

Adolescence and addiction essay sample

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



Using alcohol, illegal drugs and tobacco among adolescents has become very common and is therefore a serious public health problem. Though the number of adolescents who smoke tobacco has declined, this too remains a problem of serious concern. Alcohol, tobacco, and illegal drugs are addictive which means that the body can become dependent on them in order to function properly. “ Use of alcohol as well as other kinds of substance use and abuse, is one of several kinds of threats to health during adolescence” (Feldman, 2014, p. 371). Addiction, defined by the National Institute on Drugs Abuse, is “ A chronic relapsing brain disease that is characterized by compulsive drug seeking and use, despite harmful consequences. It is considered a brain disease because drugs change the brain; they change its structure and how it works” (The Science of Drug Abuse and Addiction, section para. 1).

Effects can be detrimental and long lasting. Adolescence is a developmental stage characterized by many physical, emotional and social changes. “ Though the body is becoming adult, the brain is changing but not fully mature yet and therefore susceptible to a higher risk for poor choices such as using alcohol and illegal drugs” (Brooks, 2014). For this same reason, the brain is more vulnerable to substance use and abuse. Currently, pornography is a serious danger as well for adolescents. Since it is fairly easy accessible through the internet it can turn into an addiction. Spirituality can be a determining factor in prevention of addiction.

Research has extensively focused on the challenges associated with adolescence substance use and abuse. However, it seems more research needs to be performed on how to prevent the high numbers of addiction in

adolescence. Besides research, news stories show evidence on the prevalence of addiction. Relationship between Abuse and Addiction in Adolescence

Adolescence is a transitional stage in development between childhood and adulthood. This stage is characterized by a unique transformation in brain and behavior. Physically, the body is becoming mature and undergoes many changes which affect social and emotional areas as well. Hormones are poured out into the adolescents' body which causes the period of puberty. According to Feldman (2014), " Puberty, the period during which the sexual organs mature, begins when the pituitary gland in the brain signals other glands in children's bodies to begin producing the sex hormones, at adult levels"(p. 351). Neurologically, this stage presents itself with lots of changes, yet, the brain is not fully mature. For example, " As the number of neurons continue to grow, and their interconnections become richer and more complex, adolescents' thinking also becomes more sophisticated (Toga & Thompson, 2003; Petanjek et al. 2008; Blakemore, 2012)" (Feldman, 2014, p. 358).

The prefrontal cortex undergoes significant changes though is still immature. Feldman (2014) states, " The prefrontal cortex is the part of the brain that allows people to think, evaluate, and make complex judgments in a uniquely human way" (p. 358). This part of the brain is also responsible for impulse control. However, " Because during adolescence the prefrontal cortex is biologically immature, the ability to inhibit impulses is not fully developed" (Feldman, 2014, p. 358). Increasing in risk taking behavior and searching for

new experiences are results of the immature and therefore not fully functioning brain. According to Doremus-Fitzwater, Varlinskaya, & Spear (2010) “ This motivation to seek out new experiences, i. e. novelty seeking behavior, has been identified as a significant contributor to current and future drug use, multiple drug use, and later abuse (Hittner & Swickert, 2006; Kelly et al., 2006)” (p. 115.).

Furthermore, adolescents need to assert their independence and explore their limits, taking risks, breaking rules, and rebelling against their parents while still relying on them for support and protection. Peer pressure is another contributing risk factor for adolescents for substance use and abuse. According to Feldman (2014), “ Peer pressure is the influence of one’s peers to conform to their behavior and attitudes” (p. 403). Many addicted individuals begin abusing alcohol and drugs in a group setting they join at the encouragement of a fellow addict. Additional reasons for substance use are: getting away from daily life pressure; some use them for the enjoyable experience, and some adolescents just want to try out how it feels. “ One of the newest reasons for using drug is to enhance academic performance. When medication prescribed for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, such as Adderall, is used illegally, it increases focus and is considered to increase ability to study and to study for longer hours” (Feldman, 2014, p. 372).

Effect of Abuse or Addiction on Brain Development in Adolescence Different substances have different effects associated with them and therefore different effects on development. Some effects may be present to a greater or lesser extent across all kinds of drug addictions, while some may be

specific to certain types of drugs. However, brain development is surely at risk by addiction and can therefore be severely affected by it. Addiction does not only change brain structure but also brain function. From Brooks' presentation (2014), I learned that: " During adolescence the brain is still doing all it needs to do to become what it needs to become and that won't happen until early adulthood. The brain is not fully developed yet. Alcohol and drugs can therefore severely affect brain development during that stage". Some drugs have a sedative effect, while other drugs have a stimulant effect.

For example, " Opioid addicted subjects meet most of the DSM criteria for addiction including dramatic tolerance and withdrawal and most of the symptoms associated with motivational withdrawal. A pattern of intravenous or smoked drug taking evolves, including intoxication, tolerance, escalation in intake, and profound dysphoria, physical discomfort, and somatic withdrawal signs during abstinence" (Koob & Volkow, 2010, p. 217). One of the dangers of substance use is that one becomes dependent on it because the brain has been conditioned to be dependent on the substance. " Addictive drugs are drugs that produce a biological or psychological dependence in users, leading to increasingly cravings for them" (Feldman, 2014, p. 372).

Consequently, one must obtain the drug in order to avoid the severe feelings of discomfort during abstinence. Acute effects differ from long-term effects. Previous research was mainly focused on the acute impact of drugs, currently the focus is shifting to long-term changes in the brain. According to

Koob & Volkow (2010), " Multiple brain regions and circuits are disrupted in drug addiction and are likely to attribute differentially to the complex phenotype observed in addicted individuals" (p. 233). Addiction causes changes in the brain and in the nervous system and that can result in severe effects on development of the brain. " Finally casual use of drugs can lead to serious forms of substance abuse and therefore become dangerous" (Feldman, 2014, p. 372).

Frequent alcohol use can turn into an uncontrollable habit. According to Feldman (2014), " Alcoholics, those with alcohol problems, learn to depend on alcohol and are unable to control their drinking" (p. 373). Because of tolerance, after some time they need more alcohol to get the positive effects they desire. Drugs and alcohol slows the reflexes of the body and dull the senses. The body reacts by feeling slow, lazy and dazed. Alcohol can harshly damage the liver as well. Impact of Spirituality on Addiction

Spiritual development significantly enriches and strengthens the other developmental areas. It enables us to have a better sense of self and to be better connected to the outside world and can therefore moderate existential anxiety and increase self-esteem. " In adolescence, spirituality is significant for the healthy, positive development of a person's sense of self -his or her identity- and for enabling identity to frame the individual's pursuit of a life path eventuating in idealized adulthood, that is, an adulthood involving mutually beneficial relations between the individual and his or her social world" (Roehlkepartain, King, Wagener, & Benson, 2006, p. 61). This sense of self might lead the adolescent to make good choices and to be less

dependent on affirmation of others and therefore less prone to follow poor choices of their peers. Spirituality can be positively reflected in parenting practices and therefore have a profound effect on adolescent development.

Good parenting, including spirituality can optimize an adolescent's potential and therefore reduce the risk factors for substance use or abuse, whereas suboptimal parenting may contribute to youth participation in high-risk behaviors. Research has shown the relationship between spirituality and addiction. According to Allen & Lo (2012, " Previous studies have empirically shown that an inverse relationship exists between religiosity and crime, delinquency, and problem behaviors like substance use and misuse. The empirical evidence is in fact very solid concerning religiosity's protective effect against alcohol and marijuana use specifically" (p. 435). Spirituality can affect prevention from addiction. Research suggests that a correlation exists between a high level of spirituality and a low level of substance use and abuse. For example, " Like religiosity, spirituality has at least sometimes, been found to reduce substance use and abuse (Chitwood et al., 2008)" (Allen, 2010, p. 436).

Places of worship might take responsibility by using their pulpits to spread some discouraging messages about the detrimental effects of drugs and alcohol. " Institutions (whether religious or secular) may also play crucial roles in the cultural, ethical, and spiritual development of youth. These institutions provide children with contexts for socializing with in-group members, and for learning crucial lessons about what it means to be a member of the ethnic and religious community (Johnson & Stanford,

2002)”(Roehlkepartain, King, Wagener, & Benson, 2006, p. 290). Prevalence of Addiction and Local News Coverage

Currently, illegal drug and alcohol use and abuse is not uncommon among adolescents. Smoking marijuana is very common among high school students. Feldman (2014) claims that “ One in 15 high school seniors smokes marijuana on a daily or near-daily basis. Furthermore, marijuana has increased over the last few years, a contrast to the decline that had occurred in the previous decade. Daily marijuana use is at a 30 year high for high school seniors (Nanda & Konnur, 2006; Tang & Orwin, 2009; Johnston et al., 2011)” (p. 371). Prevalence in alcohol use is even higher than illegal drug use. According to Doremus-Fritzwater, Varlinskay, & Spear (2010), “ Frequent and excessive use of alcohol is particularly widespread among adolescents, with approximately 25% of 12th graders reporting an episode of binge drinking within the last month.

Importantly, drug and alcohol use during adolescence has been shown to correlate with an increased incidence of drug and alcohol problems in adulthood (De Wit, Adlaf, Offord & Ogborne, 2000; Grant, Stintson, & Harford, 2001)” (p. 117). Seventy-five percent of college students have had at least one alcoholic drink in the last 30 days. “ More than 40 percent have had five or more drinks within the past two weeks and some 16 percent drink 16 or more drinks per week” (Feldman, 2014, p. 372). However, alcohol use is not limited to college students; high school students, too, are alcohol consumers. “ Almost 75 percent of seniors report having had consumed alcohol by the end of high school, and about 40 percent have done so by the

eighth grade. More than half of twelfth graders and nearly a fifth of eighth graders say that they have been drunk at least once in their lives”(Feldman, 2014, p. 372).

Additionally, binge drinking occurs often at college campuses. “ It is defined for men as drinking five or more drinks in one sitting, for women; binge drinking is defined as four drinks in one sitting” (Feldman, 2014, P. 372). The difference in quantity is related to body weight and the efficiency of absorption of alcohol into the body. Local news on alcohol or drug-related stories is mostly covering police reports on possession of illegal drugs, drug paraphernalia, and drunk driving. Torney states (Criminal Law Post), “ Roxbury police and Hopatcong police issued a joint statement announcing the arrests of three young adults.

According to police, the three were operating a butane honey oil lab out of the house. Butane honey oil is extracted from marijuana to provide a more potent high for the user. It is also dangerous because it poses an extremely high risk of explosion. Substance abuse data for New Jersey are slightly different from United States data. For example, binge drinking rates are slightly higher in total and for women 3 % higher than the United States rate. All other alcohol-related behaviors and illegal drug use among high school students in New Jersey are slightly lower than United States. Conclusion

Addiction is a widespread and significant problem among adolescents. Several reasons linked to changes within this developmental stage make them susceptible to substance use and abuse. Effects of substance use and abuse are major and especially on brain development. Spiritual development

can contribute to prevent addiction as it is significant for a positive development for one's self. Though much research has been done on addiction, a major challenge is still left on how to efficiently prevent addiction. Prevalence rates show evidence of the severity of the problem. Because of the serious adverse health and social consequences of high-risk behaviors in adolescents, understanding the factors that influence and moderate these behaviors is crucial to the development of prevention strategies.

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