of alcohol addiction can include appetite loss, vitamin deficiency, impotence, damage to the central nervous system and memory loss. Also alcoholism can shorten lifespan by more than 10 years. It is incurable but can be treated.

Drugs. The article noted that just like many prescription drugs, recreational drugs have potentially harmful side effects that can cause serious / long term health consequences. Taking high doses of them or their impure substitutes is very dangerous – respiratory failure, heart attacks or coma can result. Problems are even more likely if multiple drugs are taken or in combination with alcohol. Specific problems can be:

- Barbiturates / tranquilizers: nausea, seizures, coma. Plus alcohol: may be fatal;
- Cocaine: heart / respiratory failure, tremors, seizures and psychosis;
- LSD: disorientation, depression, nausea, increased heart rate and longer term effects such as paranoia and psychosis;
- Marijuana and hashish: elevated heart rate and memory loss, ongoing problems like infertility, cognitive issues, lung damage, poor immune system;
- Heroin: reduced respiratory and circulatory functions, dizziness, sexual impotence, constipation, withdrawal problems, seizures and death;
- PCP or “ angel dust”: can cause unpredictable or violent behavior plus convulsions, dizziness, numbness, elevated heart rate and blood pressure, even fatal heart or lung failure and rupturing of blood vessels.
- Amphetamines and other stimulants: cause many of the symptoms as above.
- Effects on Families.

Lameman (2012) published an article about the effects of substance abuse on families, based on the premise that substance abuse affects not only the abuser and his/her health and life but also the lives of those around them,

especially family members. She pointed out that the addiction creates interpersonal problems within a family such as jealousy and resentment, or conflicts with partner and/or children who may as a consequence grow apart from the addicted person, in some cases separation or divorce being the eventual outcome. There are also likely to be conflicts over money, perhaps because of losing a job through addiction or simply because of spending too much of the family income on drink or drugs. Mood swings can cause emotional trauma; the subject can also become violent, be unfaithful (finding someone who “ understands” him or her better). In such family situations it is also a real, increased risk that the children will also become addicted in a similar way.

- Effects in Pregnancy.

Marchick (2010) described the seriousness of pregnant women using drugs and/or alcohol. She explained that according to the American Counsel for Drug Education, birth defects resulting from women taking any form of drugs including prescription drugs, illegal drugs and tobacco, are totally preventable. A 2005 study found that approaching four percent of pregnant women used drugs such as “ marijuana, cocaine, ecstasy, amphetamines or heroin.” Problems caused to the baby can include premature birth, birth defects, and permanent learning and behaviour difficulties. The effects can also cause the baby to exhibit something called neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS) – a sort of withdrawal cycle that causes “ trembling, excessive crying, seizures, poor feeding, diarrhea, dehydration and fever.” Even legal drugs are hazardous during pregnancy. Marchick reported that smoking almost doubles the risk of the baby being born underweight, which

can in turn heighten the risk of the baby suffering from mental retardation and learning difficulties. Similarly, drinking during the pregnancy can cause Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), which can result in serious physical problems for the baby including facial and head deformities, eye and/or ear problems, and lack of coordination. Also, effects on the brain of the fetus can cause subsequent problems such as low IQ, poor memory, slow learning (including speech). Other potential effects from FASD include hyperactivity and aggressive behaviour, poor reasoning and judgment. Combining these problems can cause difficulties in later life in employment, relationships, and even problems with the law.

- Effects for Elderly Citizens.

“ Elderly Alcohol and Substance Abuse” (2002) published by the New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services described alcohol and substance abuse in our elderly population a “ hidden national epidemic.” Whereas an estimated 10 percent of the population overall are involved in alcohol abuse, surveys have shown that up to 17 percent of over-65’s have that problem. Because alcohol is absorbed at a greater rate by the elderly (as it also does in women), the same amount of alcohol produces more intoxication in the over-65’s than it would in younger men. Further, because many of the elderly are on medications, alcohol combined with medications can produce adverse reactions. One such can be delaying the metabolism of the medications, causing prolonged sedative effects, resulting in possible confusion and increased risk of injury from falls. Combining alcohol with medications such as antihistamines can cause raised blood pressure and possible strokes.

- Substance Abuse Leading to Crime.

An article entitled “ Crime and Substance Abuse: Criminality and Substance Abuse Linked” (n. d.) reiterated the long held belief that criminality and substance abuse are closely linked. However, it poses the question: “ Do drugs or alcohol lead to criminal activities or is it the other way around?” The article continues by stating that statistics reveal that most drugs or alcohol users do not turn into addicts, but those that do become addicts often turn to crime. It suggests the reasons are varied and include poor living conditions, lack of employment, mental problems, and more. However, the article does also note that certain crimes such as robbery are strongly linked to the need to support a drug habit. Another rather tragic aspect of drug and crime links is that drugs use is practiced by 40 to 85 percent of prostitutes. They are also in many cases victims of serious crime such assault and rape themselves, but because of their situation and their lifestyle, most of those crimes are never reported.

Conclusions

The research undertaken has shown that drugs and/or alcohol abuse can and do have serious – and in extreme cases fatal – effects, not just on the subject, but on the subject’s family, friends and work colleagues. Health problems are of course the main effects for all groups in society from children to people of all ages, but particularly for certain higher risk groups such as pregnant women (and their babies) and for elderly people, especially those who combine alcohol abuse with the consumption of certain medications.

Not only do those drugs or alcohol abusers risk their own health, they can in many cases be risking the health of others. For example when a drug or alcohol addict becomes violent in a domestic situation, or drives a vehicle while under the influence of an illegal substance. That of course is just one example of substance abuse leading to criminal activity.

Works Cited:

“ Alcohol & Drug Abuse Prevention.” (n. d.). The Bowles Center for Alcohol Studies at the University of North Carolina. Web. 27 November 2012.

“ Crime and Substance Abuse: Criminality and Substance Abuse Linked.” (n. d.). Drug & Alcohol Rehab Asia. Web. 28 November 2012.

“ Elderly Alcohol and Substance Abuse.” (2002). New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services. Web. 28 November 2012.

“ Facts about Alcohol and Drug Abuse.” (n. d.). Florida Institute of Technology. Web. 27 November 2012.

Lameman, B., A. “ How drug and alcohol abuse affects families and steps to recovery for all family members.” (2012). Chicago Tribune. Web. 28 November 2012.

Marchick, R. “ Effects of Alcohol and Drugs During Pregnancy.” (May 2010). The Livestrong Foundation. Web. 28 November 2012.