

Contributory Factors of Drug Abuse and the Accessibility of Drugs

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Abstract

Drugs have been created for the benefits of humans but unfortunately misused throughout its existence. In order to eliminate or at least to decrease its abuse, it is important to examine the contributory factors of drug abuse and the accessibility of drugs. For examples, learn how humans come in contact with drugs, the mentality behind drugs taking, populations vulnerable to abuse, and the ways of distributing and obtaining illicit drugs without getting caught for the past many years. In sum, this review attempts to discuss the contributory factors of drug abuse and how if any, advanced technology has impacted on substance use; specifically, the genetic influence on substance abuse and the availability of drugs as a result of advanced technology. This would help the government and NGO to generate the effective precautions and interventions.

Key words: Contributory factors, accessibility, drug abuse

Introduction

The use of illicit drugs is primarily influenced by environmental factors while abuse and dependence may be influenced primarily by genetic factors.¹ In other words, environmental factors such as the group of friends an individual mixes with affect the probability the person takes drugs while genetic factors affect whether this individuals would later become addicted to the drugs.² Though not certain of the particular gene playing role, genetic factors has been estimated to comprise a significant 40-60% of the total risk of problem drug use.³ The fact of genetic impact on humans' illegal drug abuse could not be denied or ignored unless proved to be incorrect. In fact, enormous recent studies were conducted to identify the gene and the route in the brain causing or to influencing problem drug use.⁴

Biological Factors in Drug Use

There are biological mechanisms responsible for humans' variety of sensations in the brain inclusive of pleasurable sensations. Studies found humans' brain to have a natural "pleasure pathway" that mediates the experience of reward. It is through the activation of this pleasure pathway that an individual experiences a pleasurable sensations or feelings.^{1,5} Therefore, the consumption of illicit drugs activates this pleasure pathway and consequently produces the pleasurable experience. Though the exact location of the pleasure pathway in the brain is yet to be identified, it is definite that everyone has this pathway¹, contributing to the fact that every human being has the inclination to be addicted and dependent on drugs. However, the chances of getting addicted (predisposition) are not the same for each individual. In sum, due to biological factors, though the mechanism of activation in the pleasure path is the same, the degree of activation is not the same for different individuals, contributing to different individual's predisposition to drug abuse.

Research shows genetic factors to influence how people experience certain substances. In order to find out the genetic factors in drug abuse or addiction, many studies had been carried out to compare individuals with and without a family history of substance abuse. Upon reviewing several studies investigating alcoholism from the biological perspective, for instance, Gordis⁶ concluded that the sons of alcoholics might be more responsive to alcohol initially when it is consumed and then became less responsive to the effects as the hours pass after the consumption. While the initial experience of alcohol consumption is a positive one like euphoria and the experience after several hours is a negative one like being down and depressive¹; it is logical that the sons of alcoholics tend to have higher chances to be addicted to alcohol as compared to the sons of nonalcoholics.

In sum, due to genetic factors, some individuals are better able to appreciate the positive experience of substance consumption but not to the negative experience, hence making the overall substance consumption experience a positive or pleasurable one. It is human nature to seek for pleasant experience, therefore augmenting these individuals' seeking out for the overall pleasurable substance consumption experience.

Environmental Factors: Availability and Accessibility of Drugs

Availability of drugs or accessibility of drugs is one of the factors contributing to the increasing drug abuse during recent decades. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics' report in 2007, 22% of students in grades 9 through 12 admitted that they had been offered, sold, or given illegal drugs on school property. According to Majlis Bangsa-bangsa Bersatu (as cited in⁷), easy accessibility of drugs has been one of the current situations among the youth. Rationally, when accessibility of drugs is easy, chances of people trying out and consequently being addicted to drugs is increased. Hence, accessibility of drugs is an issue requiring immediate attention so that actions could be carried out to minimize or eliminate possible negative effects.

In order to obtain better income, drug syndicates are becoming more creative in tempting people to be involved in drug abuse and consequently be addicted⁷. Once a great number of people become a drug addict, drug syndicates would not need to worry about source of business as in order to cope with the addiction or to avoid the pain of withdrawal syndrome, drug addicts would try ways including illegal ones to obtain the drugs.

Advanced Technologies

The easier communication and interaction among humans as a result of advanced technology, specifically internet, has been providing a diversity of benefits to human beings. Unfortunately, it is not without its disadvantages. In this case, in particular, internet has eased the transaction of drugs selling. Sales of drugs on net increase exposure and hence accessibility of drugs to non-drug users who might be tempted to later abuse drugs. Internet has been a popular tool for marketing and purchasing stuff including herbal dietary supplements.⁸ Among the herbal supplements sold on net, 48% has been found to be likened to illicit drugs such as marijuana and ecstasy. With just a click away, both first time drug user and chronic drug abuser are able to have drugs delivered to their door step. This is greatly favored by the individuals involved as both the sellers and the buyers get to maintain their anonymity.⁹ Furthermore, through internet, chronic drug abusers get to keep in contact with drug sellers to ensure continuous source of drugs.

Besides, through the borderless World Wide Web, people especially the youth get to learn more about drugs easily. This is especially awful when some drug abusers share in forum or their own website/weblog regarding their positive experiences with drugs. Some feature tips on where to get a particular drug, the different ways of ingesting the particular drug in order to obtain different effects, descriptions on the momentary happiness or “high” as a result of the drug, information on the duration of the effects, possible side effects and so forth. Some even have frequently asked questions (FAQs) and questions and answers (Q&As) section to answer people’s inquiries regarding drug abuse. Undeniably, there are also websites advocating anti-drug messages by communicating the negative impacts of drug abuse and other related information.¹⁰ Unfortunately, by typing in the name of drugs on a search engine such as Google, as compared to these advocating anti-drug messages websites, those advocating drug abuse directly or indirectly are most likely to be retrieved.¹⁰

Though most studies carried out on the availability or accessibility of drugs are conducted in other nations, we cannot deny the fact that similar situation has occurred in Malaysia. This is proven when it was found that sales of steroids have been found to be carried out illegally through Facebook, social network on internet, in Malaysia.¹¹ In fact, by simply typing in a particular drug’s name in Facebook search engine yields several groups supporting the use of the drugs.

Quoting a drug abuser from Japan:¹² *Even less than 10 years ago, you had to go to specific areas... to acquire illegal substances... you really had to know where exactly to go, and when. Now, if you spend a few minutes online, it’s really easy to get access to information about the soft stuff.*

Sales of Drugs in School Compound

A news report¹³ stated that nowadays, students not only misuse drugs outside of school compound but also in class while the teacher is teaching. Which means, today, young people especially students need not wait till after school hours to gather at a point for drug abuse activity. They do it in school, where every young individual in the nation is mandated to attend. In addition, news report¹³ states that students are used to sell drugs. As students go to school every weekday as mandated, a student drug pusher would not face problem in

introducing and selling drugs to classmates and schoolmates. Therefore, with the increase of student drug pushers in the school compound, the accessibility of drugs among the young generations is further increased.

Financial Capability

Other than the ease of access to drugs in school compound, another scenario that adds to the accessibility of drug these days is the young generations' financial capability. For instance, a substantial number of students aged 13 to 17 years from several national and private schools in Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, and Negeri Sembilan admitted that they are drug abusers¹³. Among this number of students, many come from middle and upper class families and hence given generous amount of pocket money, ranging from RM250 to RM1,500 per month¹³. This generous amount of money, which is not necessary for a secondary or high school student, further increases the ease of teenagers in obtaining illegal drugs. The researchers further explained that the great sum of money on hand would eliminate one possible barrier in obtaining drugs. Therefore, inappropriate amount of money on hand has become one of the factors contributing to the increase of accessibility of illicit drugs.

A special concern in recent years would be the increase in the use of 'club drug' at night clubs and dance parties. According to the study of Johnson, O'Malley and Bachman¹⁴, the main club drug is Ecstasy, methamphetamine that consist the hallucinogenic properties.

It is essential to note that adolescents used drugs as strategies to reduce stress, which can interfere with the development of competent coping skills. For example, Foo, Tam and Lee² in their study found that stress from examinations, peer influence, family factors, curiosity, and other factors contributed to the thought of trying on drugs. Foo, Tam and Lee further explained that parents, peers, and social support play an important role in preventing adolescent drug abuse. For instance, parents who were more involved in setting limits (such as where their children went after school) were more likely to have adolescents who did not use drugs.

Conclusion

Concluding from the abovementioned points, with the changes in the globe in this new era, accessibility of drugs has increased. This scenario increases people's exposure and later probability to be involved in problem drug use. Therefore, in order to cope with nation's problem drug use, related parties need to be aware of the contributory factors for better precautions and also interventions. There should also be awareness that problem drug use is the result of the combination of several factors instead of just one sole cause.¹⁴ More effective methods need to be implemented to be better able cope with the scenario in this technologically advanced era.

Conflicts of interest: None declared

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