



DRUG ADDICTION OF WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

The term “drugs” generally refers to substances with different chemical structure and different action on the Central Nervous System (CNS), from being stimulant until being sedative. Their common feature is the ability to alter the physical and mental state of the person and cause addiction, of different nature, mental or physical, of varying degree. The last decade the theoretical approach of the term has been increasingly introduced, according to which, each sex is involved in a different way from the other in drug use. It also follows a different path, from the beginning of use until the need of treatment. Women experience drug addiction in their own way and the causative factors that lead to this situation are totally different compared to men. This study provides a comprehensive review of the new evidence regarding women’ drug addiction, and the factors contributing to it. A review of the literature was performed through the electronic databases PubMed, Google Scholar, Scopus, Scientific journals in English and the Association of Greek Academic Libraries Link (HEAL-Link), using the following key words: causes of addiction, female drug addiction, substances use, women. The role of the family appears to be important in the field of women’ addiction. Women who have been sexually and / or physically abused when they were children, they are very likely to take drugs. The "choice" of drug dependence as a lifestyle by the females happens after the initiation of use, while the opposite is happening to males. The interactions with various sub-cultural groups can also affect, at least partially, the orientation and the views of young women regarding drugs. There are a large number of reasons for which a young woman can be drug addicted. She may consume various substances as a proof of unity, acceptance and comradeship from the members of a social or occupational group. The causes of the problem are deep into our "sick" society and affect all the aspects of our lives.

INTRODUCTION

The use and addiction to psychoactive substances is now recognized as a complex phenomenon, which arises as a result of interaction between individual, family and social factors; a phenomenon with economic, cultural, historical, and political components [1,2].

The growing number of female users, several of which are mothers or pregnant women, is a phenomenon that occurs in most European countries in recent years [3]. Societies all over the world are concerned about the impact of drug use by an increasing number of individuals.

Women constitute of about 30% - 40% of the total population of drug addicts, and as a subgroup are characterized by a rate of rise in use much higher than men [4, 5].

It is well documented in the literature that emotional problems, coming from the “self constitution” of the user, are probably related to genetic factors, as well as to the experiences during childhood. All these influences appear to play an important role in developing of a future addiction syndrome [6]. In many cases there is a close



relationship between various social and psychological factors which had a detrimental role in the development of an individual's personality, and drug addiction [7]. Some of these factors are: psychopathological disorders of the user, her low self-esteem, disturbed family environment physical and / or sexual abuse, delinquent behavior, etc. [8].

Furthermore, as the gender is a fundamental component of identity and implies differences in socialization and expectations around the performance of the role, values and relationships, there is a great need to evaluate the addiction problem in correlation with the gender. (9) There are differences in the way women experience drug addiction and on the causative factors that lead to this situation, compared to men [10].

AIM

This study provides a comprehensive review of the new evidence regarding women's drug addiction, and the factors contributing to it.

METHODOLOGY

The material of the study consisted of recent articles on the topic. The literature review was performed on valid databases such as Pub Med, Google Scholar, Scopus, Scientific journals in English and the Association of Greek Academic Libraries Link (HEAL-Link), using as key words: causes of addiction, female drug addiction, substances use, women. Criterion exclusion of articles was the language in addition to Greek and English.

THE ROLE OF THE FAMILY

The role of the family appears to be important in the field of addiction. The dysfunction in the family and the misguided edification are linked to the development of antisocial behavior in children, in the context of which the use of illegal substances is displayed. In users' families, it is quite common to find parents with mental health problems or parents who are dependent on psychotropic substances [11]. These characteristics are not the only one that can have a role in the appearance of the addiction problem, but are indicative of the psychodynamic relations that may influence the whole situation. It is very important for the family to know some of the main reasons leading to drug addiction and to recognize the need of its involvement in the preventive and treatment programs [12].

Attitudes and opinions of the parental environment regarding the use and abuse of forbidden substances appear to influence and form similar future behaviors of their children [2]. However, in practice the identification of specific predisposing factors has been proved quite difficult as well as the determination of the way that these factors affect the upcoming behaviors of the offspring [13]. But there are large discrepancies between data provided by parents and the given information from their children. It seems that from the user's side, the most important role seems to play the concept that has been

formed by him/ her due to the parental position on the issue, rather than the actual parental attitude towards it [14]. In this context, sometimes drug use is used by the children, especially the girls as a means to attract the attention and interest of their parents, and to ask for their help [2].

The father is usually emotionally or physically absent, uncaring, dismissive, violent at the kid but easily manipulated by the mother [15]. The child who will be addicted to drugs is usually closely tied to the parent of the opposite sex, the girl with her father, the boy with his mother. This does not mean that it is not found, in some cases, pathological close relationship between father and son drug addict or mother and daughter drug addict [16].

Drug addiction, as an attitude to life, is considered by many as the form taken by the personal rebellion against a family and community reality that oppresses, exploits, and condemns the person in everyday misery [17]. This desperate pursuit of the need to feel different from the others, it is often facilitated by the contact with a man (when it comes to a woman) usually addicted or at a stage of experimentation with forbidden substances, by whom she will be emotionally involved in order to help him stop [18]. He is, therefore, the true meaning of her life. This is the beginning for her trip to the "independence" from their parents and the access to the world of myth. It is also well known that a woman in this situation has many times the desire to feel the same "excitement" with her partner or she wishes to "identify herself" with him [19].

It is this reaction that occasionally takes the form of "deviance" and drug addiction. From childhood the girl must constantly fight to win her independence even in the degree that it is already given to boys [20]. In this context, the terms of conflict with the mother are developed; the mother becomes the transfer vector of the role of socially imposed subjection to man and of the female passivity [21]. In these cases the father, by his attitude, maintains the climate of conflict between mother and daughter, although he seems not to actively participate. Sometimes, the opposite occurs. Father takes the responsibility "to alter" his daughter, exercising great force, of any form, on her [15, 22]. Under these conditions, drugs come to relieve from the tension, anxiety, anger, pain caused by such situations, as well as from the guilt that accompanies them [1]. Drugs therefore become a tool used by women to escape from the suffocating control of their behavior, the debilitating criticism, and negative, against them, the comparison to a 'more capable' brother or sister, the rejection [22]. It is supported in the literature that they use drugs to escape from the boredom that tortures them, to confront their somber mood, and sometimes to lose weight. (18) Furthermore, some others take drugs in order not to feel ashamed, not to be afraid, and not to feel inadequate. On the other hand they need to feel that they are doing something special, by which they refuse, in practice, the conventionality of their parents [21].



WOMEN'S ABUSE

Last years, a finding with special clinical interest is the exposure to violence and particularly the high rates of physical and sexual abuse that women in many cases have suffered in their childhood, in and out of their family [23]. Some traumatic facts and experiences in childhood have an impact later in life, when corresponding activation mechanisms appear [24]. The activation variables that are significantly associated with the chronic use of cocaine include: house's abandonment, history of compulsion in taking drugs by the sexual partner and rape in childhood [25].

The relationship between the use of forbidden substances and the physical and / or sexual abuse is complex and needs to be better understood in order for the women to be relieved from substance abuse and violence [26]. There are at least three main ways of explaining this relationship. According to the first, substance use leads to abuse. In the second, the abuse is leading to substance use, while the third and last way of interpretation reports that substance use and abuse are subject to a two-way relationship [27]. One third of adults addicted to opiates had experienced significant traumatic events in their childhood. It is reported that women who were sexually abused in childhood have significantly higher rates of hard drugs' use in adulthood, compared with those who had not suffered some form of abuse [3, 27].

It seems that psychological problems and psychosocial stress as well as a companion who is drug user could be the ground for the women to start drugs use [28]. Any kind of abuse is closely related to the creation of a trauma. Some studies indicate that substance abuse may function as self-management of the psychological impact arising not only by the exposure to trauma itself, but also from the posttraumatic stress disorder [29]. Use or substance abuse, therefore, after an incident of abuse, can be a partially effective, although brief and maladaptive coping strategy in reducing the aversive emotions [30].

It is well documented in the literature that women who had the experience of sexual abuse, the use and abuse of substances is probably a way of "healing the pain," a mechanism to withstand feelings of worthlessness, fear, disgust with themselves. It is a way to manage and cope with the negative perceptions about themselves (negative self-perceptions) [28, 29]. The recognition and acceptance of repressed emotions (anger, guilt, shame, self-blame) related to the specific period of life of the addicted person is essential for the stay and the emotional development within the therapeutic context, in order for the individual to enhance self-esteem and to prevail positive feelings. Another reason could be the need to find a shield against the old painful memories of sexual trauma [31].

The family's dysfunction and the inadequacy of parents in their role can be a good ground for sexual or physical abuse towards the child and can lead to several problems in their adulthood (such as the adoption of

impulsive behaviors, substance use, etc.) [3]. It is equally important to examine the conditions in which the abuse was committed, in order an early therapeutic intervention to occur [11]. The family atmosphere is a key factor in this process, since drug addicts frequently report sexual -in nature- experiences with close persons (family members or relatives) [3].

SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Drug use usually begins in puberty. Teenagers in this period often experiment with substance use. The new drug users are experimenting with various substances under the instigations and pressures of their friends [1]. The curiosity, the availability of substances and the effect of encounters seem to have a major impact on the beginning of a person's experimentation with substances [17]. The attitude of friends towards the substances and the perceptions that the new users form from their environment regarding the substances, appear to be decisive formative factors of their own future behavior [1].

In many cases the use of a substance is a basic requirement of a social group for the "input" of a new member in it. The adopted views of a social group are often able to modify and direct the behavior of a new member [20]. This is very easy to happen especially during the pre-adolescent period of life, when the parental influence begins to wane, and the impact of the broader social environment is constantly increasing [3, 14]. There are a large number of symbolic reasons for which a young woman consumes various substances as a proof of unity, acceptance and comradeship for the members of a social or occupational subgroup [33].

Various marginal groups, who adopt the use of a psychoactive team regarding the safe reception of a substance, are often quite capable to modify and bend the reservations and objections of the newcomers. In many cases the use of a substance is considered as a separate qualification and a sample of "power" or "liberation" [17, 34].

The young user's friends groups usually consist of insecure people who have resorted to psychotropic substances in order to feel desired and dynamic [12, 35]. This "friendly" environment cares to strengthen the soul of the teenager with the addiction to psychoactive substances. It also ensures the existence of the addictive substance and the initiation of its use. Drugs are usually offered by their best friend or their sexual partner. It is characteristic that the "choice" of drug dependence as a lifestyle by the girls happens after the initiation of use, while the opposite is happening to boys [35].

The interactions with various sub-cultural groups can affect, at least partially, the orientation and the views of a new user, as they alter her self-esteem, particularly when the young woman has increased needs for recognition and acceptance [36].



CONCLUSION

The problem of drug dependence is a deeply traumatic experience for today's society with incalculable consequences in all the sectors [1]. The causes of the problem are in our "sick" society and the problem is addressed when the society is improving, when it changes for the better and when the people are sensitized regarding the problem [6, 30].

Substance abuse deserves our attention in all

aspects of our lives: in our family, in our work, in the places of our religious worship, in our schools and ultimately in all areas where we seek entertainment, play and rest.

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CONFLIT OF INTREST

No conflict of interest

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