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DRUG ABUSE

Drugs have been existing since the early 15th century and society has confronted drug abuse and addiction ever since; in the modern world, drug abuse has become a problem for many individuals due to traumatic experiences, mental disorders, peer pressure and personal problems. For every addiction, there is always a solution- professional assistance can help a drug addict get control of his/her life once again.

Drug abuse is the use of legal or illegal substances in ways which they should not be used. You might take more than the regular dose of pills or use someone else’s prescription. You may abuse drugs to feel good, ease stress, or avoid reality.

Drug rehabilitation programs are essential for drug addicts who are committed to ending the psychological and physical dependence that drugs bring throughout time of usage.

Statistics have shown;

Over the past year alone, nearly 15% of the adult population in Nigeria (around 14.3 million people) reported a “considerable level” of use of psychoactive drug substances—it’s a rate much higher than the 2016 global average of 5.6% among adults.

It showed the highest levels of drug use was recorded among people aged between 25 to 39, with cannabis being the most widely used drug. Sedatives, heroin, cocaine and the non-medical use of prescription opioids were also noted. The survey excluded the use of tobacco and alcohol.

The cause of drug abuse is not known, nor is it understood why some people can abuse drugs briefly and stop without difficulty, whereas others continue using drugs despite undesirable consequences. Biological factors, such as genetics and the presence of other psychiatric disorders, may play a role, as may environmental factors, such as peer pressure, history of abuse, and stress, and developmental factors, such as the timing of drug exposure.

Substance abuse can have an effect on a person’s physical and mental health, as well as social relationships, family, work, school, and quality of life. The potential effects of substance abuse include:

I) Damage to organs, such as the heart, brain, and liver.

II) Development of other mental illnesses.

III) Damage to social network or relationships.

I) **Damage to organs:** Different drugs have different effects on various organs such as the brain, heart, liver, kidneys and lungs.

Cocaine suppresses appetite, so much so that it can be a cause of, and a consequence of, eating disorders. The drug significantly changes the body’s metabolism, rendering fatty foods meaningless and giving addicts much less body fat than people who don’t use cocaine. On its own, cocaine can also cause lasting damage to food and liquid intake, resulting in permanent changes to body weight regardless of diet. Cocaine abuse can also induce a persistent cough in users due to the widespread damage that the substance does to the respiratory system. Repeated exposure to cocaine through snorting and smoking can also cause infections and tissue death of the nasal linings and sinuses. Users can experience chronic cough, chest pain, and fatigue due to lung damage, as well as bleeding from the lungs. Long-term cocaine users are often easily fatigued, have trouble breathing, and regularly experience chest pains.Taking cocaine for a period of time may also exacerbate pre-existing heart conditions, hastening the damage to the heart and causing lasting problems with breathing, circulation, and blood pressure.

Methamphetamines do a very good job of destroying the brain’s dopamine neurotransmitters, and repeated exposure to the drug will make it impossible for a user to experience pleasure from any other source. Given time and treatment, the dopamine receptors can heal, but damage to an addict’s cognitive centers could be lifelong. Research suggests that damage to motor coordination through chronic meth use is similar to what individuals suffering from Parkinson’s disease go through.

The loss of motor coordination is one effect on the body, but the changes in brain chemistry can also lead to violent and unpredictable behavior that takes a gruesome toll on the user’s physical self. In addition to causing a massive dopamine overload, methamphetamines also force an increase in adrenaline production, which makes users feel anxious and high-strung all the time, depriving them of sleep and rest. Users act in a hyperactive manner, fixating on a particular object or task, then rapidly finding another target for their obsession, and so on. Severe meth consumption can lead to hallucinations that compel users to damage their own bodies; they feel like they have insects crawling under their skin, leading them to pick and scratch until they bleed, a condition known as formication. Other long-term, physical effects of meth include damage to blood vessels, which impedes the regular flow of blood to all parts of the body. Without the ability to heal itself, even minor injuries can become infected and worsen, and the skin itself loses many of its healing and protective properties. Many users develop small sores all over their body, which, coupled with the formication, can become open and oozing. As with most stimulants, meth causes bursts of involuntary activity, including teeth-grinding. Coupled with the poor diet and bad hygiene that are symptoms of a substance abuse problem, heavy meth addicts tend to have broken and rotting teeth. Meth dries the salivary glands, which removes the protective layer of the mouth’s natural acids; any sugary or acidic foods consumed during a meth binge further damage the teeth, causing numerous cavities.While some of the effects of severe methamphetamine abuse may be cosmetic and can be reversed, what the drug does inside the body is much less forgiving. The extreme stress on blood vessels increases the risk of stroke, which can cause permanent brain damage or death.

Another drug that can impact the production and function of the neurotransmitter, dopamine, in the brain is marijuana. Tetrahydrocannabinol, the active chemical compound in marijuana, also triggers the release of dopamine, which is why marijuana smokers feel good and satisfied about the act of smoking marijuana or consuming edible marijuana products. However, excessive, long-term smoking has been shown to lead to dopamine deficits in the key regions of the brain, leading researchers to theorize that smoking marijuana to the point of addiction may cause damage to the brain that is similar in nature to what even small amounts of cocaine can do. Such damage not only targets the dopamine neurotransmitters but also the grey matter centers of the brain, resulting in cognitive decline. Marijuana can also cause other forms of long-term damage to the body. The smoke in marijuana, for example, consists of a variety of toxic chemicals, including hydrogen cyanide and ammonia, which can tear and wear away at the bronchial passages in the lungs. As with cocaine abusers, chronic pot smokers may suffer from a persistent cough, which can harm the lungs and respiratory passages itself, as well as struggle with breathing, fatigue, and excess mucus secretion. Tetrahydrocannabinol can make the heart increase its rate by 50 beats per minute, a state that can persist for three hours; for smokers who are prone to heart disease or have other health complications, this could induce a heart attack and long-lasting damage to the heart.

Various drugs have such a strong enough effect on the body that they can result in changes in a person’s appearance. One of the most well-known substances in this regard is methamphetamine, or crystal meth.

One of the side effects of taking meth is diminished blood flow, and this includes blood flow to the capillaries of the skin, which can result in a number of physical changes. As a result, damage to the skin can take longer to heal, resulting in sores and scarring on the face and body.

Other drugs that can cause major changes in physical appearance include heroin, cocaine, and steroids. Any substance abuse can result in changes in appearance. The person may neglect personal hygiene, in addition to having bloodshot eyes, persistent dark circles under the eyes, bruises, and potent body odor.

Still, these signs are not necessarily a result of drug abuse.

II) **Development of mental illnesses:** Mental health means different things to different people. One may think of control, happiness, contentment, order – but good mental health is usually a sign of a positive way of life. Mental ill health is the opposite of this – it causes problems and creates barriers to being happy. One’s frame of mind may vary between the two as mental health can change. It can be affected by external influences, and one of these is drugs.

Drugs that are psychoactive, such as cannabis, methamphetamine, ecstasy and heroin, have the ability to affect your mood. They can arouse certain emotions or dampen down others. The changes in mood or behaviour caused by drugs are the result of changes to the brain. Drugs interfere with the chemicals in the brain. This affects the messages those chemicals are trying to send. All psychoactive drugs may cause mental health problems while you are taking them. These can include anxiety, mood swings, depression, sleep problems and psychosis.

Drug-induced anxiety disorder: It causes panic attacks – periods of very severe anxiety when the heart rate increases, with trembling, sweats, shortness of breath, and a fear of losing control. One may also feel like their surroundings are strange and unreal, or that they are losing your personal identity and sense of reality.

Drug-induced psychosis: Psychoactive drugs can cause delusions – believing things that aren’t true, or hallucinations –seeing or hearing things that are not there.

Drug-induced mood disorder: There may be times when an abuser feel depressed – sad, restless, irritable, tired, or manic – elevated mood, delusions, impulsive behaviour, racing thoughts. This is called mood disorder and may be caused by drugs such as cocaine, amphetamines, heroin and methadone, to name a few.

III) **Damage to social network and relationships:** Unfortunately, substance abuse and addiction can damage social health. All types of relationships – family, friendships, and romantic relationships — can be put under enormous strain when someone becomes addicted. Since relationships often cannot compete with the euphoric experience of substance use, the user will typically put less time and energy into maintaining the relationship, allowing various damaging elements to begin to surface.

Someone that begins using alcohol or other drugs excessively may not be outwardly open about their use due to strong feelings of shame, guilt, and fear of judgment. They may think others will not understand or accept the situation, which breeds the tendency to be secretive with their loved one. They may lie about where they are, who they are with, the events of the day, why they are behaving differently, why money is missing etc.

At times, secrecy will increase to the point of the complete distancing or isolation. This can put enormous strain on any relationship.

The loved one may begin to develop trust issues due to the perceived lack of respect, honesty, and loyalty. Trust is essential to feelings of safety and care in a relationship and reduced trust often leads to the emergence of a number of relationship-damaging issues like jealousy, anger, fear, and resentment.

Anger and violence can become concerns as a relationship deteriorates. Frustrations will be high, but if someone is using a substance that is known to cause aggression, the situation may be even more dangerous. Drugs known to increase anger, irritability, and violence include: cocaine, MDMA, crystal meth, steroids, etc.

Living with an addict or can put the loved one at greater risk of victimization. Additionally, the loved one living with an alcoholic or addict may have an increase in their own frustration, causing them to express anger or act out violently against the substance user.

Treatment of drug abuse is often an extended process involving multiple components including:

Cognitive behavioral therapy to work on thought patterns and behavior

Family therapy to help the family understand the problem and to avoid enabling drug use

Identification and treatment of coexisting conditions

Medications to decrease cravings, block withdrawal symptoms, counteract drug effects, or to cause unpleasant side effects if a drug is used

Motivational incentives to reinforce abstinence

Motivational interviewing to utilize a person’s readiness to change behaviors

Rehabilitation to assist those with severe addiction or coexisting mental illness through the initial stages of quitting

Supervised withdrawal (detoxification) to prevent, recognize and treat physical symptoms of withdrawal

Support groups

It is evident that drug abuse has a strong hand In our society, it is essential that we tackle this great problem to preserve our future generations.