Original Article

The Impact of Psychological, Social, Societal, and Economic Factors Leading to Relapse in Patients Recovered from Addiction

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Abstract

Background: The problem of using psychotropic substances and addiction has become one of the major problems in the world. Despite the significant increase in treatment programs of addiction, many studies indicate that the rate of relapse globally is very high, especially when treatment is limited to the medical side only. **Aims:** The study aims to determine the percentage of influence of psychological, societal, social, economic, and other factors that lead to relapse when recovering from addiction. **Methods:** This study conducted in two main hospitals for the treatment of substance use disorders in Baghdad (Ibn Rushud Teaching Hospital for Psychiatry and Al-Ataa Center for Addiction Treatment) through the period from January 10, 2023, to June 10, 2023. All (300 inpatient) who are suffering from relapse to addiction after recovery were included in the study. The scale was prepared for the psychological, social, therapeutic, environmental, and economic factors, which was used by a group of senior doctors working in the field of treatment of addiction and rehabilitation centers, who unanimously agreed with their expertise on these factors. **Results:** This study revealed that the most important factor for relapse is the availability of addictive substances (91%); other factors include psychological, social pressures that the addict is exposed to in his social environment, in addition to the loss of social support (76%). The pressure of friends or peers with a rate of (78%) and the weakness of family control (44%) in addition to the influence of other factors that were examined in this study. **Conclusion:** There are many factors affecting the return of those recovering from addiction to addiction again, and the most prominent of these factors is the abundance or ease of access to psychoactive substances in addition to other factors, which include (psychological, social, societal, and economic factors).Society must realize that the responsibility for preventing addiction should not be borne by the medical treatment alone, because it is a problem that must be dealt with collectively by all parties to enable recovered patients from addiction to build their lives with confidence.

Keywords: Addiction, psychological, relapse, suicide

Introduction

Despite the significant increase in treatment programs in the countries of the world to treat drug addicts, there is a large percentage of recovered addicts who have returned to addiction again and this is called relapse.[1,2] Indeed, 85% of treated addicts relapsed within less than a year from the time of treatment as many studies indicate that the rate of recidivism to drug addiction globally is very high, especially when treatment is limited to the medical aspect.[3-5] It is a problem faced by many societies, and this means that society has not succeeded through its systems and laws in returning the recovered from addiction to its natural state to live a normal life again.[6,7] This represents a dangerous indicator for society and is also considered a phenomenon against therapeutic and preventive goals.[8] It also poses a challenge to treatment and rehabilitation centers because of the control.[9] Metrics treatment, rehabilitation, accommodating addicts in hospitals and specialized centers for the treatment of addiction, and heavy material losses, all become useless, unless the problem of relapse is controlled.[10,11] The results of multiple studies

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found that the relapse rate of recovering addicts after the 1st year of treatment reached 65%–80%,[12] and that the most important factors of relapse are the availability of addictive substances and psychosocial pressures to which the addict is exposed in his social environment.[13,14] Pearson, 1990, has pointed out that the sources of social support are one of the most important factors of protection from a relapse that can vary from family, friends, neighbors, specialized counselors, and relatives. Where the individual resorts to one of these sources according to the type of problem facing him and the appropriateness of this source to the nature of the problem or the extent of his preference for this source over other supporting sources.[15]

Aims of study

The objective of the current study is to determine the percentage of the impact of psychological, societal, social, and economic factors, leading to relapse in the recovery from substance addiction.

Methods

This study conducted in two main hospitals for the treatment of substance use disorders in Baghdad city (Ibn Rushud Teaching Hospital for Psychiatry and Al-Ataa Center for Addiction Treatment and rehabilitation) through the period from January 10, 2023, to June 10, 2023.

A scale has been prepared for suspected influencing factors which include (psychological, social, societal, environmental, and economic factors), which were used by a group of specialized doctors working in the field of treatment of addiction and rehabilitation centers, who unanimously agreed with their expertise on these factors.

Three hundred (all inpatient) who are suffering from relapse to addiction after recovery were included in the study, who had been diagnosed according to the international diagnosis of mental disorder (International Classification of Diseases 11th Revision) by the psychiatric staff of the (inpatients wards). Every patient was included except for those who refuse to enter the study or whose psychological and mental condition did not help to answer, and the informed consent was taken by the researcher from all participant patients, taking into consideration confidentiality and privacy of them. The data obtained tabulated in Tables and appropriate statistical analysis were done.

Exclusion criteria

1. Patients who refuse to participate in study
2. Those who are hostile or their mental condition did not help to answer were excluded from the study.

Results

Table 1 indicated that the mean age of all relapsed patients was 33.04 ± 10.46 years, but the highest proportion was connected with the 25–34 age range (n = 147, 49%). All of the sample members were males (100%) variable refers that most of substance abusers are males (n = 300, 100%); the married patient (n = 124, 41.3%) and single (n = 143, 47.7%). The education level results showed elementary schools level among more than half of substance abusers (n = 175, 58.3%). Regarding economic state, more than half of sample members were with middle economic level (n = 171, 57%).

Table 1: Samples are distributed based on their demographic characteristics

Variable	Frequency (%)
Age (years), mean±SD	33.04±10.46
15–24	51 (17)
25–34	147 (49)
35–44	75 (25)
45–54	15 (5)
55–64	12 (4)
Total	300 (100)
Sex	
Male	300 (100)
Marital status	
Single	143 (47.7)
Married	124 (41.3)
Divorced	26 (8.7)
Separated	5 (1.6)
Widowed	2 (0.7)
Total	300 (100)
Education level	
Illiterate (neither read nor write)	32 (10.7)
Read and write	12 (4)
Elementary school	175 (58.3)
Intermediate school	43 (14.3)
Secondary school	23 (7.7)
College	15 (5)
Total	300 (100)
Economic situation	
Poverty	42 (14)
Medium	171 (57)
Good	72 (24)
Very good	15 (5)
Total	300 (100)

SD: Standard deviation

The psychological, social, physical, environmental, and economic factors influencing in relapse according to the answers of the patients are presented in Table 2.

The study revealed the most impactful factor for relapse of recovering from abuse or addiction is substance availability. The material availability compromised 91% of the relapsing cases. The second factor is the environment, since the addicted person stays with the same society in continuous contact with the same environment it is easy to drug them to relapse. The parameters of psychological, social and culture causes abusers to relapse. The case of relapsing increases as long as the access to reaching substances is easier and more available, this factor comprises 78% as indicated by the study. The third factor is a

Table 2: Percentage of patient suffered from suspected influencing addiction relapse

Psychological, social, physical, environmental and economic factors suffered by addict patient	*n* (%)
Feeling frustrated, stressed, and demoralized	195 (65)
Feeling anxious and afraid of future	201 (67)
Feeling sad and hopeless for future	183 (61)
Emptiness and boredom	234 (78)
Irritability and lack of control over emotions	144 (48)
There is no purpose in life	198 (66)
Pressures of bad friends	234 (78)
Availability of narcotic or psychotropic substance	273 (91)
Marital or family disputes	141 (47)
Financial problems (such as debt or hardship)	111 (37)
The influence of social networking sites (Facebook, Telegram, or others)	84 (28)
Job loss and unemployment	147 (49)
Work pressures (such as working long hours or night shifts)	45 (15)
Loss of a family member	78 (26)
Weak parental control, relationship	132 (44)
Sudden lifestyle changes (such as traveling and moving elsewhere)	51 (17)
Stay away from addiction treatment and rehabilitation program	195 (65)
Nonadherence to addiction treatment program	201 (67)
Weakness in community support or help from others	228 (76)
Social stigma, discrimination and intolerance	249 (83)
The environment is not conducive to change and abstain from abuse	258 (86)
Chronic diseases such as high blood pressure, asthma or diabetes	39 (13)
The presence of chronic physical symptoms (such as headache, musculoskeletal, or stomach pain)	105 (35)
Night insomnia	147 (49)
Social isolation	159 (53)

weak family or rejection from the family and lack of support increasing cases of relapsing by 86% as revealed by this study. Moreover, Society needs to support and change its concept and become more open and perceptive to former addicts as a new member of society. This is vital to help get rid of the negative perception towards former drug addicts.

Discussion

The study revealed the most impactful factor for relapse of recovering from abuse or addiction is substance availability. The material availability compromised 91% of the relapsing cases. The second factor is the environment, since the addicted person stays with the same society in continuous contact with the same environment it is easy to drug them to relapse. The parameters of psychological, social and culture causes abusers to relapse. The case of relapsing increases as long as the access to reaching substances is easier and more available, this factor comprises 78% as indicated by the study. The third factor is a weak family or rejection from the family and lack of support which is compromised (44%) in the occurrence of relapse. The study showed that the percentage of the effect of stigma or discrimination on relapse by (83%), this high percent may because of their illegal behavior, most members of society still find it difficult to accept recovering former drug addicts, so they have hurt feelings and low self-esteem, which leads them to relapse, that is, to return to drug abuse again.

The study indicates that the weakness of social support or assistance from others (76%) or social isolation constitutes a percentage (53%) or the environment is not suitable for change and abstinence from abuse (86%) of the causes of relapse, so we actually need to support society and change its concept and become more open and accept former addicts as new person in society and this is important and vital to help get rid of the negative perception towards former drug addicts. Also social support requires the presence of understanding people in the individual's surroundings, who trust him and provide him with support when needed. The study showed that exposure to frustration and psychological pressure (65%), feeling anxious and afraid of the future (67%), feeling sad and hopeless (61%), or losing purpose in life (66%) increases the risk of relapse due to changes in brain activity, which reduce coping and conflict management mechanisms, although the addicted person learns actual healthy coping behavior in the stages of treatment.[16] In the case of multiple stressors or high emotional stress, there is a greater possibility of relapse as the stressed individual may use addictive substances for self-medication.[17,18] The best advice is to learn how to replace bad habits of coping with stress with healthy ones. Economic pressures, including loss of work or unemployment (49%), material problems (such as debts) (37%), or work pressures (such as working long hours or night shifts) by (15%) contribute to the return of the recovered from addiction to abuse again. After treatment or discharge from the treatment institution, the drug abuser cannot find suitable work because job opportunities are decreasing for less educated people, or he cannot return to his previous job or he may be dismissed from his job or he cannot exercise his previous role due to the lack of confidence of others in the participation of the recovered person in the work so he is forced to return again to abuse.

The spread of boredom or emptiness constitutes (78%) of the causes of relapse is important because when recovering and stopping use, the vocabulary of daily life and normal behaviors seem to him less rewarding or attractive and exciting where he feels that life moves in slow motion due to low levels of dopamine in the brain from the effect of addiction, in addition to the lack of recreational activities and the difficulty of finding work, all of this leads to a feeling of boredom in the recovered themselves.

The study showed that moving away from treatment and rehabilitation by (65%) or non-commitment to the designated treatment by (67%) leads to relapse, so caring for addicts needs model treatment units that include psychological and social rehabilitation and aftercare, including vocational rehabilitation and reintegration of the recovered into society after completing medical

treatment, which includes detoxification or treatment of mental disorders associated with addiction and ensures easy access to it. There is also a relationship between chronic pain and the occurrence of relapse,[19,20] which is related to psychological factors such as psychological trauma and other mental disorders, and one of the important symptoms is night insomnia.[21,22] There are some important observations that indicate the weakness of some other factors in the occurrence of relapse, such as the impact of social networking sites (28%) or the impact of chronic diseases (13%) and this percentage is low because most of the sample is young people, another observation was that there are no cases of addiction for women in the research sample during the period of its conduct among patients in these main addiction treatment centers in Iraq, this may be either due to the lack of cases of addiction in women, or women not going to these centers, and only going to private psychiatric clinics of psychiatrists for addiction treatment because of the social norms and restrictions in the country.

Conclusion

There are many factors affecting the return of those recovering from addiction to addiction again, and the most prominent of these factors is the abundance or ease of access to psychoactive substances, in addition to other factors which include (psychological, social, societal, and economic factors). Society must realize that the responsibility for preventing re-addiction should not be borne by the medical treatment alone because it is a problem that must be dealt with collectively among all parties to enable those recovering from addiction to build their lives with confidence.

Recommendations

1. Follow-up of recovered people to prevent long-term relapse
2. Increasing awareness programs for addicts
3. Keeping the recovered person away from the environment that caused him to fall into addiction
4. Continuous development of the skills of employees in addict centers and follow-up of all developments in the treatment programs
5. Helping the addict to participate and interact with others
6. The centers and youth forums of the provincial councils in the preparation of social, recreational and sports activities for young people
7. Establish self-help groups of former addict patients.

Consent for publication

The author consent to the publication after acceptance of the article.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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