

Center for Behavioral Health Studies

The Dual Challenge of Substance Abuse and Mental Disorders

As many as 60% of all people who abuse drugs and alcohol also suffer from some form of mental illness. Conversely, an estimated 45% of individuals with mental illnesses also have substance abuse disorders. This information comes from recent studies funded by the National Institute of Drug Abuse (NIDA).

The current reality is people suffering with a co-occurring disorder present a huge challenge for professionals providing drug abuse research, prevention, and treatment services.

Study Design

Attempts to understand substance abuse and mental illness comorbidity are complicated since there are many ways these complex conditions can develop. Studies suggest that some peoples' genetic makeup may put them at higher risk for psychiatric and substance use disorders.

In some instances, individuals with a mental illness may begin to abuse drugs to alleviate distressing symptoms of their illness. In other cases, substance abuse and its associated neurobiological changes appear to increase and possibly trigger mental disorders.

A recent study conducted by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) followed 700 individuals from early childhood into their late twenties. **The report concluded that early substance abuse is associated with occurrence of psychiatric disorders.**

These studies give us a better understanding of the origins and progression of comorbid mental and substance abuse disorders. Today's research is now trying to identify genetic variations that increase an individual's vulnerability to mental and substance abuse disorders.

According to Mona Sumner, Chief Operations Officer at Rimrock Foundation, "this new information has the potential to improve our ongoing efforts to develop effective approaches to preventing comorbidity". Better treatment of patients suffering from this devastating condition is a key objective of the newest research efforts.

Study Findings

Major depressive disorder, conduct and personality disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and schizophrenia are mental disorders that often accompany substance abuse. Of these, mood disorders are among the most commonly diagnosed mental illnesses in people with abuse substance.

Overlapping symptoms of coexisting disorders greatly increase the difficulty of diagnosing and treating either problem separately. However, reports indicate that by integrating pharmacological or behavioral therapies for mental disorders with drug abuse treatment, outcomes for both illnesses can be improved.

Recent findings have shown that giving antidepressant medications to adult patients in methadone treatment reduced their craving for drugs as well as their drug use.



Summary

Increased understanding of how biological and environmental factors affect mentally ill individuals' susceptibility to substance abuse is central to developing new programs to prevent co-morbidity.

Today's new reality recognizes many individuals with substance abuse disorders also struggle with mental illnesses.

This study's findings suggest that there are common risk factors for both substance abuse and major depressive disorders.

Investigation into the origins and pathways of co-occurring disorders promises new treatment methods that can reduce the incidence of both diseases.

Editorial Staff

Editor in Chief:

David W. Cunningham

Assistant Editors:

Hugh Kilbourne
Kay Seder

Art/Graphics Designer:

Lenny Joyce



Center for Behavioral
Health Studies

Rimrock Foundation
P.O. Box 30374
Billings, MT 59107

NON-PROFIT
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
BILLINGS, MT
PERMIT #142

For further information on Rimrock Foundation's treatment services, call Jen Porter, Admissions Supervisor, at 1-800-227-3953 or 1-406-248-3175, or visit our website at www.rimrock.org. For more educational information on treatment services, contact the Rimrock Foundation Library at the above numbers.