

Addiction in Adolescence

Linnea S. Puckett

School of Behavioral Science, Liberty University

Authors Note:

This article addresses addiction and its effect on adolescent development. Because of this, there will be a conflict of interest. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Linnea Puckett.

Email: lpuckett10@liberty.edu

Abstract

The adolescent years are arguably the most challenging for children. During this development period, adolescents are no longer only influenced by their parents and friends but also by their peers and society. They are experiencing changes in their interest, physical bodies, and emotions as puberty hits. The influence of internal and external factors can influence a child to start to seek the approval of others to define themselves. Frequently, this can lead to poor decision-making, making adolescence the most dangerous time for addiction development.

Adolescents are often highly influenced by their peers, society, and media. Due to certain things being labeled as “cool,” such as drugs, alcohol, and sex, by these three groups, many adolescents find themselves compromising their previous worldview values to win the approval of others. Also, adolescents face their first identity crisis, discovering what is truly valuable to them.

One could argue that this stage of development is the most impressionable time for a child or teen. Things that used to hold value, such as honesty in schoolwork, obedience to parents, pursuit of high grades, and protecting your health, are questioned, and exploration of one’s identity becomes the key to the overall development.

Keywords: Addiction, Adolescents, Teens, Development, Influence, Peer Pressure, Society push.

Addiction in Adolescence

Addiction, by definition, is “a strong inclination to do, use, or indulge in something repeatedly”(Merriam-Webster, 2023). Alternatively, “a compulsive, chronic, physiological or psychological need for a habit-forming substance, behavior, or activity having harmful physical, psychological, or social effects and typically causing well-defined symptoms (such as anxiety, irritability, tremors, or nausea) upon withdrawal or abstinence”(Merriam-Webster, 2023). In adolescents or teenagers, addiction can often result from strong influence by peers, society, and media to participate in highly addictive behaviors, such as drinking, smoking, doing drugs, and sex. With the mixed desire to understand what their identity should be and wanting to impress, teenagers have a higher chance of being influenced by what these three outside sources say than what their family finds of value.

In this paper, we will discuss what the current research is saying about addiction/abuse, resilience in this population, and what interventions may counteract the abuse of substances and addictions in this population. Also, we will explore the importance of healthy spiritual development and its effect on the likelihood of use/abuse/addiction in adolescent years. We will also cover what is happening locally in Washington regarding addiction problems. In the conclusion, we will look at further studies that should be done to foster better knowledge.

Addiction Resilience

Although there is much pressure on teenagers to explore dangerously addictive behaviors, some counter-pressure pushes teenagers to pursue resilience and resist the urge to give into what is considered “societal norms.” Some of this resilience and resistance comes from a change in perspective of what is considered essential or the onset of maturity. “The notion of maturing out has been investigated extensively in population-based surveys. Results from these studies show

that role transitions (e.g., marriage, employment, and starting a family) and changes in substance use motives are associated with reductions from heavy to moderate levels of, as well as resistance from, substance use” (Cousijin et al., 2017).

Cousijin et al. believe that if adolescents had enhanced associative learning and social attunement could drive more flexible behavioral change in the positive reinforcement of addictive behaviors. As a result, the adolescent sees the consequences of their actions and can be driven positively or negatively affected to ensure better positive reinforcements than addictive behaviors. (Cousijin et al. 2017). For Morrow and Flagel, another way we can counter addictive behaviors includes “using biomarkers to identify individuals who are at high risk of developing addiction” (Morrow et al. 2016, pg 9).

The Spirituality Effect

One of the critical development factors of Adolescents is their spiritual growth. In addition, spirituality can positively or negatively affect the desire to pursue addictive behaviors. Depending on the type of spirituality developed in the teen, it can influence the trend of negative influence in spirituality based on the hipster lifestyle. Hipster Spirituality has roots in Native American ideals, with beliefs in the balance of life in Mother Nature and the Universe. For this group, the influences of smoking are the high-risk factor. “With new alternative forms of smoking, such as electronic cigarettes and hookahs, gaining popularity and favor among the public, the hipster subculture embraces the trend as well.

Consequently, more individuals are exposed to smoking. Furthermore, beyond social influence, companies are tailoring their products to appeal to this particular subculture, placing a specific aim on young adults with a high interest in social status and modernity, things which the hipster movement embodies”(Campbell. 2015, pg 150).

On the other end, Spirituality can positively affect countering addictive behavior when the person's faith stresses the importance of morals and the value of respecting your body. Faiths such as Buddhism, Christianity, and Hinduism stress the importance of maintaining a healthy balance for the body. Buddhism influences the belief in Karma. That one's actions in the past can influence one's future life and reincarnation. Also, they believe that in order for one to reach enlightenment (which is the final stage of human suffering to eternal peace), one must practice meditation, spiritual and physical labor, and have good behavior. (National Geographic Society, 2023). Hinduism has very similar aspects to Buddhism in this manner. Christianity expresses the importance of how you should treat your body. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20, Colossians 3:5, 1 Corinthians 3: 16-17). (New International Version, 2011).

Based on the developed religion of adolescence and the importance of practicing the religion, a teenager can strongly desire to abstain from drugs, alcohol, and sex. The stronger the influence of spiritual belief is on the teenager, the less likely the teenager will conform to societal norms and negative peer pressure.

Local News

Local news in Washington is pressing for a new law to keep drugs illegal. AP News states, "The law retains criminal penalties for drug possession, making it a gross misdemeanor punishable by up to six months in jail for the first two offenses and up to a year after that. But police and prosecutors would be encouraged to divert cases for treatment or other services, and the measure provides \$44 million for investments that include methadone mobile units, crisis centers, and short-term housing for people with substance-use disorders" (New Washington Law Keeps Drugs Illegal, Boosts Resources for Housing and Treatment, 2023). The old law in place

was bound to expire on July 1st this year, so the bill passage became a priority to keep dangerous drugs from becoming legal.

Not only will this law help save thousands of lives taken by addiction, but it can also save lives of innocent lives. In recent UW (University of Washington) News, reports of people using and smoking drugs on the buses are causing public health concerns. UW news states:

“Researchers detected methamphetamine in 98% of surface samples and 100% of air samples, while fentanyl was detected in 46% of surface and 25% of air samples. One air sample exceeded [federal recommendations for airborne fentanyl exposure at work established by the U.S.](#)

[Environmental Protection Agency](#)” (UW assessment finds fentanyl and methamphetamine smoke linger on public transit vehicles, 2023). However, because the research is just starting, there is no proof of secondhand drug use's potential health risks or effects. Still, the effects of drugs on the mental health of all present can lead to distress. Therefore, the desire to have these risks removed should be the priority of Washington State.

Conclusion

In conclusion, adolescent addiction is a significantly prevalent and severe issue, not only in our society but in the peer relationships of teens. Although there is resilience among adolescents and encouragement of spiritual beliefs that foster resistance to drugs, the pressure of society, peers, and media have caused a dramatic increase in addiction. Which ultimately means more causes of death related to overdose. Therefore, it is essential that more research is done on how to foster positive peer influence, the effects of secondhand drug/smoking on the health of adolescents, how social pressures can be redirected, and how we can change the portrayal of addictive

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behaviors in media. Only then can we ensure that we are not only protecting the new generation but the generations to come from this harmful style of living.

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