

The Relationship between Family Factors and Substance Abuse

Family Team:

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Drug Abuse in Adolescence (Carr, 2000)

- Personal Factors
 - Predisposing personal and constitutional factors
 - Personal beliefs and behaviour patterns
 - Belief or narrative that youngster is not effective in controlling drug use
 - Drugs are the best way to forget your problems
 - Denial of severity of the problem

Family Factors

- Family behaviour patterns and family beliefs and narratives.
- **Predisposing Family-Based Risk Factors:**
 - Poor relationship with parents
 - Marital Discord
 - Parental Drug Abuse
 - Inconsistent Discipline
 - Lack of parental supervision
 - Unclear rules, roles and routines

Family Beliefs and Behaviour Patterns

- Parents may become involved in drug abuse maintaining interactions with their children if they have inaccurate knowledge about adolescent drug abuse and its management.

Network Problems (Context)

- High levels of stress
- Limited support
- Social Disadvantage within the family`s wider social system.
- Lack of coordination and clear communication (eg bad versus mad treatment)
- Under-resourced educational environments
- Deviant peer group and deviant culture eg high crime rate

Opiate Addicts and Their Parents (1975)

- Bruce K. Alexander & Gary Dibb
(University Burnaby Canada): British Columbia
- Family Process CD-ROM: 1999
- Ethnocentric research.
- Cultural Relevance: Very close to our experience with Maltese families. (Vancouver 1972-1974)

Opiate addicts who maintain close ties with their parents

- Close Emotional and Financial relationships
- Special Sub-Group :Minority or Majority?
- Gender Difference (Especially Young Males?)
- Parents as deeply concerned but unable to control the addiction of their offspring
- Focus on dyad or triad of parents and addict

Aim of research paper

- Records of a methadone program: rough indication of the proportion of addicts who belong to addict-families
- Description of the common characteristics of 18 “addict-families” observed in family therapy
- The Relation between process in addict-families and persistence of addiction will be analyzed.

Participants

- Son or daughter between 18 and 28 years old
- Close relationship: living in the parental home or visiting twice a week or more.
- Addiction: taking an opiate drug daily for at least 3 months.
- In 15 out of 18 cases the son or daughter was receiving methadone maintenance treatment and individual counseling.
- Family Therapy only given to families where both two parents and addict participate (exception for single parents)

- All families but one had steady income from employment of a parent.
- Range of employments
- Race: Caucasian
- Majority of parents living at home (7 families were without a father)
- Several families: one parent was a heavy drinker
- In 13 out of 18, the addict was male. Median Age: 21.
- In 17 cases addict was using methadone or heroin during at least part of the therapy period.

Observations in Family Therapy

1. **The parents were much more successful in meeting reality demands than the addict.**
 - Difficulty in finding and keeping jobs.
 - Poor academic achievements
 - Difficulty keeping driving license
 - Failure to pay debts
 - Failure to keep appointments regularly
 - Inability to get up in the morning
 - Not caring for their own possessions and refusing to help care for the home
 - Poor teeth due to neglect
 - No credible plans for the future
 - Faced criminal charges for drug offences or theft.

- 2. In spite of underlying frustration and disappointment, relations between addicts and parents and between the parents themselves were congenial, calm, polite, and conventional during therapy.
- Overt anger was very rare (except therapist)
- Family members reluctant to criticize each other except in joking and trivial ways.
- Addiction agreed upon safe locus of criticism
- Myth of harmony to the marital relationship

3. The addicts did not comply with their parents' urgings to help with household chores, meet financial obligations, or discontinue their use of drugs or association with drug-users.

- Making excuses which parents were willing to accept
- Making promises which were unkept
- Obtaining money from parents through nagging, accusing parents of insufficient caring, threats, making contracts they fail to hold.
- Amused resignation of parents

4. Husbands appeared to dominate wives.
 - Father talked most and steered conversation during therapy.
 - Wife allowing herself to be interrupted and changing her mind in face of husband`s disagreements
 - Marital relationship described mostly positively, conventional stereotype of dominating male and accommodating wife.

5. Parents used their money and energy extravagantly to indulge the addict, and the addict relied heavily on the parents to meet his needs.
 - Buying expensive cars , Paying addiction expenses, Large sums of pocket money.
 - Driving them for appointments, Making excuses for them for missed appointments
 - Parents needing reassurance they were not being too hard when they refused such requests.
 - Addicts confidence that they would be allowed to live at home no matter what they did. Parents confirmed this.

Conflict between over-involved parent and peripheral parent.

- Underlying bitterness not dealt with overtly
 - This conflict as source of tension in marriage.
6. Parents did not help the adults to acquire adult skills or to take realistic steps towards independence.

7. Parents and addicts shared a perception of the addict as a failure.
 - Placing high values on conventional virtues like competitiveness and aspired to an affluent standard of living.
 - Addiction blamed for all problems, addict perceived as unusually gifted or charming (usually most among siblings) prior to getting into drugs.

The Addict-Family and Addiction: A Hypothesis

- The ability to create a satisfying alternative life-style following withdrawal can be crucial.
- The relationship between the addict and his parents reduces the possibility of the addict` s developing a satisfactory life-style without addiction.
- Adult skills, social-maturity and self-esteem impeded
- Family Rule of superficiality in communication.

Addiction`s Functionality:

- **For the Addict:**
Relief from painful awareness of his failures
Addiction`s Glamour
- **For the Parents:**
Rationalization for their overindulgent relationship
- **For the Family :**
Rationalization for impoverished family relationships :
ex. Joyless marital relationship

Discussion

- Minority in Vancouver 1975.
- Descriptions should not be generalized beyond this special group.
- Does this description apply to Maltese families?
In our opinion: Majority possibly due to cultural and geographical context.

Mothers` and Fathers` Roles

- Authors concluded their fathers were not absent and were as likely as mothers to be overindulgent:
 - selective sample
 - how did they come to this conclusion (authority as different differs from presence).
- How might Maltese parents differ in terms of mother-father roles?
 - The theme of culture: class

Clinical Implications

- Dilemma: encourage the addict to leave home or attempt to change family process?
- The themes of parents' marital difficulties and social isolation.
- Many local hypotheses have to be based on clinical impressions and experience.
- The need for local and international empirical research in this field.