
Substance Abuse In Women

I was taking a test in my Exploring Careers to see what type of professions it would recommend based on my personal interests. As a result, my teacher noticed that I matched the medical field. Since she was having a field trip for her other class to a local hospital, my teacher invited me so that I could get a more closer look. When I went for the visit I got to interact with a clinical pharmacist that explained to me his daily duties and why his job was so important. I learned about his personal story and how his mother struggled with addiction for most of her life and how it has encouraged him to get into this field. This was an eye opener because I never knew how common addiction is. I also became more aware of family members who were dealing with a substance dependency and how they were unable to get help because of how expensive treatment was. Reality hit that most people probably do not get the opportunity that they need to get help and it can result in it being life threatening. Also getting help means missing work and making time in someones busy schedule. I now want to pursue to being a clinical pharmacist so that I can help others take the correct dosages.

In general, Substance abuse is an epidemic that is taking over the nation. "Of the 7 million Americans aged 18 to 25 who need treatment for substance use disorders, 93 percent do not get it"("Less" 3). Although it affects men and women, women tend to become more easily get addicted in comparison to men. The issue is that most women do not accept the fact they have an addiction or they might not have the opportunity to get help. Furthermore, "When women do develop substance abuse problems, they tend to develop them faster than men do"("Gender and Use" 56). This has led to fatalities to both the women and the fetus of those that are pregnant. How can we help women break their drug dependency? To obtain more knowledge I researched about causes, treatment, and the possibilities of relapse.

From my research, I have concluded that giving women the opportunity to get the correct treatment and making it more socially accepting to be getting help will allow more women to consider rehabilitation. Additionally, women "also develop medical or social consequences of addiction faster than men, often find it harder to quit using addictive substances, and are more susceptible to relapse"("Addiction in Women" 2). As an effect, "there is little epidemiological evidence of increased female alcoholism or problem drinking"("Women and Substance Abuse "1). Since most women deny needing treatment especially because having a drug dependency is something that society shames when in reality it occurs to millions of people. Treatment will not be worth it if the victim themselves do not believe they need it. Harvard Health Publications claim that "what makes permanent recovery difficult is the drug-induced change that creates lasting memories"("Addiction and the Problem" 4). The normalization of treatment will help increase its awareness by creating more support for those who struggle with addiction daily. Substance abuse in women should be reassessed in order to prevent relapse and increase opportunity for those that need treatment.

Fatality caused by substance abuse have been rising especially among pregnant women. Research shows that abusing substances result in severe health problems because many substances pass easily through the placenta, so substances that a pregnant woman takes also reach the fetus ("Drug, alcohol, and tobacco use during pregnancy" 1). This will continue to occur until people learn and begin to take care of themselves before it is too late. Use of some

substances can increase the risk of miscarriage and can cause migraines, seizures, or high blood pressure in the mother, which may affect her fetus. It can be also be difficult for women to get help for a substance use problem during or after pregnancy because of social and legal fears. In addition, spouses that consume equal amounts of alcohol were way less likely to get a divorce in comparison to those relationships in which one partner is a heavy drinker and the other is not. In order to help people that have already encountered addiction, I researched preventability of treatment and factors that hinder the effectivity of treatment.

Dealing with drug dependency is a constant battle that needs to be fought everyday. Mosaic Family Services is a local association that encourages families who have struggled with addiction, domestic violence, and human trafficking. This organization has the mission “to support, educate, and empower individuals and families of the communities we serve”(“Substance-Abusing Women” 2). At the shelter, they offer from housing to legal representation which can help put the client on the right track. This shelter has the priority of being welcoming and comforting to help everyone feel safe and at ease. A proper environment is vital for clients to flourish and grow an independent and stable states of mind. There are many reasons why people develop addiction and can eventually overdose. One of the many factors of developing addiction is having a traumatic event occur and think that relying on substances will make the thought go away. A personalized approach in women's treatment is much more effective when it comes to treating the disease of substance abuse.

Ultimately, there is no one specific solution to drug dependency, and what may work for one person may not be a good fit for someone else. Simply understanding the different options can be an important first step. These programs need to take these issues into consideration and offer child care, job training, and parenting classes. Many treatments end with clients relapsing so trying to customize the methods of rehabilitation will lower those chances. For example, “what makes permanent recovery difficult is drug-induced change that creates lasting memories”(“Addiction and the Problem” 4). Once a person is an addict then that will stick with them for the rest of their lives. Many people have points in his or her lives that are falling apart and those are the times that people tend to relapse. Obviously there will always be low points in everyone’s life so it would be an unrealistic solution to help them stay away from certain emotions. Although there are many factors that can cause substance abuse in women, there are ways to help those that struggle everyday to not have a setback.

Most people do not believe they are addicts because it is comparable to admitting a weakness. The writers at Alcoholism & Drug Abuse Weekly claim that “of the 7 million Americans aged 18 to 25 who need treatment for substance use disorders, 93 percent do not get it”(“Less than” 3). These percentages are troublesome because fighting addiction alone is difficult. Getting treatment will give women a support system and the opportunity to introduce themselves to others with similar stories so they know they are not alone. Being an addict will make people more susceptible to health issues, in addition the negative effect it has on pregnant women. Importantly, to clarify, “drug dependency is a medical condition—not a crime. Pregnant women do not experience drug dependencies because they want to harm their fetuses or because they don’t care about their children” (“Addicted while Pregnant” 8). The baby gets used to the substance that the mother was using but then when born the baby goes through withdrawal, the mother has a stillbirth, or can even pass away. Sadly many women experience this trauma since they might not know have the opportunity of getting help. Although assessing our treatment might take a longer time to work its magic, it the most beneficial at preventing another downfall in the future.

Trauma or stress is a big factor in women resulting in drug dependencies. To ease the pain and distract themselves from their lives, they believe these substances are good for them. For example, "Women are also far more likely than men to be subjected to sexual violence both as children and as adults" ("Substance-Abusing Women" 792). Sexual violence, domestic violence, and human trafficking could destroy anyone's mental state. Mental health plays a huge role in addiction and it can become an escalating problem. Although genetics can play a huge role in developing addiction, it also does not mean that it is affected by people's demographic. As a result, "alcohol and drug abuse among women occurs at similar rates among poor and nonpoor people and among white people and people of color" ("Substance-Abusing Women" 789). There are many stereotypes out there that some women of different demographics drink more than others but the numbers are all quite similar. Addiction afflicts people from all walks of life. It doesn't matter where you live, what color your skin is, what you do for a living, or how much money you have or don't have. No one is immune from addiction. Yes, there are homeless drug addicts. But there are also suburban soccer moms, bankers, and lawyers who are drug addicts. They took a taste of a mind-altering substance oftentimes as prescribed by a doctor. On the other hand, some people's cultures it is acceptable to drink more or not at all. It is important to have a complete understanding on the role society plays with drug dependent women.

Many people who have not experienced addiction, whether it was first hand or a loved one, say that addicts dug the hole themselves and that they do not deserve any assistance. There are many reasons why the number of women that have fallen into their cycle have increased. Opioids are now a national crisis that has become the leading cause of death for people under 50 years old in the United States" (Mosaic). This causes distress in finding a balance between using the opioids for its medical benefits and abusing the drug. For example, based on the need for prevention measures related to the emergence of prescription drug misuse, the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) is conducting regional Town Halls to discuss suggested best practices and solutions to prevent prescription medication misuse" ("Mosaic"). There are many causes such as genetic and environmental that have been linked to all addictions to opiates seem to play a role. Now it is widely accepted that people with an "intense" personality and behavior related to dopamine addiction, are more likely to use drugs including the highly addictive and dangerous opiates. At Mosaic Family Services they offer the MYSAP program that works on selective preventive measures by educating the community on current drug issues and the negative effects of drugs on the mind and body. Also they teach about the devastating consequences that it can have on one's life so that many can see the true effects it can have.

Alcoholism is another substance that is commonly abused and has been progressively increasing over time. Since women usually tend to weigh less than men and alcohol remains in body water, an average woman can consume the same amount of alcohol as an average man yet have more of an impact. As a result, the female drinkers tend to experience unfavorable effects and develop an addiction a lot faster in comparison to males. Additionally, the changing social norms are making it more acceptable for women of all ages to drink. The combination of more women drinking and women drinkers being more impacted by alcohol has created a health epidemic of women and alcoholism that is impacting millions of American families. Based on society women usually also have more family responsibilities making it even more important for them to get the treatment. Women that are "pregnant or have young dependent children very frequently cite their desire to protect and support their family as their primary reason for seeking alcoholism treatment" ("Women and Alcoholism" 3). Many times Binge drinking is a risk

factor for sexual assault, especially among young women in college settings. Each year, more and more college women are sexually assaulted. Research suggests that there is an increase in the risk of rape or sexual assault when both the attacker and victim have used alcohol prior to the attack.

Addiction begins with drug use, and the main factor in drug use is access. For example, “the drugs that people choose to use, either for medicinal or recreational purposes, have to be accessible to them(“Substance Abuse Among Women” 3). Since the drug would not be available in the first place then there is no chance on getting addicted. Women in our society do not have trouble accessing drugs since there are dealers on every corner. Often, women begin using drugs for medical purposes. They may not be aware of the risks of addiction or the fact that women can be more susceptible to addiction than men. Doctors tend to over prescribe medications and exclude explaining the possible consequences of taking the opioids. The opioid epidemic is not only the doctor’s fault. Since people expect the medications to make them “pain free” the doctor feels pressured to over prescribe them(“Why Do Doctors” 3). Women are more likely to suffer chronic pain than men, and they receive prescriptions for longer doses of pain medicine. In fact, it is rarely possible to completely eliminate pain; trying to do so often results in excessive administration of opioids. Also many people go to the doctor for some type of “ pain” to get painkillers and then sell them for double or triple the price. From a society that emphasizes the need for pills to treat pain, lack of training on pain management for physicians, a disconnected healthcare system, and pressure on doctors have come together to create an epidemic that has taken the lives of so many.

Addiction tends to work fast but seems like a relatively slow process. Many people thinking they just have a liking to a substance so they continue it until they finally overdose. Erika Byrd was “ among the rising number of people in the United States who have been killed by alcohol in the last decade”(“Alcohol is Killing” 45). Byrd, who passed away in 2011, would always manage to convince her family that she does not need rehabilitation. She had been struggling for a while until eventually she overdosed and left her family behind. For many women, drug abuse starts as a way of taking control of something about themselves that they do not like. It’s self-medication that’s meant to make their lives better but, it always ends up having the opposite effect. There are no drugs that can fix the way you look or feel about yourself, and drugs are not a substitute for friends or food or a relief from stress. All of these factors can be changed with hard work and some help. Focusing on the positive parts of your life and working to eliminate the negatives are two major steps in the life-long pursuit of happiness. Joining a support group can help because “listening to how other people handle similar situations, and sharing your thoughts with them, will help reduce your anxiety and depression”(“Sub. Abuse among women” 68). Adding drugs or alcohol just compounds the negatives and makes this journey to happiness much more difficult. substance abuse becomes an additional problem on top of these others, rather than being the solution to anything. Prevention is the best approach to addiction in women. Since women develop addiction rather quickly, prevention may no longer be an alternative for you or someone you love. Always ask about the need for prescription drugs, and only take them as directed by your doctor. Dispose of the extra pills immediately so they will not be available for anyone else in the future. Ask your doctor for alternative means of pain management if your condition is chronic. Many doctors say that if you’re taking prescription medication, do not drink alcohol. Putting the effects of both drugs will lead to addiction much faster.

When in recovery, choosing a safe living environment is vital since it is such a vulnerable time.

Sober living homes are one option that allows people to recover in a safe place with others in similar situations which can really help someone not feel alone. They are supposed to help them to transition back into the community after intensive inpatient services and to learn to live independently without the use of drugs and/or alcohol. There are all types of sober living homes. Some are owned by businesses or religious groups, but the majority of homes are run privately, most often by groups of sober people who form an informal agreement to have a sober living arrangement. These privately run homes allow addicts to invest in their own recovery. The only issue is that if one person relapse they can influence other people to relapse too. The cost of living in a sober living home can vary based on location; however, the rates are typically similar to those of moderately priced rental apartments.

After seeing many loved ones struggle with substance abuse I realized how important this topic is to me. Now I volunteer at Mosaic Family Services for my service learning. They are dedicated to serving survivors of human rights abuses from around the world and within their community. While also creating access to opportunities for their clients, and empowering them towards independence. Mosaic's clients vary from unaccompanied minors to human trafficking and is all about making it a safe space. Being in a safe environment where there is no temptation to use is vital to fighting the addiction.

By volunteering at this organization, I have learned that I can make an impact on someone else's life and that there is always hope even when things are falling apart. In doing this I will gain knowledge on how to make others that are also going through drug dependencies get help. What astounded me the most was how everyone looks like people I pass everyday and if I was to see them at the grocery store I would have never thought about their past. That taught me that I never known what people have been through and everything that has shaped them into being the person that they are now.

All of my research is based on how even acknowledging that one has an addiction is a step closer to getting better. After putting all of my information together, I have found different factors that might make treatment not seem the most preferable and I have found different reasons on why so many women fall into this issue. For my end product I created an instagram account called "The Virago Project." I chose this name because Virago in Latin means female warrior which really conveyed the purpose for this profile. With help from my mentor I created a virtual way to become informed about women abuse and to advertise their stories so others know that they are not alone. The point of this account is to encourage women to get help while also educating them about the dangers of abuse. I gathered all the basic information about treatments and all the statistics. My postings are intended to create an information brochure that is assessable at all times. I want this account to contain inspirational quotes and words of encouragement while also being informative. I am going to spread awareness about the "The Virago Project " by giving shoutouts on my actual personal accounts and also getting shoutouts and promotions from other bigger accounts. I want to incorporate a space where women can share their stories and their progress to inspire others and to help generate their own motivation. I am not a medical professional by any means this was just a way to have a place to find inspiration. My goal is to portray Mosaic Family Services purpose of creating a safe space into a portable profile that is accessible at all times.

A problem that I faced was that most places would not allow me to volunteer since I am not eighteen yet. Although that was a setback, I finally found a great facility that cares deeply about their patients and treats them with the best care. Since I am not a qualified medical healthcare

professional, there were many limitations but I still managed to do learn a lot from this experience. Also, working as a team at Mosaic has strengthened my leadership skills and has made me better at problem solving and working with social networking. This organization is full of caring people that want the best for their clients and that has honestly made me want to better myself as a person. Another setback I encountered was my idea of creating an app for my end product not fulfilling its purpose. Yet I figured it out by changing up my end product and making a profile that does all of the same things just with an app that has already been created.

My end product targets women that are fighting their addiction everyday. I want "The Virago Project" to attract women to get help and to never give up fighting. I also want to encourage women to be able to express themselves by their writings. There is nothing more empowering than being one's true self and these women need that because addiction can put people in a vulnerable place. I think it is important for women to be able to have an account that will remind them and motivate them towards getting better.

I want to continue volunteering at Mosaic Family Services so that I can continue to meet new people and hear what they have been through. After this experience, I will have learned more than I ever thought I would on not only substance abuse but becoming a better and more well rounded person. Although the amount of work is substantial, in the end it is all worth it even if it only helps one person.

The results can be counted and measured. I am able to count the amount of people that follow comment and like my account. I will also be able to measure the effectiveness by asking my followers on their opinions. Although many might not be interested in the account because they might not want extra tools outside of of their rehabilitation. The account is supposed to either aid during or after rehabilitation.

Some people think drug use and abuse is not a big problem, but it is a really big problem. There are many people who view addiction as a moral failing or as something that only bad people suffer from. They are stuck in a world where addiction is only a problem for low-income or homeless people with long criminal records. Which is not true at all. When teens start using drugs they think is good because they don't know the facts about using drugs and because drugs make them feel different. "When I smoked the first time I felt different and I did like it" ("Drug Use And Abuse" 18). Teens always like to experiment, but they eventually grow out of it. "Teens might tell themselves they will only try a drug once, but many teens find themselves under continual peer pressure to continue to experiment with drugs and join the party" ("Addiction and the Problems of Relapse" 68). Addicts think differently than other people they think the drug is part of their life or as part of their culture. For example, when they first start smoking a few puffs of marijuana and they get high. Later once their body gets used to it they need to smoke a lot more for the same effect to happen. In most cases drug abuse starts out in teenage years and later can evolve into adult issues.

In conclusion, from my experience of completing my Capstone I gained a lot of self motivation and time management skills. While also developing my problem solving skills that I will need to be able to take with me for when I go to college or get a job. I was able to accomplish a lot more than I ever would have thought and I am very proud with my results. The whole process was a lot of work but I ended up being prepared and feeling good about my overall presentation. I am glad to say I have finally completed the biggest project I have ever completed. If I was still at a regular high school I would not be as well rounded and prepared for going to a university as I

am here at Richland Collegiate High School. Overall I am glad to have made a change and inspired at least one of my followers with my Capstone project. I am very grateful for having the opportunity to be able to dedicate so much time on a project that we all find interest in.