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Addiction from a Psychological Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Addiction represents one of the most prominent challenges to mental health in the modern era due to its complex and multidimensional effects. This research aims to provide an in-depth analytical study of the phenomenon of addiction from a psychological perspective, focusing on its psychological causes, types, explanatory theories, its effects on human behavior and methods of prevention and treatment. The study relies on a review of recent scientific and theoretical literature and is based on a combination of cognitive, behavioral, neurological and psychoanalytic approaches to present a comprehensive view of addiction as a complex psychological and behavioral disorder.

Keywords: Addiction; Psychological perspective; substance use disorder; Behavioral addiction; Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT); Psychoanalytic theory; Neurological theory; Mental health; Addiction prevention; Psychological treatment; Risk factors; Emotional dysregulation; Motivation; Rehabilitation; Social support

Introduction

Addiction is not merely a behavioral phenomenon related to the use of drugs or excessive engagement in certain activities. Rather, it is a psychological disorder that affects thinking, behavior and emotion and can lead to a deterioration in an individual's quality of life. Interest in addiction dates back centuries, but the psychological approach has gained particular momentum in recent decades with the development of neuropsychology and cognitive science. Understanding the psychological aspects of addiction is essential for developing effective treatment programs and sustainable preventive strategies.

Definition of addiction from a psychological perspective

The American Psychiatric Association (APA) defines addiction as "a pathological pattern of substance uses or behavior characterized by loss of control, excessive preoccupation and continued use despite harmful consequences." The World Health Organization (WHO) views addiction as "a state of psychological and physical dependence characterized by a compulsive desire to consume a substance or engage in a specific behavior."

Psychology views addiction as going beyond physiological dimensions to include patterns of thinking, emotion and behavior. Accordingly, addressing addiction requires analyzing the psychological factors behind it, in addition to identifying the environmental and social factors that contribute to its development.

Types of addiction

- **Chemical addiction:** This includes dependence on substances such as alcohol, nicotine, opioids, cocaine, cannabis and hallucinogens. This type is characterized by direct biological effects on the brain, as these substances lead to changes in brain chemistry, creating a state of physical and psychological dependence.
- **Behavioral addiction:** This includes gambling, internet addiction, sex addiction, shopping addiction and video game addiction. Despite the absence of a chemical substance, the psychological and behavioral effects are similar to chemical addiction in terms of impaired behavioral control and compulsive engagement despite harmful consequences.

Psychological factors leading to addiction

Addiction does not arise from a single cause but is the result of a complex interaction of individual, psychological, environmental and biological factors. The most prominent factors include:

- **Individual factors:** Personality traits such as impulsivity and sensation-seeking, poor coping skills and low self-esteem. Individuals lacking emotional or social fulfillment are more likely to seek external compensation such as substances or addictive behaviors.
- **Environmental factors:** These include family disintegration, childhood abuse and social and economic pressures. An emotionally or socially unstable environment can push individuals toward escapist behaviors that provide a false sense of relief.
- **Psychological disorders:** Such as depression, anxiety disorders, borderline personality disorder and bipolar disorder. These may lead individuals to substance use as a way to escape or alleviate psychological suffering.
- **Cognitive factors:** Exaggerated expectations regarding the effect of the substance and distorted beliefs about behavioral control, such as believing one can stop at any time, contribute to the continuation of addictive behavior without recognizing its risks.

Psychological theories explaining addiction

- **Behavioral theory:** Views addiction as a learned behavior reinforced through rewards (e.g., relief, euphoria, reduced anxiety) and through escape from negative emotions. This perspective explains why individuals find addictive behavior a means of coping with psychological distress.
- **Cognitive theory:** Emphasizes the role of distorted thoughts, such as believing that the substance is necessary for happiness or stress management, leading to psychological dependence.
- **Psychoanalytic theory:** According to Freud, addiction reflects unconscious conflicts and is often seen as compensation for feelings of deprivation or emotional inadequacy. Psychoanalysis considers the roots of addiction to lie in childhood experiences and early deprivation of affection or security.
- **Neurological theory:** Suggests that addiction is associated with biological changes in the brain's reward system, particularly in dopamine release in areas related to pleasure and motivation. Over time, repeated exposure to addictive stimuli leads to structural changes in the brain.

Psychological and behavioral effects of addiction

- **Mood disturbances:** Addicts often experience mood swings, such as anxiety, depression and heightened irritability, due to the biological and psychological changes associated with chronic use.
- **Cognitive decline:** Impairments in attention, memory and decision-making abilities, which are common symptoms in chronic substance use or compulsive behavioral addiction.
- **Social relationship disorders:** Isolation, loss of trust and frequent conflicts lead to the deterioration of social bonds. Addiction often results in a loss of social support.

- **Identity disruption:** Addiction leads to a loss of self-awareness, low self-confidence and distorted self-image, creating a vicious cycle of frustration and compulsive behavior.
- **Compulsive behavior:** Repeated engagement in behavior despite its clear negative consequences on health and daily life.

Psychological treatment approaches for addiction

- **Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT):** Used to identify and modify distorted thoughts and behaviors associated with addiction. This model helps individuals develop coping skills and deal with triggers that lead to relapse.
- **Motivational interviewing:** Focuses on enhancing internal motivation for change through dialogue and resolving internal resistance.
- **Group therapy:** Provides a supportive environment and fosters a sense of belonging. Individuals feel accepted and non-judged, which contributes to their recovery.
- **Family therapy:** Targets family dynamics that contribute to addiction. It works on improving communication and restoring balance within the family.
- **Pharmacological treatment:** Includes the use of medications such as methadone, naltrexone or buprenorphine to reduce cravings or alleviate withdrawal symptoms, often as part of a comprehensive treatment plan.
- **Behavioral rehabilitation programs:** Include psychological support, vocational training and life skills development to help individuals build a substance-free lifestyle.

Prevention and early intervention

- **Psychological awareness programs in schools and communities:** Raise awareness about the risks of addiction and strengthen youth's psychological resilience.
- **Mental health support and strengthening protective psychological factors:** Such as boosting self-confidence, effective communication and healthy emotional expression.
- **Providing a supportive environment for youth:** Especially during critical developmental stages such as adolescence, where social influence is strong.
- **Early therapeutic intervention:** Upon the emergence of signs of substance use or risky behaviors, including preventive psychological support and counseling.

Conclusion

Addiction is a complex psychological and social challenge that requires a comprehensive approach integrating psychological understanding, social support and medical intervention when needed. It is essential to view the addicted individual not as a criminal, but as someone suffering from a psychological disorder in need of holistic care. Psychology plays a vital role in analyzing the phenomenon of addiction and developing effective treatment and prevention strategies, particularly when psychological therapy is combined with medical and social approaches. Early prevention, well-structured therapeutic intervention and enhanced community support remain the foundational pillars in reducing the prevalence of addiction.

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