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Substance abuse during the pandemic

NAME:

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Introduction



- ▶ The certainty and stress arising from the COVID-19 pandemic has taken a toll on the mental health of many individuals.
- ▶ It has been reported that there has been a rise in the misuse of stimulants and opioids to cope with what is happening around the world. This rise has been in both quantity and frequency of use in the drugs.
- ▶ Some people who were abusing substances before the pandemic started to use new substances because their usual substances became harder to come by due to increase in number of people using them.
- ▶ The production and supply of commonly abused substances has also spiked and the illegal business greatly increased.

Background of the Problem



- ▶ Substance abuse has been around for centuries and increasing in usage and new substances as the years increase.
- ▶ Some people who abuse drugs and substances can easily quit or change their unhealthy behaviour while others have become addicted to them, using them regularly for example on a daily basis.
- ▶ Both legal and illegal drugs can change how your mind functions and give you that sense of ease or pleasure.
- ▶ The most common drug abused is alcohol, which is a legal drug that alters the brain functioning and gives you the sense of being 'drunk'. Other legal drugs abused are prescription and over the counter medicine ("Substance abuse: Know the signs," 2018). A few examples of illegal drugs are cocaine, ecstasy, heroin and molly.

Causes of the problem

- ▶ Majority of people get into drug and substance abuse because of stress and the anxieties in their lives. In order to cope, they resort to the habit so as to avoid their personal problems.
- ▶ Another reason individuals get into drug and substance abuse is because of pressure from outside. In the 20th Century, cigarette smoking was seen as a cool thing to do as portrayed by the media. 100 million people died in that century as a result of tobacco use.
- ▶ One reason which is not common is the drug exposure timing ("What to know about substance abuse," 2020). A child exposed to drugs through his peers is more likely to become an abuser compared to an adult getting exposed to drugs during his adulthood.

Demographic trends of substance abuse

- ▶ According to statistics, as of June 2020, almost 15% of Americans were reported to be abusing drugs so as to cope with the stresses and anxieties which had arisen from the COVID-19 pandemic (Abramson, 2021).
- ▶ During the early months of the pandemic, it was reported that there had been a 20% increase in the number of people nationwide who had experienced drug overdose compared to the statistics taken the same time in the previous year (Abramson, 2021).
- ▶ Not only that, more than 40 states had seen a very significant increase in drug related mortality by December 2020 alongside growing substance abuse disorders.
- ▶ There has been an increased number of people hospitalized and others in rehabilitation treatment due to substance during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Factors leading to increased number



- ▶ The main factor that has led to increase in the number of drug and substance abusers and abuse cases is the lack of healthier ways to cope with the stresses life.
- ▶ The pandemic was a huge blow to the entire world which was unexpected. Nobody knew exactly where the fatal COVID-19 came from and how to successfully treat it. With the government's declaration of nationwide quarantining and social distancing, many people lost their jobs, feared what would happen and so their mental health declined.
- ▶ Without proper education and guidance in ways to cope with the stresses (for example, physical activities and social interactions), many turned to drug and substance abuse to seek comfort.

Psychological concerns



- ▶ The pandemic has proven an increase in stresses and uncertainties of life not only because of the fatality of the virus but also because of loss of jobs and decline in the economy.
- ▶ Drug and substance abuse has not been able to solve that, but rather increase it. They have led to being dependent on the drugs, withdrawal symptoms, loss of motivation, being secretive, depression and anxiety.
- ▶ Some people abusing hard drugs have experienced psychosis which is seeing the world around you different from others. This is seeing, hearing and believing things which other people don't, as referred to a 'being away from reality'.
- ▶ These mental health concerns arising from substance abuse can lead to mental illness and even death through suicide or overdose to cope.

Economic concerns



- ▶ With the loss of jobs and the significant decrease in the economy, many individuals have gone into drug and substance abuse to cope, and others into peddling them in order to survive.
- ▶ Lack of productivity as a result of substance abuse has cost the economy a lot of income which would have served individuals and their loved ones in their households.
- ▶ Decline in health has led to increase in the costs of providing healthcare to the substance abuse affected individuals. Also, much income has been used in rehabilitation centers to guide them out of their addictions
- ▶ Substance abusers who have committed crime have brought about more criminal justice costs, including prosecution, incarceration and victim costs.

Health Concerns



- ▶ People who abuse drugs exhibit a number of health issues, including mental health issues, lung cancer and heart disease ("Addiction and health," 2020).
- ▶ Images taken through scanning and xrays show how damaging substance abuse can be if prolonged, for example, in the case of tobacco which causes many cancers such as oral cavity cancer and larynx cancer.
- ▶ In addition to that, drug abuse has also increased the risk of contracting HIV/AIDS through sharing of needles and also sexually transmitted illnesses through practicing unprotected sexual acts.
- ▶ While pregnant, a woman's substance abuse will affect the unborn child's health and may cause the child to go into withdrawal after it's born or get seizures ("Addiction and health," 2020).

Effects on non-substance abusers

- ▶ Breastfeeding or pregnant substance abusers put their babies at health risk for example neonatal abstinence syndrome and also sleeping or feeding problems.
- ▶ Involuntarily inhaling of secondhand tobacco from smokers can increase the risk of lung cancer and heart disease to the passive smoker. Children are at a higher risk due to the 250 plus chemicals in the substance ("Addiction and health," 2020).
- ▶ Increased spread of infectious diseases such as Herpes from a substance abuser to a non-substance abuser. Because of impaired judgement, the substance abuser may engage in sexual acts outside his/her marriage and contract an STD then spread it to his/her partner.
- ▶ High risks of causing vehicle accidents also due to impaired judgement. A drunk driver puts himself, the passengers and pedestrians at a risk of getting injured and even dying due to vehicle accidents.

Prevention and control methods of substance abuse

- ▶ Despite the pandemic school restrictions, educators have taken a more efficient method of learning which is online learning. This class instruction strategy can be used to create awareness and influence students in drug abuse resistance.
- ▶ Mass media campaigns are also very beneficial to changing substance abuse by the use of billboards, newspapers, radio and television to address these issues. Communicating the negative consequences on mass media would reach many people hence promote drug free lifestyles and hinder pro-drug messages.
- ▶ Collaboration of several communities can increase efforts in developing strategies for prevention and control of substance abuse. Communities can work together and create agencies that educate on the dangers of substance abuse and also create policies that control it.

Prevention and control methods of substance abuse

- ▶ Counselling of the affected individuals and groups is also another method which has been used actively for long. This can involve therapy or rehabilitation of the substance abuser, educating and leading them out of their addictions.
- ▶ Behavioural monitoring is also an effective strategy in preventing and controlling substance abuse. For example, children can be monitored by their parents for concerns in their behaviour which may be an indication to their mental health. The parents can then take action to teach the children to prevent them from getting into substance abuse.

Role of the government concerning the issue

- ▶ The government has reduced illegal and harmful drug abuse by coming up with laws that address the issue. For example, in some states in the United States, it is illegal to grow, sell and use marijuana, except for medicinal purposes.
- ▶ Most harmful drugs are forbidden in the United States by the government for example cocaine and heroin. Anyone found in possession of such drugs, charges will immediately be pressed on them.
- ▶ The government has also increased the rates of substance abuse recovery by setting up a policy of abusers returning from their rehabilitation after 6 months ("What's the government doing about drugs?" 2017). It has also set up rehabilitation facilities that are cost effective to assist substance abusers recover from their addiction.

Organizations aimed at drug and substance abuse prevention and treatment

- ▶ National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) focuses on scientific advancement on the causes and consequences of drug abuse and use that information to improve the people and public health.
- ▶ The World Health Organization (WHO) specializes in substance abuse management through its agencies like Centre for Addiction and Mental Health and the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse.
- ▶ The Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA) takes solutions based on community strategies and comprehensive plans to address substance abuse problems. Today, CADCA represents the interest of more than 4000 anti- drug coalitions

Organizations aimed at drug and substance abuse prevention and treatment

- ▶ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) is an agency that makes health efforts to improve individuals living with mental health and substance use disorders, and their families ("Who we are," 2019).
- ▶ Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E) teaches children how to recognize and resist the direct and subtle pressures of society to experiment with drugs.

Conclusion

- ▶ The current COVID-19 pandemic has led to a large growth of drug and substance abuse in the United States and also around the world.
- ▶ Despite the challenges at hand, the government and community has made a lot of effort not only to provide those struggling with drug abuse with assistance, but also giving people hope as a means to cope with the anxieties of these uncertain times.
- ▶ Though the numbers rose greatly during the beginning of the pandemic and towards the end of 2020, they have not risen that much in 2021. That shows that individuals are getting better.
- ▶ The entire world hopes that the COVID cases will soon end and life will go back to normal, therefore highly decreasing the amount of drug and substance abuse.

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