

THE ROLE OF DRUGS IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

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Recent years have witnessed major progress in the field of health care with important advances emerging at an unprecedented rate. While modern science and technology have contributed to lengthened lives, to alleviation of pain and suffering and to the enrichment of the quality of life, public expectations have continued to change. We live in a world colored with phantasy -- heightened and glorified by the media!

We live in a period in which change is constant. Everyday new forces, new confrontations, new policies alter our society. We are being increasingly pressured by forces of rapid and sometimes radical change. Change that offers opportunity for growth while, at the same time, signaling rather clearly that certain techniques, practices and procedures have become obsolete. The challenge to keep abreast is tremendous and complicated.

During these times of high unemployment and inflation, we tend to focus on cold economic statistics - namely number of jobs, income loss, crime and other effects on the economy. However, there's a tragic, human side of a depressed economy we often forget.

Inflation, depression and unemployment do more than affect the gross national product. They bring on despair, anger and depression among the jobless and their families. Studies show that during periods of high unemployment, the number of divorces, suicides, admissions to mental hospitals and prisons increase. There is also increased use of alcohol, tobacco and caffeine -- people use more chemicals and drugs as coping mechanisms.

We might ask why do people use drugs? Most western civilizations are drug-taking cultures. Few people get up in the morning without drinking their daily cup of coffee, tea or cocoa. A mid-morning snack is usually accompanied by one of these beverages or "soda pop" which may contain caffeine. About 39% of the American public then lights up a cigarette with this morning break.

At home, a young mother take a tranquilizer to ease the tensions caused by raising young children, the older individual may take a laxative, the children take vitamins, and many people will swallow aspirin for a headache or take medication for a stomach-ache that may be caused by lack of breakfast or by stress. Anyone who works in the high pressured field of public relations advertising, stock market and crime preventions walks with antacids like Maaloz, Tums, or Amphagel.

At lunch, some workers have a cocktail along with coffee and a cigarette, whereas others may swallow a variety of nostrums for real and imaginary aches and pains.

Late afternoon and early evening is traditionally cocktail time. After work, the tired often harrassed individual stops with friends for a round of drinks. When he or she arrives home, a drink before or with dinner may be the custom. The student may relax with a marijuana joint before dinner. Later on some amphetamines or "pep pills" may be consumed so the students can study most of the night in preparation for an examination. Adults relaxing in front of the television or visiting with friends may consume a few beers, cocktails or marijuana to make the occasion brighter.

If there is a celebration, party or wedding, many kinds of alcoholic beverages will probably be freely served and consumed.

Later in the evening, the person who cannot get to sleep may take a prescription or "over the counter" sleeping medication, whereas the long-distance truck driver, night nurse, telephone operator or cab driver or any night time worker may consume amphetamines to keep awake on the job.

We are a drug using culture and most of our daily activities, in some way or other, are touched by the use of drugs or other chemicals.

* Since the beginning of human life, there has been a desire to change consciousness awareness. This appears to be a basic need that transcends culture, age, race, intelligence and other human and personal characteristics. This urge to relieve tension is felt spontaneously from within the individual. It reaches a peak, finds pleasure in relief, and then dissipates. The rhythm is different for everyone. Like the sexual need, the need to alter consciousness feels good and is satisfying to an inner urge.

The fulfillment of this need has been expressed through medical religious, and recreational settings and many methods have been used to accomplish it. Meditation, chanting, prayer, Yoga, and Zen and similar exercises are found in most societies as a means of changing consciousness in a religious setting. Alcohol, the most commonly used drug throughout history, has been used by most cultures for these purposes. Some groups have used hallucinogenic mushrooms, cactus, seeds and other herbs to better communicate with the gods or higher powers so as to gain inner peace, inspiration, or prophecy as part of this religious consciousness changing experience.

In medical settings the relief of pain, in particular, has been accomplished throughout time, by such techniques as chanting, hypnosis, acupuncture, the "laying on of hands", and herbs such as opium, marijuana, and alcohol.

In the average primary-care physician's office, it has been estimated that apparently 75 per cent of all patients have psychologically induced illnesses or symptoms ranging from ulcers, headaches, rashes, weakness and backaches. In many cases, the symptoms of these and other illness will disappear with the administration of a placebo or "sugar pill". A change in consciousness has occurred in the person who believes that he or she has received some kind of medicine to relieve the problem and the symptoms go away.

The desire to change consciousness has also been used in recreational settings and secular festivities. Most celebrations such as the winter, spring and autumn festivals in many cultures are usually accompanied by the use of alcohol or hallucinogens. The greeting of relatives and friends, the making of peace or war, the vanquishing of an enemy, the celebration of love or a loved one have all been accompanied throughout most cultures with a change in consciousness either by dancing,

chanting, or using a variety of natural dru

The urge to change consciousness often is strong when the individual is in a crisis period and is attempting to work through a solution. For some people, it is tempting to obliterate oneself from the crisis by altering his or her consciousness. This may take the form of heroin dependency, alcoholism, religious or political fanaticism, constant party-going, sexual conquests, constantly being stoned on marijuana, watching television, sleeping most of the day, over-eating to obesity, or using any other substance or becoming involved in an activity to an excess. Excess means being engaged to the degree that other areas of the person's life suffer such as his or her interpersonal relations with family and friends, poor school or job performance, or physical harm to oneself.

Suppose we relate some of the tasks of late-adolescence-young adulthood, when if resolved satisfactorily help one come to terms with him or herself and lead a much happier life.

All of us have certain basic needs that must be met in order for us to survive. If these needs are not met, we will cease to function in a positive psychological, sociological or emotional level. ABRAHAM MASLOW characterizes these needs as:

1. Physiological such as oxygen, food and water.
2. Safety, which includes shelter, clothing, and protection from hostile beings and the environment.
3. Love and Belonging, which includes close family, friendship, and love ties.
4. Self-esteem, which includes feeling good about oneself, one's job, status, work, and career.
5. Self-Actualization, which is the fulfillment of creativity, peace with oneself and detachment.

In the process of meeting one's basic needs and going through the tasks of young adulthood, a variety of activities are carried out daily including some to alter consciousness states. If these actions are exhibited in a responsible manner, the person usually develops and continues to grow as a mature human being. What is responsible behaviour?

Kirkendall and many others prominent in social psychology believe that responsible behaviour is generally those actions, decisions, and attitudes that increase trust among people; enhance self-respect, dissolve barriers separating people; aid crativity, work and job performance; and augment social, physical, and mental well being. Responsible behaviour also includes accepting responsibility for both positive and negative results of your actions. Most people also feel that responsible behaviour would include any action or activity that did not harm yourself or others.

Examples of responsible behaviours would be the use of alcohol at a party and then waiting for the effects to wear off before driving home; completing a job the best you know how; scheduling time to spend with your family; taking prescription drugs as the doctor ordered; eating wholesome foods in adequate amounts; taking on only those tasks which you have sufficient time and energy to complete and learning all you can about drugs (legal and illegal) so that you can make wise decisions. Let's begin with ALCOHOL.

Throughout history most cultures have used alcohol in one form or another. Alcoholic beverages were probably discovered accidentally when mixtures of crushed fruits or honey were left exposed in a warm atmosphere to airborne yeasts that convereted the natural sugars into alcohol and carbon dioxide by fermentation.

The oldest known code of laws, that of Hammurabi of Eabylonia, (in about 1770 B.C.) regulated drinking establishments, and Sumerian physicians prescribed beer in 2100 B.C. References to drinking and making wine are found in abundance in the Old Testament of the Bible. So alcoholic beverages have been around for a very, long time. Most people who drink are Social Drinkers which means that they may take a drink to celebrate a birthday, wedding, promotion or some family social event. But this may happen less than 6-7 times a year. These people are also called Infrequent Drinkers. A Light Drinker drinks about once a month, but never more than 1-3 drinks at any one time. A Moderate Drinker drinks at least once a month, but drinks no more than 3-4 drinks at a time. Or he or she may drink once a week but no more than 1-2 drinks at one time.

A Moderate Heavy Drinker drinks at least once a week and 3-4 drinks or drinks once a month with 5 or more drinks at one time. A Heavy Drinker drinks more than once a week with 5 or more drinks consumed at any one time.

Alcohol is sometimes considered a food, and each gram of pure alcohol contains seven calories. However, these are often called "empty" calories because they contain no nutrients. A half ounce of alcohol contains about 100 calories but the various sugars found in most drinks, especially beer and wine, give higher calories to each average sized drink.

- * A bottle of beer (12 ounces) contains 170 calories.
- * Two ounces of whiskey contain 140 calories.
- * Eight ounces of wine contain 270 calories.

The drinking of alcoholic beverages is considered for many social situations almost necessary. About 85 per cent of all North Americans who drink do so without harmful effects to themselves, their families or to society. Most young people favor beer, while wines are in among adults and for the second year in a row, hard liquor sales decreased. Certain ethnic cultures, drink wine with food. This is traditional and alcohol is not abused or misused.

Alcohol in one form or another has long been used in medicine. It was used in surgery, in childbirth, and as an anesthetic in ancient times (even in old Western movies, the doctor always gave the patient a drink before removing the bullet). Whiskey was used for treating colds, brandy to revive one in a faint and wine to build up the blood. Often physicians prescribed a drink to sparken a sluggish appetite. Everyone knows about Lydia Pinkam's secret ingredient which relieved menstrual cramps and pre-menstrual tension real or phantasized.

Perhaps one of the earliest uses for alcohol was in religious ceremonies. Red wines symbolizing the blood of life from the cults of Bacchus passed into Christianity. On the other hand, other religious groups developed abstinence beliefs as part of their religious practice. In Arabia, the followers of Muhammad and in China, the followers of Buddha forbade the consumption of all alcoholic beverages.

Although most people drink alcoholic beverages in a mature and responsible manner, many use alcohol in an irresponsible manner thereby causing problems for themselves, their friends, their family, and society.

Alcohol abuse or problem drinking is usually defined as acute intoxication or binge drinking that results with problems with family, friends, job, or the law. Problem drinking is similar to alcoholism with the exception that the person abusing alcohol is often not physically dependent upon the substance. Problem drinking, also, is usually more apt to occur in the 15-24 year old group. Alcohol abuse is often defined in relation to alcohol-related problems such as fighting, crime, and driving while intoxicated. Surveys find that males under 25 are most likely to be found in this group.

Both alcohol abuse and alcoholism in the United States cost at least \$26 billion each year lost to society through lost production, health and medical expenses, motor vehicle accidents, crime, social welfare, alcohol programs and research. The social cost of irresponsible use results in family breakup, divorce, loss of employment, unwanted pregnancies, and child and spouse abuse.

The third largest economic cost associated with alcoholism and alcohol abuse is motor vehicle accidents. Alcohol abuse contributes about 43 percent of nonpedestrian traffic fatalities, 39 percent of fatal adult pedestrian fatalities, 14 percent of personal injury accidents, and 7 percent of property damage accidents. At least 43 percent of motor vehicle accidents are attributed to alcohol and in at least 62 percent of fatal accidents, the driver had been drinking.

Briefly to review some of the Physical Effects of Excess Drinking and Irresponsible Alcohol Use, the incidence of heart damage particularly Cardiomyopathy (a disease of the heart muscle) has a direct relationship with heavy drinking. Because heavy drinkers are often heavy smokers, it is thought that the higher incidence of heart disease in alcoholics and heavy drinkers is probably caused by smoking and not the alcohol in itself.

Chronic excessive drinking can cause serious

damage to the central nervous system. The person shows symptoms of Wernicke's encephalopathy with uncontrollable eye movements, jerky and unbalanced movements and mental confusion. Later Korsakoff's Psychosis appears in which there are defects in retentive memory, apathy and inertia. Since alcoholics are often malnourished, there may be pellagra with diarrhea, skin eruptions caused by deficiency in Vitamin B.

We are all familiar with Cirrhosis of the liver. However, a high intake of alcohol by itself is not sufficient to produce cirrhosis. Poor nutritional states contribute to this condition. The most common effect in the liver after continued high alcohol intake is the development of fatty liver in which lipids or fat accumulate in the liver. Death can occur suddenly from this problem and it is considered an important cause of death in individuals age 25 to 44 who are heavy drinkers. The continuing scarring might lead to sudden hemorrhage.

Other risks include cancer of the mouth, throat and other parts of the body, gastritis, anxiety, irritability and fatigue.

ALCOHOLISM is a complex process with many definitions. It is a disease, just as cancer, heart trouble or arthritis. It is a disease that is treatable. It is a disease which can be treated at many stages. Once it was believed that a person had to reach BOTTOM, so to speak. That is not true. A person can be helped at any point. We have been led to believe that only "street bums, derelicts and the like are alcoholics". Only 5 percent of all alcoholics fall into that category. Most alcoholics are hard working, upright citizens in the community holding responsible positions, ministers, doctors, teachers, housewives, students, office workers, bankers and just ordinary people. Alcoholic persons have both a physical and psychological dependency upon alcohol and usually:-

1. Have a loss of control over their drinking. They find themselves drinking when they did not intend to drink or drink more than they planned.
2. Have functional or structural damage with social, economic, or domestic problems. There are often job and family problems among alcoholics along with various alcohol related illnesses.

The message clearly says to youngsters. "With a drink, you too can enjoy the good life". There are creams, lotions and pills for bad breath, acne, hairy legs, white teeth, shining hair, smooth skin, shapely legs and bright eyes. All will make you most attractive and able to get the mate you desire. If you ache, there are medicines to alleviate pre-menstrual and menstrual stress, loneliness, drowsiness, joint pains, irregularity and smelly feet. All can be bought at your neighbourhood drug store. You learn that you need not let your stressful job upset you, because there is Tums, or Maaloz. If you tend toward sinusitis and frequent sore throats and colds, you can buy at least a dozen of quick cures.

As educators, parents and citizens, we must create a climate of WELL BEING which helps young people attain and maintain a high degree of mental and physical health which results from successfully satisfying one's

burdened with stress, war, poverty, disease, distrust, fear and nuclear threat, we must help our children to view a society where freedom is the ideal and the ever-broadening sharing of human values the constant goal. The personal recognition and individual commitment to such standards and ethics will enable one to develop, within the broad limits of his or her own society's needs an abiding sense of responsibility for his or her own attitudes and behaviour - a dedication to truth, honesty, justice, fairness and compassion.

I would like to conclude with a few words by Edna St. Vincent Millay.

"THE WORLD STAND OUT ON EITHER SIDE
NO WIDER THAN THE HEART IF WIDE
ABOVE THE WORLD IS STRETCHED THE SKY
NO HIGHER THAN THE SOUL IS HIGH".

3. Use alcohol as a way to escape from various problems that threaten to deteriorate their lives.

CAUSES

There are many theories, but basically the cause is unknown. Different things may trigger alcoholism in different individuals. There is a Genetic factor which means it tends to occur in families. There are others which involve abnormal metabolite in the brain and nutritional genetic factors.

Some consider Alcoholism as the result of a LEARNING THEORY. Alcohol ingestion is considered a reflex response to some stimulus as a way of reducing anxiety. There is also the ALCOHOLIC PERSONALITY THEORY. Some of the characteristics found among alcoholics are low frustration tolerance, socialability, feeling of inferiority, fearfulness and dependency. As yet, there is no research which has been able to identify a common personality structure of an alcoholic that could be used for predictive purposes. Then there is the SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY. Those cultures who tend to drink for the sake of drinking have higher rates of alcoholism. These are Americans, French, Poles, Irish, Russians, Swedes. Others who tend to drink in religious celebrations or with family tend to have lower rates of alcoholism - such as Chinese, Greek, Jews, Spanish, Portuguese and Italians.

HOW CAN WE PREVENT THIS DISEASE?

First we know that young people are experimenting with drugs and alcohol at an early age. The age of the first drink is now about eight or nine. Why? Some authorities speculate that earlier social maturation of today's young people leads to earlier social experimentation in a variety of so-called adult behaviours. These include smoking, sex, lack of supervision and freedom to come and go at will.

Young people drink and use drugs for a number of reasons. Parental and Peer influences are the most potent. Since parents serve as role models for adult behaviour, their attitudes and practices play a major role in determining their children's approach to alcohol during adolescence. The desire to be liked by peers and be accepted by them is extremely important to youngsters. So parents should know more about the friends of their children and the kinds of influences which place stress upon

behaviours. We also know where drinking is forbidden by adults, teenage drinking is more likely to reflect rebellion against parental standards. Where families have flexibility and acceptance of drinking in a social manner and where children see it use with meals, at parties and religious ceremonies, youngsters tend to follow this pattern.

Other important factors include achievement sense of responsibility, goals, acceptance by important family members and general good healthy attitudes towards life. When children are taught decision-making early, they tend to evaluate more carefully the choice to drink or not to drink, to smoke marijuana or not to smoke, to inject heroin or not to or to sniff cocaine or leave it alone.

Children must know the facts about drugs. These should not be presented in isolation but integrated into a school curriculum as part of education for living. Many of the same decision-making mechanism involved in deciding how or not to use alcohol or drugs are involved in deciding how to drive a car how to handle finances, to have or not engage in sex, to choose a career or get a job. This kind of education should begin in the first grade. Even children at six and seven years of age have some very clear notions about alcohol and drugs and their effects.

The schools are a logical place to initiate prevention, but long before the children reach schools, parents have demonstrated their value systems to youngsters. The family is always the most effective agent of change and influence. The parents must set the example for their children. This means monitoring their own behaviour. If children see parents taking aspirins for headaches, tranquilizers for stressful situations, alcohol to relax, they learn that this is how one avoids unpleasantness and pain. They do not learn how to approach the problem logically and think through a satisfactory solution. They look for the "Magic Bullet".

I began this talk with the theme THE ROLE OF DRUGS IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY. For too many, the media provides that Magic Bullet. Alcohol is shown at cocktail parties. The women are beautifully groomed and stylishly dressed. The men are gallant and charming. Everyone seems to be having a good time.