

Use of Photovoice in Addiction

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KEYWORDS

• Addiction • Images • Photographs • Photovoice • Recovery substance abuse

KEY POINTS

- Drug addiction is a major public health problem.
- Recovery is a challenging process of change for the addict that involves stigma.
- Photovoice provides an ability to address issues with a powerful visual image through clues to decode multiple layers of meaning within the addict's private world.

NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

Addiction to narcotic substances is an increasing public health problem.^{1–3} The misuse of a drug is considered taking a medication different from that which was prescribed or for a different condition than prescribed.¹ It can cause harm to the individual, families, and community (**Table 1**).^{1,4–8}

It is estimated that 4.4 million Americans chronically abuse drugs: 3.6 million are chronic cocaine users and 810,000 chronically use heroin (**Fig. 1**).^{1,5,6,8–10} The National Survey on Drug Use and Health data noted illicit drug use in Americans older than age 12 to be second only to marijuana use. The number of persons with opioid dependence increased from 936,000 in 2002 to 1.4 million in 2011. An estimated 56.1% of opioid-dependent persons in 2011 were age 26 or older with a third (472,000) age 18 to 25. Illicit drug use has increased in teenagers and those older than age 50 by 50% between 2002 and 2011. There have been 1.9 million or more new nonmedical opioid users each year since 2002, contributing to increases in indicators of problems associated with its use.^{7,8,11} In addition to illicit and controlled substance use, a national study identified an emerging trend in the abuse of prescription and over-the-counter drugs.^{8,11}

There are enormous and increasing health care costs correlating to drug abuse caused by the lost productivity and increased medical requirements needed to treat severe drug-related health problems.¹¹ In 2011, the National Institutes of Health estimated that the financial costs of untreated opiate addiction are rising above \$235 billion a year related to social costs of destroyed families, destabilized communities, increased health care costs, and increased crime.^{4,5,8}

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Table 1 Harms of addiction	
Individual	Community
Health	Reduced worker productivity
Disease	Increased rates of domestic violence
Poor parenting	Criminal behavior
Decreased self-esteem	Premature death
Increased public disorder	Morbidity
Poverty	Health care costs secondary to adverse reactions and disease can also be seen
Increased police involvement and congestion in the courts	

Data from Refs.^{1,4-8}

ADDICTION

Recognizing the immediacy of reward associated with drug use coupled with the documented changes in brain chemistry that occur with long-term abuse of drugs is critically important to understanding why recovery can be difficult. Drug abuse is a disorder of the whole person. The problem is the person, not the drug. The addiction is only a symptom and not the essence of the disorder.¹² Addiction is a primary, chronic, neurobiologic disease, with genetic, psychosocial, and environmental factors influencing its development and manifestations (Box 1).^{6,13-16} It is characterized by behaviors that include one or more of the following: impaired control over drug use, compulsive use, continued use despite harm, and craving.^{13,17} It is medically diagnosed in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition — Text Revision* (Table 2).^{1,17,18}

Research supports that those who misuse substances suffer from diffuse cortical damage,^{14,16,19} most of which occurred in the frontal and temporal lobes. Although these addicts may seem to be able to function in everyday situations, loss of frontal brain activity limits one’s executive ability leading to misinterpretations of actions. As a result, addictive people seem generally apathetic, indifferent, and lacking



Fig. 1. Rates of addiction. (Data from Refs.^{1,6,9,10}. Photos courtesy of Foundation for a Drug-Free World [www.drugfreeworld.org]; with permission.)

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