



The Causes of Opioid Addiction

Richard Hamm

Los Angeles, CA, USA

Causes of Opioid Addiction

Opioid addiction, a chronic medical condition characterized by the compulsive use of opioids despite harmful consequences, has emerged as one of the most significant public health crises of our time (Ledger, J., 2020). Opioids include prescription painkillers such as oxycodone and hydrocodone, illicit drugs such as heroin, and synthetic drugs such as fentanyl. These substances are well known for being highly addictive and have caused thousands of overdoses. Opioids severely harm communities and individuals with a myriad of health, social, economic, and psychological burdens. Opioid addiction is caused by several factors, including cultural, social, and psychological factors and the ready availability of opioid products.

Economic and Cultural Factors

Economic instability and poverty coexist significantly with opioid addiction. Financial hardships often lead to hopelessness and despair, leading individuals to find comfort through opioids. As well, economic hardships can limit access to normal or healthy activities, increasing the likelihood of substance abuse as an escape from reality.

The connection between economic instability and substance addiction is well-documented. Economic hardships significantly impact today's society, leading to substantial amounts of stress and high substance abuse rates. The lack of opportunities for any healthy engagement for economically disadvantaged communities worsens the problem of addiction, as individuals turn to opioids to escape their harsh conditions. In places where economic opportunities are rare, individuals could feel trapped in a repeated cycle of poverty and addiction, with few ways of improving themselves (Montiel Ishino et al., 2020).

As well, low educational achievements and high dropout rates are very closely linked to higher rates of opioid abuse and addiction. People with lower levels of education often lack awareness about the risks of drug use, leading to more abuse and addiction. Not enough drug education and prevention programs further worsen this issue.

Extensive research and drug education programs are critically important in preventing substance abuse. However, many educational institutions lack the resources to implement working prevention programs, leaving students vulnerable to addiction (Horák & Verter, 2022). Furthermore, dropout rates are higher in communities suffering economic hardship, creating a cycle where lack of education and poverty fortify each other. Moreover, many people have a negative stigma towards the idea of seeking help for their substance use problems, which makes it hard for them to seek necessary treatment.

Limited access to healthcare, particularly therapy and addiction services, worsens the risk of opioid addiction and abuse. Economic and coordination barriers prevent individuals from receiving medical and psychological support. This lack of access leads to undiagnosed and untreated mental health issues, which often co-occur with substance abuse, creating a horrible

cycle of dependency on drugs. (Opioid Crisis Affects All Americans, Rural and Urban | USDA, n.d.).

Access to healthcare is an essential factor when addressing opioid addiction, as incomplete mental health resources significantly contribute to the opioid addiction crisis. Economic barriers and the stigma behind seeking help for addiction further hinder access to the necessary care, preserving the cycle of addiction (Patrick Abbott & Duane M. Chase, 2008). In many rural and underprivileged areas, there are not enough healthcare providers to meet the high demand for mental health and addiction services, leaving many individuals without the support they need to overcome the vicious cycle of opioid addiction.

Social Factors

In terms of social factors, family dynamics can play a critical role in the development of opioid addiction. It has been known that parents who abuse substances significantly influence their children to develop the same habits (Horák & Verter, 2022). The lack of parental supervision and involvement further contributes to teens and young adults experimenting with drugs. (Amy et al., 2011)

The familial influence on opioid use is high, as it has been found that children whose parents use substances are more likely to become substance users themselves than children whose parents do not use substances. The lack of parental guidance and support intensifies this risk as adolescents turn to drugs to cope with their mental, emotional, and psychological challenges. Furthermore, family dysfunction, domestic violence, and neglect infer that substance use among adolescents is a way of coping with trauma and the listings present in their lives (Frontiers | A Biopsychosocial Overview of the Opioid Crisis: Considering Nutrition and Gastrointestinal Health, n.d.).

Another factor that increases drug use among adolescents is peer pressure and social circles. The desire to be accepted socially amongst others often drives people to begin experimenting with opioids. Peer pressure plays a significant role in the initiation of opioid addiction since other people exert a considerable influence on the uptake of substances. Many adolescents use opioids to fit in with social groups and gain acceptance, increasing the risk of addiction (Patrick Abbott & Duane M. Chase, 2008). The influence of social media cannot be overlooked, as it glamorizes the use of drugs and exposes adolescents to the content of drug use that normalizes drug experimentation among them (Hilliard J., 2019).

Families and cultures that enable drug use contribute to the high rates of opioid addiction. Drug use in some communities may be normalized or even encouraged, hence the high rates of opioid addiction. Community attitudes may affect drug addiction since people will use substances that are accepted or encouraged by their peers (Jalali et al., 2020). In some communities, drug use is highly normalized, further enhancing the problem (NCBI Books, 2014). Community norms that view substance abuse as an acceptable coping strategy can create a horrible environment for adolescents where opioid addiction thrives.

On the other hand, negative societal attitudes towards addiction could prevent individuals from seeking help. Many people have a negative stigma about seeking help for their substance use problems, which prevents them from seeking necessary treatment. Additionally, the lack of community support for addiction treatment programs also makes it difficult for individuals to find the help they need.

Psychological Factors

The prevalence of mental health issues among individuals with opioid addiction is significant as mental health disorders often co-occur with substance abuse, creating a cycle of

dependency. Anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues significantly increase the risk of opioid addiction. Inadequate mental health resources increase this issue, leaving individuals without the support they need to manage their conditions. (*Mental Health and Substance Use Co-Occurring Disorders*, 2023). For many individuals, opioids are used as a form of self-medication to reduce the symptoms of undiagnosed and untreated mental health disorders, leading to a cycle of addiction that is difficult to break.

The impact of trauma on opioid addiction is profound. Trauma and adverse childhood experiences significantly increase the risk of developing substance use disorders. Physical, emotional, and sexual abuse creates a foundation for addiction, as individuals use drugs to cope with their trauma. The correlation between trauma and substance use leading to mental health issues is well-established. Individuals with a history of trauma are notably more likely to advance substance use disorders. Trauma creates a foundation for addiction, as individuals use opioids to cope with their immense emotional and psychological pain (Montiel Ishino et al., 2020). Adverse childhood experiences, such as abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction, can create long-lasting psychological scars that incline individuals to get onto substance abuse as a coping mechanism, as an escape from their harsh realities or mental health issues.

The use of drugs as a coping mechanism is a common factor in opioid addiction because individuals often turn to opioids to escape from life's challenges and emotional pain. Substance use becomes a method of avoiding or numbing horrible experiences. This reliance on opioids as a coping mechanism heightens the risk of addiction (Patrick Abbott & Duane M. Chase, 2008). The use of substances as a way to manage life's difficulties can, in an instant, escalate into dependence, as the temporary relief brought on by opioids becomes a necessity for dealing with a person's ongoing stress and emotional distress.

Availability and Accessibility of Opioids

The over-prescription of opioids has created an environment where these drugs are easily accessible. Over-prescribing opioid products such as painkillers increases the availability of opioids in households and plays a significant role in the development of opioid addiction (Jalali et al., 2020). Excessive prescribing practices have contributed to the availability of opioids in the illegal drug market and the misuse of opioids. Unused medications in households often lead to experimentation and addiction (NCBI Books, 2014).

Many opioids are also available through illegal channels, which contribute to opioid addiction. The availability of opioids in the black market is exceptionally convenient, and this explains the high rates of opioid addiction. Rural communities are particularly affected by the invasion of illegal opioids, as drug trafficking in these areas is prevalent (Fentanyl Use Spreads Deeper into Mexico, on Heels of US Epidemic | (Reuters, n.d.). The use of synthetic opioids such as fentanyl in the illicit drug market has also worsened the situation since these synthetic opioids are even more potent and toxic as compared to prescription drugs and opioids. Many people become hooked on these opioids, leading to overdoses or severe addiction.

Purchasing opioids through online platforms has also meant that one can easily get the drugs without a prescription. Social media influences drug trends and behaviors by glamorizing the use of drugs and facilitating opioid distribution in general.

The influence of online platforms and social media in this opioid addiction crisis is also a significant factor in the increasing opioid addiction rates since the internet has made it so much easier to obtain these opioids without prescriptions. Social networks and online forums serve as a black market that allows users to acquire opioids without the effort or struggle of legally obtaining them.

Conclusion

Opioid addiction is caused by several factors, including cultural, social, and psychological factors and the availability of opioids. Cultural factors that contribute to the opioid addiction crisis include economic hardships, poor education, and lack of health care. Social factors that also contribute to the crisis include family influence, peer pressure, and culture in the community. Psychological factors that contribute include mental health issues, trauma, and coping mechanisms. Lastly, the availability and accessibility factors that contribute to the opioid addiction crisis include over-prescription practices, easy access, the black market, and social media, further worsening the problem altogether.

Addressing the opioid addiction crisis requires comprehensive, multi-faceted approaches. Enhancing community awareness, improving access to healthcare and support, and supporting policy and regulatory changes are crucial. Educational programs that raise awareness about the dangers of opioid use, increased availability of mental health and addiction services, and better regulation of opioid prescriptions and illegal drug trafficking are essential. Collaboration among communities, educators, healthcare providers, and policymakers is vital to creating a unified front against the opioid epidemic. Only through concerted efforts can we hope to mitigate the devastating impact of opioid addiction on individuals and society.

References

- Abuse, N. I. on D. (--). *Part 1: The Connection Between Substance Use Disorders and Mental Illness* | National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA).
<https://nida.nih.gov/publications/research-reports/common-comorbidities-substance-use-disorders/part-1-connection-between-substance-use-disorders-mental-illness>
- Amy Yule, M. D., & Timothy Wilens, M. D. (2011). *Familial Influences on Adolescent Substance Use*. 28. <https://www.psychiatrictimes.com/view/familial-influences-adolescent-substance-use>
- Fentanyl* | National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA). (n.d.). Retrieved August 5, 2024, from <https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/fentanyl>
- Fentanyl | Overdose Prevention* | CDC. (n.d.). Retrieved August 5, 2024, from <https://www.cdc.gov/overdose-prevention/about/fentanyl.html>
- Fentanyl use spreads deeper into Mexico, on heels of US epidemic* | Reuters. (n.d.). Retrieved August 5, 2024, from <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/fentanyl-use-spreads-deeper-into-mexico-worrying-authorities-2024-02-20/>
- Frontiers | A Biopsychosocial Overview of the Opioid Crisis: Considering Nutrition and Gastrointestinal Health*. (n.d.). Retrieved August 5, 2024, from <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/public-health/articles/10.3389/fpubh.2019.00193/full>
- Hilliard, J. (2019, July 16). The Influence Of Social Media On Teen Drug Use. Addiction Center. <https://www.addictioncenter.com/community/social-media-teen-drug-use/>
- Horák, M., & Verter, N. (2022). Family and Substance Use. In M. Horák & N. Verter (Eds.), *Substance Use Disorders Treatment in Therapeutic Communities: A Cross-Cultural*

- Approach* (pp. 109–133). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-16459-0_8
- Jalali, M. S., Botticelli, M., Hwang, R. C., Koh, H. K., & McHugh, R. K. (2020). The opioid crisis: A contextual, social-ecological framework. *Health Research Policy and Systems*, 18(1), 87. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12961-020-00596-8>
- Ledger, J. (2020, December). Yale Medicine. Retrieved August 9, 2024, from <https://www.yalemedicine.org/conditions/opioid-use-disorder>
- Ledoux, S., Miller, P., Choquet, M., & Plant, M. (2002). FAMILY STRUCTURE, PARENT–CHILD RELATIONSHIPS, AND ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUG USE AMONG TEENAGERS IN FRANCE AND THE UNITED KINGDOM. *Alcohol and Alcoholism*, 37(1), 52–60. <https://doi.org/10.1093/alcalc/37.1.52>
- Mental Health and Substance Use Co-Occurring Disorders*. (2023, February 7). <https://www.samhsa.gov/mental-health/mental-health-substance-use-co-occurring-disorders>
- Montiel Ishino, F. A., McNab, P. R., Gilreath, T., Salmeron, B., & Williams, F. (2020). A comprehensive multivariate model of biopsychosocial factors associated with opioid misuse and use disorder in a 2017–2018 United States national survey. *BMC Public Health*, 20(1), 1740. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-020-09856-2>
- Opioid Crisis Affects All Americans, Rural and Urban | USDA*. (n.d.). Retrieved August 5, 2024, from <https://www.usda.gov/media/blog/2018/01/11/opioid-crisis-affects-all-americans-rural-and-urban>
- Opioid Misuse in Rural America | USDA*. (n.d.). Retrieved August 5, 2024, from <https://www.usda.gov/topics/opioids>

Oregon Health Authority: Fentanyl: Opioid Overdose and Misuse: State of Oregon. (n.d.).

Retrieved August 5, 2024, from

<https://www.oregon.gov/oha/ph/preventionwellness/substanceuse/opioids/pages/fentanylfacts.aspx>

Oregon Health Authority: Reducing Opioid Overdose and Misuse: Opioid Overdose and Misuse:

State of Oregon. (n.d.). Retrieved August 5, 2024, from

<https://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/PREVENTIONWELLNESS/SUBSTANCEUSE/OPIOID/Pages/index.aspx>

Patrick Abbott, M. D., & Duane M. Chase, M. D. (2008). *Culture and Substance Abuse: Impact of Culture Affects Approach to Treatment.* 25.

<https://www.psychiatrictimes.com/view/culture-and-substance-abuse-impact-culture-affects-approach-treatment>

Racial/Ethnic and Age Group Differences in Opioid and Synthetic Opioid–Involved Overdose Deaths Among Adults Aged ≥ 18 Years in Metropolitan Areas—United States, 2015–2017

| *MMWR.* (n.d.). Retrieved August 5, 2024, from

<https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/68/wr/mm6843a3.htm/>

Substance Use and Misuse in Rural Areas Overview—Rural Health Information Hub. (n.d.).

Retrieved August 5, 2024, from <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/topics/substance-use>

Treatment (US), C. for S. A. (2014). Drug Cultures and the Culture of Recovery. In *Improving*

Cultural Competence. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

(US). <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK248421/>