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Research Paper: Heroin and More

What is heroin

According to “What is Heroin and how is it used?” by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, heroin is an illegal, highly addictive drug that is processed from morphine, a naturally occurring substance extracted from the seed pod of certain varieties of poppy plants. Heroin can typically be sold as a white or brownish powder that is “cut” with sugars, starch, powdered milk or quinine. Pure heroin is a white powder with a bitter taste that predominantly originated in South America, as well as to a lesser extent, Southeast Asia, and dominated the United States market east of the Mississippi River. Highly pure heroin can be used in different ways, such as; snorting or smoking. To some users those methods are more appealing due to the elimination of the stigma that is associated with the injection of drug use. Black tar heroin is a sticky substance that is similar to roofing tar or hard like coal and is predominantly produced in Mexico and sold in the United States in areas west of the Mississippi River. The association with the dark color of black tar heroin is from crude processing methods that leave behind impurities. Another kind of heroin is the impure heroin, it is usually dissolved, diluted, or injected into and individuals veins, muscles, or somewhere under the skin (National Institute on Drug Abuse).

Where is Heroin Produced

There are multiple areas where the production of heroin is located, such as; Columbia, Mexico, the Golden Triangle--which consist of Burma, Laos, and Thailand--and Afghanistan (Module 2: Where Heroin is Produced). Afghanistan is the world's largest illicit producer of opium, which is the raw material of heroin. The global production of opium in Afghanistan was estimated to be 7,162 tonnes in 2014. The second largest opium producing region is Southeast Asia. Their estimate of opiate production in 2014 decreased to 762 tonnes from a peak of 893 tonnes in 2013. However, they still remain at a high level of production of the drug (*Heroin Production and Precursors (EU Drug Markets Report)*).

The History of Heroin

In 1898, heroin was first manufactured by Bayer pharmaceutical company in Germany, while they marketed heroin as a treatment for tuberculosis, as well as a remedy for morphine addiction. However, opium addiction was considered a major problem in the United States during the 1850's. The solution to this problem was to provide opium addicts with a less potent and supposedly non-addictive substitute, which was morphine. Not long after, morphine became an addiction and became a bigger problem than opium addiction. Again with the same process, the morphine problem was solved by another non-addictive substitute--heroin, which was proved to be more addictive than morphine. The cycle repeats itself by finding another non-addictive substitute, which was known as methadone. The drug was being used worldwide as a treatment for heroin addiction. However, it later proved to be even more addictive than heroin. By the time it hit the 1990's, the mortality rate of heroin addicts was estimated to be twenty times greater

than the rest of the population (“What Is Heroin? How Is Heroin Made? What Is Heroin Made of? - Drug-Free World.”).

The Risk factors of Heroin

There are many risk factors that are associated with the use of heroin. The effects can differ with each heroin user, by the length of the abuse, the amount of heroin used, the presence of other substances, and individual makeup. The longer an abuser uses heroin, it can commonly cause; liver disease, skin disease, an infection of the valves and lining of the heart, HIV or hepatitis B and C, chronic pneumonia, clouded mental functioning, blood clots, kidney disease, seizures, overdose, death, etc (“Heroin Addiction Signs, Effects, & Withdrawal Symptoms.”).

Those who are abusing heroin will become physically dependent on the substance, as well as, afraid to stop using for fear of the withdrawal symptoms they may experience. Withdrawal symptoms from this drug can develop as soon as a few hours after sustained use. Some effects of withdrawal could be; intense craving for heroin, extreme sweating, nausea, vomiting, severe muscle aches and pains, crying jags, insomnia, funny nose, fever, death, etc. (“Heroin Addiction Signs, Effects, & Withdrawal Symptoms.”).

The Number of Drug Users

Statistics have shown that 19.7 million Americans age twelve and older have battled a substance use disorder in 2017. About 74% of adults who suffer from a substance use disorder struggled with an alcohol use disorder, while 38% of adults battled with an illicit drug use disorder. During 2017, statistics display that one out of every eight adults have struggled with both alcohol and drug use disorders at the same time (Thomas, Scot). Overall, around 21 million

American have at least one addiction, but only 10% of those individuals receive treatment for their addiction (“Addiction Statistics - Facts on Drug and Alcohol Use - Addiction Center.”).

Alcohol is a widely abused substance in the United States, as well as, other areas around the world. However, alcoholism is often left untreated, which can cause detrimental to an individual's physical, mental and social well being. Statistics show that every year--worldwide--alcohol is the cause of 5.3% of deaths. As well as, about 300 million people all around the world have an alcohol use disorder (“Addiction Statistics - Facts on Drug and Alcohol Use - Addiction Center.”).

Opioids are a dangerous drug due to the high risk for addiction and overdose. This drug is an ingredient in many pain relieving medications. Due to the opioids being addictive, about 130 Americans die every day from opioid overdose. There is about a 20% to 30% of individuals who take prescription opioids and misuse them, while 10% of those individuals become addicted from the misuse of the drug (“Addiction Statistics - Facts on Drug and Alcohol Use - Addiction Center.”).

Cigarettes are legal and accessible in many areas around the world, but they cause a variety of fatal health conditions and are highly addictive. Statistics show that about 34 million Americans smoke cigarettes. The use of cigarettes has caused over 480,000 deaths every year in the United States (“Addiction Statistics - Facts on Drug and Alcohol Use - Addiction Center.”).

Cocaine is an illegal stimulant and is highly addictive. First time users of cocaine can become addicted after using the drug only once. Studies show that about 5 million American are regular cocaine users. During 2016 to 2017, cocaine related overdose deaths increased by 34% (“Addiction Statistics - Facts on Drug and Alcohol Use - Addiction Center.”).

Methamphetamine is a substance that has a high potential for abuse, overdose, addiction, and is extremely dangerous for a person's health. About 774,000 American are regular meth users, while 16,000 of them are between the ages of 12 to 17. Statistics has also shown that 10,000 American who use regularly have suffered a fatal overdose in 2017 ("Addiction Statistics - Facts on Drug and Alcohol Use - Addiction Center.").

Statistics for heroin have shown an estimate of 13.5 million individuals in the world take opioids, which included 9.2 million that uses heroin. In 2007, it has been reported that 153,000 of heroin users in the United States. Other estimates show that figures as high as 900,000. Opiates, mainly heroin, were involved in four of every five drug related deaths in Europe ("Heroin Statistics - Facts About Heroin Addiction, Use & Death - Drug-Free World.").

Why People are Using Drugs

Individuals may take drugs because they want a change in their lives. Some may think that drugs are the solution, however, it's the drug that becomes the problem. A few reasons why an individual might be taking drugs are; to fit in, to escape or relax, to relieve boredom, to seem more grown up, to rebel, to experiment, etc. It may be difficult to face the problem right in front of you, but the consequences of drug use are worse than the problem that is trying to be solved (*Heroin Production and Precursors (EU Drug Markets Report)*).

Many individuals have different reasons as to why they consume alcohol. Some may use the substance to relieve stress. For both moderate drinkers or alcoholics, alcohol have an anxiolytic properties, that can inhibit anxiety or the feeling of stress. It can be common to some users to use alcohol to unwind after a long day. Other reasons could be peer pressure or to lose one's inhibitions (Stuart).

Opioids are usually an ingredient in medication due to the chemicals that relax the body and can relieve pain. This drug has the ability to make an individual to feel relaxed and “high”, which is the reason why users use this substance for non-medical reasons. A few ways that an individual can misuse opioids is by; taking the medication in a different way that is prescribed, taking another person’s prescription, and taking the medication for the effect to get high (National Institute on Drug Abuse).

Individuals who use cigarettes usually start in their teens. Majority of the time, those who smoke have friends or family that smoke, which can cause an influence on that individual. Other times, teens will say that they want to try it to see what it’s like or to make themselves appear cool (“Why People Start Using Tobacco, and Why It's Hard to Stop.”).

There isn’t a single reason as to why an individual will use cocaine or methamphetamine. However, there are multiple reasons as to why they start. Some include; to fit in a social group, to reduce inhibitions, increase confidence, out of curiosity, to escape reality, etc (“Why Do People Use Ice.”).

Some individuals may not knowly know that they are on their way to becoming addicted to heroin. The harmful health consequences from the misuse of opioid medication that are prescribed for pain treatment of pain have increased in recent years. Many people will assume that prescription pain relievers are safer than illicit drugs because they are medically prescribed. However, these drugs that are taken in ways or amounts that are not intended by a doctor, or taken from someone who was not prescribed by the doctor will result in a severe adverse health effects. Research has shown that the misuse of these kinds of medication can lead to heroin use due to it being cheaper and easier to obtain than prescription opioids (*Heroin Production and*

Precursors (EU Drug Markets Report).

To Conclude

All of these drugs are extremely dangerous to the human body and there are many individuals that abuses these substances. All of these drugs can cause addiction and can even lead to death. Many individuals need to be educated about how harmful these drugs can be or to get help before it's too late.

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