



IJSRM

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SCIENCE AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

An Official Publication of Human Journals



Human Journals

Review Article

May 2020 Vol.:15, Issue:3

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Family Dynamics in Patients Diagnosed with Substance Use



IJSRM

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SCIENCE AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

An Official Publication of Human Journals



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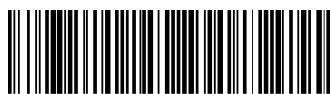
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Submission: 21 April 2020

Accepted: 29 April 2020

Published: 30 May 2020



HUMAN JOURNALS

www.ijsrm.humanjournals.com

Keywords: substance use, family dynamic, parent, veteran, and domestic violence, IPV

ABSTRACT

Background: Family relationships impact the well-being of individual family members. The dynamics can influence others who are a part of the family for years and even a lifetime. Negative effects of substance use can cause a great amount of stress on family and friends of the person who is addicted. Consequences often include the loss of relationships, emotional turmoil, role changes, isolation, financial instability, exposing children to negative influences, and divorce. **Method:** The purpose of this literature review was to gain a better understanding of how family relationships are affected by substance use and how family dynamics influence substance use. Some of the themes discussed throughout this study are alcohol and substance use and how they can affect the dynamics and wellbeing of a family, a couple, and the children. Other themes that were touched on were how to help treat alcoholism and substance use including social support. **Conclusion:** Alcohol misuse and substance use can have a major effect on the dynamics of a family and the wellbeing of each person involved. It was also found that social support can help to better the outcomes of patients who are dealing with this type of disorder. In conclusion, it can be determined that for individuals, an impaired family dynamic can lead to substance use more commonly than individuals with a supportive and healthy family dynamic.

INTRODUCTION

Families have an important role in supporting a family member with problematic substance use [1]. Michigan's Department for Health and Human Services (DHHS) recognizes the importance of family in one's recovery and uses family team meetings as a component in a patient's recovery. Substance Abuse and the Mental Health Service Administration (SAMHSA) [2] and National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) [3], both stress the importance of family support groups for the loved ones. These support groups allow the loved ones to work through feelings they may be experiencing so they can positively support the mental health patient. The research question was: Are people who have impaired family dynamics more likely to use substances than those with a supportive family dynamic? "Evidence suggests that combat exposure is, independently associated with a greater risk of substance use and substance use disorders" [4]. Further investigation included how positive and negative family dynamics impact substance use (see Figure 1). Teeters et al. [5] stated substance use disorders (SUDs) are a common problem seen among military veterans. The purpose of this review was to better understand family relationships and the role they have on abstinence in patients with substance use disorders.

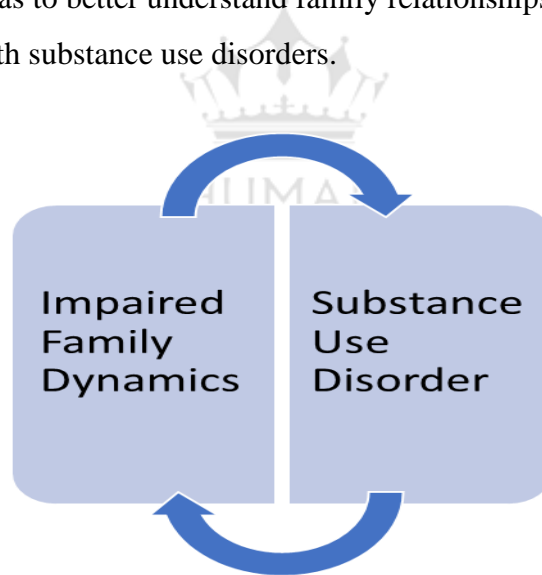


Figure No. 1: Impaired family dynamics can lead to substance use more commonly than individuals with a supportive and healthy family dynamic.

Case Study

The patient for this case study was a middle-aged male with a diagnosis of alcoholism. He was divorced two times, has three children, and is living with his father. The patient was in the U.S. Navy for four years. He stated that he began drinking socially, which further led to more drinking. His use of alcohol led to relationship conflicts between his families, which led to domestic charges.

He also stated that after his domestic charges and losing custody of his kids he began to use drinking as a coping mechanism. Currently, he has no contact with his ex-wife or children. As a pending legal issue, he has delinquencies with child support, several arrests, telephone misuse, and domestic violence charges. Despite his history with alcohol, he has a great relationship with his parents, especially his dad. He states that his parents have been extremely helpful in his recovery. His parents did divorce at a young age, but he states that he continues to see both parents equally.

The patient was calm, positive, pleasant, and he used humor as a coping mechanism. He stated that he is angry at his ex-wife for taking his children away from him, and he feels a bit of regret that he could not be there for his three children. The patient began to get a little defensive when talking about his ex-wife; it almost seemed like he was a little on edge and would often change the subject back to his children. Overall, the patient seemed to be handling his diagnosis quite well and stated that he wants to get help and did not want to die from alcohol use.

METHODS

For research studies that involved substance use, databases such as Clinical Key, ProQuest and CINAHL were utilized. Other sources included the American Psychological Association, Social Work Journal, and Dove Medical Press. Using keywords such as substance use, family dynamics, domestic violence, parents, veterans, and military allowed for a narrowing of the search. The articles were published in several journals ranging from 2017 to 2020. Some articles included how substance abuse and domestic violence are related and family and peer associations with drug use in soldiers. Other studies found relationships and social support are connected to recovery and abstinence.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Support Networks

Haverfield et al. [6] discussed how components in returning to the community for patients with a mental health disorder and a substance use disorder can be impacted based on the patient's social support. This study used a randomized trial to compare enhanced post-discharge treatment to traditional telephone monitoring treatment. The enhanced post-discharge treatment included individual and group psychotherapy, behavioral management, and psychopharmacology. The participants were evaluated at 3 months, 9 months, and 15 months post-discharge. The major theme of this study was to focus on support networks such as peers and families to support an individual with abstinence. The focus was on support outside of the in-patient programs to see what is beneficial for patients with co-occurring diagnoses. Results indicated, "weak family support increases the adverse impact of substance use on mental health service utilization by patients with co-occurring schizophrenia. In addition, family ties may contribute to disorder severity through conflict and abusive interactions as well as the recollection of past trauma" [6].

Social Support

The initial use of substances started slowly and then increased for alcohol. This alcohol use was associated with social support from help groups. "Family conflict was the most consistent predictor of mental health and substance use outcomes. Specifically, more family conflict was associated with greater psychiatric, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and drug use severity, but not alcohol use severity, at treatment intake and across follow up" [6].

Family-Oriented Treatment

Denomme and Benhanoh [7] explored how a family-oriented treatment program could benefit families who had loved-ones with a substance use disorder. This study focused on how concerned family members are often overlooked and not involved in treatment even though they are also impacted by a substance use disorder diagnosis. "Stress, perceived social support, and family functioning are strong determinants of coping capabilities and health and are affected by a family member's substance use-related problems; concerned family

member-oriented programs should target these factors as a means to help these family members cope with substance use disorders and maintain a healthy lifestyle” [7].

Substance Use and Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)

Cafferky et al. [8] IPV and substance use affects every aspect of society worldwide. Studies have suggested that alcohol use has been the most linked to IPV when compared to other substances. This research included a meta-analysis of 285 studies. The findings showed that in both males and females, there is a greater risk for IPV with alcohol use, then with drug use. The results were congruent with other meta-analyzed studies, suggesting that there is an increase in IPV when there is a history of emotional/psychological abuse or previous violence towards the same partner. This meta-analysis was the first to look at the risk for IPV when both drugs and alcohol were involved. The researchers found a greater link between male users and IPV perpetration, while they found that women users were more likely to experience IPV victimization. When comparing alcohol consumption, it was found that people who drank alcohol a few times a week, almost daily, and daily had a higher risk for IPV perpetration when compared to those who only drank occasionally [8]. The study results indicated that alcohol increases the incidence of IPV greatly. Cafferky et al. [8] found that those who drink daily or several times a week are more likely to be a perpetrator of IPV. The study also suggested that women who drink frequently are at risk for victimization of IPV.

Father’s Alcohol Misuse on Family Wellbeing

Another qualitative study obtained the thoughts of a social worker on the topic of paternal alcohol misuse. Kühn and Slabbert [9] used the family systems theory as their theoretical framework. This theory stated that when a father uses alcohol it is inevitable that it will affect the family. Alcohol use can lead to high levels of stress between couples, and it can hurt parenting. The findings suggest that alcohol misuse by a father causes a great decrease in the family’s wellbeing. Couples are at a much higher risk for stress, conflict, IPV, and divorce, while the children are often neglected or abused [9].

Misuse of alcohol can lead to stress and damage on the family dynamics. One of the main stressors is the uncertainty of the father’s behavior, as he will often fail to complete parental obligations leading to a disruption in the family balance. Alcohol misuse can also lead to a decrease in income as unemployment is a common consequence. The money that is made is

often spent on alcohol which can potentially lead to financial problems, causing the family to take on huge challenges [9].

Alcohol Misuse Involving Couple and Children.

Conflict is a common consequence of alcohol misuse and it can often turn violent. As stress, tension, and arguments continue to rise, the relationship can be ruined leading to divorce or separation. Children can be just as affected by alcohol misuse as a spouse. A common theme seen with a father who misuses alcohol is neglect and emotional abuse. These children must step up to protect themselves and they can often feel trapped because they do not know who to trust [9].

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

Easton et al. [10] in a randomized control trial designed to examine the best therapy for criminals who have been arrested for partner violence and are substance dependent. Of the 63 males included in the study, 29 received cognitive behavior therapy and 34 were assigned to drug counseling. In their study, substance use was present in approximately 50% of domestic violence abusers. The standard of care for prisoners is large group therapy sessions that are not specific to one disease. A meta-analysis found that this approach has not been effective in reducing violence. Many of these standard treatments focus on the violence itself instead of risk factors such as substance use and anger control problems. After eight sessions, results showed that substance abuse domestic violence (SADV) cognitive behavioral therapy was superior to drug counseling in reducing the number of positive drug or Breathalyzer tests. There was a significant difference in the number of cocaine positive tests and Breathalyzer positive tests during the treatment period [10].

The hypothesis that there is a relationship between the days that the participant abused substances and when they were violent towards a partner was supported. The participants received their assigned therapy for twelve weeks and were evaluated 3 months post-treatment for several violent episodes. There was a significant difference in the total number of aggressive episodes in participants who received SADV and those who participated in drug counseling. The participants of the SADV therapy reported an average of 1.14 days of violent behavior. The drug counseling group reported an average of 11.07 days. Additionally, participants in the SADV trial reported 6.69% of violent days co-occurred with alcohol use days. On the other hand, drug counseling participants reported an average of 11.69% of

violent days with alcohol use days [10]. Overall, the study concluded that a combined intervention that addresses substance abuse and partner violence has a greater success rate than drug counseling. The cognitive-behavioral approach focuses on substance abuse as a reinforcement of violent behaviors and builds skills to reduce use and reward non-use activities.

Family and Peer Contextual Association

Habibi et al. [11] aimed to explore the relationship between family and peers with drug use among military personnel stationed in Iran. For this study, 422 draftees between the ages of 18 and 30 from bases in Tehran participated. All participants were given a survey that assessed substance use, family factors, and peer factors. The researchers discussed how alcohol and illicit drug use are very common in young adults in Western countries. However, there is very little research on alcohol and drug use in Middle Eastern countries. Iran is the second-ranked in the world for opiate use, averaging about twice the global average. Drug use in military ranks may be as high as 30%; and, as high as 26% of Iranian soldiers report using illicit drugs in a six-month period [11]. This study sought to research the contributing roles of peers and family in substance use, especially in the military. On military bases, the peer role maybe even stronger due to the sense of brotherhood and masculinity associated with being a soldier. Additionally, dysfunctional family dynamics and neglect are associated with higher rates of substance use.

There is a significant positive relationship between drug use among soldiers and family and peer model of risk behavior. In soldiers, peer modeling of risk behavior had the strongest relationship with illegal substance use. On the other hand, parents' sanctions had a strong relationship with soldiers who did not use alcohol or drugs. Overall, they found that there is a correlation between a soldier's drug use and peer and family behaviors. These findings, and many other studies of different regions, have all shown significant parallel between early family experiences of family substance use and young adult substance use. Additionally, the soldiers who reported parents who disapproved of substance use showed a significantly less affinity towards using than those who had parents that condoned early drug use or role modeled use. Finally, the most powerful indication of drug use among soldiers was peer modeling. Observation of peers doing risky behavior puts an individual at a higher risk of being persuaded due to peer pressure of doing illicit drugs.

FINDINGS

Impaired family dynamics can lead to substance use more commonly than individuals with a supportive and healthy family dynamic. The dynamics can influence others who are a part of the family for years and even a lifetime [12]. Consequences often include the loss of relationships, emotional turmoil, role changes, isolation, financial instability, exposing children to negative influences, and divorce [13]. It is evident from this review that substances are used as a coping mechanism. Some of the neglect of obligations and issues experienced because of substance use included unemployment, decrease in income, altered social relationships, increased domestic violence, and divorce. Help is available such as family support groups, peer support groups; cognitive-behavior therapy, group therapy, and social support (see Figure 2).

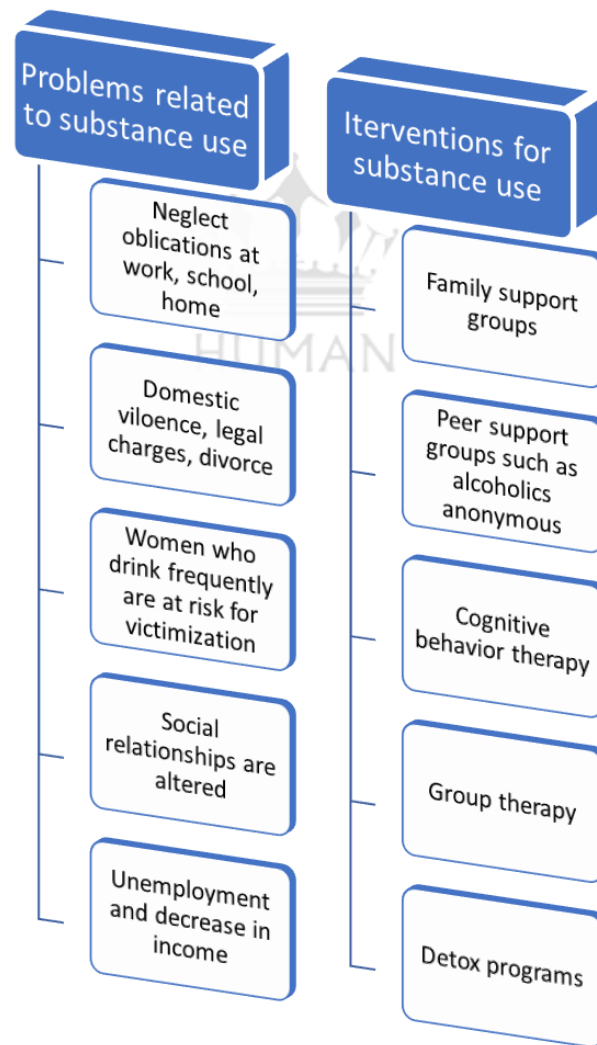



Figure No. 2: Problems related to substance use and its interventions

CONCLUSION

Substance use is a common affliction seen in military veterans and it almost always negatively affects family members of the veteran. One of these negative outcomes is domestic violence, which was seen in the patient included in the case study. The review also revealed that young people in homes with substance use and broken family dynamics have a higher risk of abusing substances when they grow older. Interventions that were found to combat substance use and violence included group therapy, family support group, peer support group, and cognitive behavior therapy that combines substance abuse and domestic violence. In conclusion, the research answered the question that, yes, an impaired family dynamic can lead to substance abuse more commonly than individuals with a supportive and healthy family dynamic.

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