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Addiction Awareness and Prevention

Addiction can be exposed and passed on as early as infancy. The United States is currently the fourth-highest country with addiction problems. Addiction can be sourced from personal injuries, peer pressure, post-operation, etc. Addiction has worsened over the years due to the accessibility of drugs and over-the-counter prescription medication. The United States has not hidden the stigma behind addiction, and various organizations have created awareness by publishing articles, journals, videos, and international/country-wide ads. The federal government is also trying to take action and funded 42.5 billion dollars towards addiction awareness through nonprofit and nationwide addiction rehabilitation centers. Currently, the use of illegal drugs and alcohol is at an all-time high. “The annual economic impact of substance misuse is estimated to be \$249 billion for alcohol misuse and \$193 billion for illicit drug use.” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services) If so much money has been put into substance abuse rehabilitation centers and programs, how come addiction hasn’t started to decline? This question can be answered through the internal and external conflict of those who are addicts, and accessibility.

Dating back, even to the 16th century, addiction has enwrapped the lives of many. Although starting as a small portion of the population, accessibility to these drugs and alcohol started to make getting addicted much easier. As stated by the National Center for Drug Abuse Statistics, “Half of people 12 and older have used illicit drugs at least once;” one of the top drugs being nicotine, especially in young adults. This exposure can date back to the mother taking

drugs, smoking, and drinking during pregnancy. The environment they were raised in is a big aspect and can lead to addiction. Family, and the persistent presence of relatives, especially parents, have a lasting role on the child's mental health. An absent parent, or traumatic endurences during their early stages of life can cause a "switch" in their brain to believe that binging on drugs and alcohol is the young adults' way of coping. Not only family but the community and friends they are around can, ultimately, make or break them. Spending time with the "wrong group" of people will affect their behavior. During the stage of adolescence, popularity and having many friends is a big goal for them. Many teenagers would do anything to become "cool" even submitting themselves to peer pressure. The adolescent stage is a big step in brain functionality: adolescents enter puberty and can learn and adapt to things much quicker than any other stage. This is also an opportunity for addiction to start. The best way to prevent this from happening is by enabling and instilling the use of drug prevention and alcohol prevention programs at school. Being able to expose the consequences and lasting health effects of addiction can persuade many adolescents and young adults to not take drugs and drink alcohol, reducing the risk. Unfortunately, many youth programs have been discontinued, increasing addiction in the population and affecting communities.

Addiction, and relapses, do not always originate from exposure at a young age, but can also be due to personal injuries. After sustaining an injury, many are prescribed medication, one painkiller being opioids. Many healthcare professionals and researchers see many horrible addiction cases because of opioids. "An opioid epidemic still exists today, where the use of pain medications is skyrocketing. Data in 2018 reported that every day 128 people die as a result of overdosing on opioids. This includes heroin, as well as pain relievers such as OxyContin (oxycodone), hydrocodone (Vicodin), codeine, morphine, and the deadly synthetic opioid

fentanyl.” (Behavioral Health Centers, 2017) Addiction can, however, also sprout from mixing prescribed medication and alcohol. Addiction can be accidental. For instance, binge drinking beer and wine without the person fully grasping how much they had to drink. Many undergo stress and traumatic experiences that make them “drink the pain away.” This is not a healthy way of seeking help and only worsens their relationship with themselves and the people around them. Many friends and family members might not understand what is going on with addicts and do not experience the withdrawal they endure when trying to seek help, which is why many cut off connections with addicts. Society has raised controversy and blamed addicts for not seeking help, further worsening the stigma behind addiction.

Many victims of addiction try to seek help but can find it difficult. Many rural states have limited/inaccessibility to addiction rehabilitation centers, restricting addicts from improving. Furthermore, according to the National Center for Drug Abuse Statistics, “The cost for the cheapest medical detoxification programs is \$1.75k. The cost for the cheapest inpatient rehabilitation programs per month is \$6k. The cost of outpatient rehab for a 3 month program is \$5k.” With the lack of resources, there isn’t a way for addicts to pay back these programs without getting a job—which will be highly rejected due to the person’s past drug and alcohol experience— or selling drugs, which can cause them to relapse and can start the vicious cycle all over again. The United States government should use part of the billions of dollars to open up more rehabilitation centers in rural areas, and further benefit these addiction programs. As a community and society, there needs to be a change in perceiving those seeking help. An increase in nonprofit organizations, bettering the public of addiction could allow them to see that addiction is not a topic to judge, but spread empathy towards.

References

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