

Title

Addiction and Ecological Framework

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Introduction

Addiction, a word that in society holds so much meaning. Although we never think about what it truly means. Addiction is a mental condition that involves a person's environment, genetics, and an individual's life experiences. This person uses substances or performs behaviors that become uncontrollable despite the consequences (ASAM, 2019). It is something that everyone experiences at some point of their life. There is little information being presented to society about the subject of addiction. Because there are so many different types of addiction, society as a whole is at risk. I will look at themes in past research to help me conduct my analysis. This will be done using a sociological perspective and applying ecological framework theory. There will be a discussion connecting the literature and my analysis. Environment, boredom, and family dynamics are the common reasons we will be discussing throughout this analysis. This will contribute to the understanding, views, and likelihood of addiction. So how do familial and societal factors increase the chances of addiction?

Review of Literature

In this section I will review past research and identify the common themes as they relate to the analysis. I have found three themes that have been identified to increase the likelihood of addiction. Within these three themes there are multiple different ways that the information was examined. The majority of the ways they were examined looked through more of a quantitative and qualitative research lens. These past pieces of literature as a way to integrate the ecological framework to give a different perspective into this area of research. When going through these pieces of literature there was no finding that was more important than another. Within this section the themes are as previously stated: 1) boredom or lacking sense of purpose; 2) a person's environment; and 3) family dynamics.

As humans we yearn to have a sense of belonging and purpose. When this feeling is not met then we try to find anything else to fill that void. This is classified as being bored and not having a sense of purpose in society. A famous study called “Rat Park” proved that being bored and yearning for a purpose is a reason for beginning and continuing to do drugs (Basu 2020). This reason seems as if it could be avoided but it is a very common reason that is addressed when examining addiction. Being attached to another person is a form of addiction. An article explained that living arrangements created a dependency on another individual which pushed that person into addiction (Menicucci 2007). For many people being attached to someone gives them a sense of purpose. This is seen the most in romantic relationships but also a helicopter parent. A helicopter parent is one that watches every move their child makes, while also enforcing strict rules. Once that romantic relation or helicopter parent is no longer in the picture then the addict is looking for a way to fill that now empty void. As a way of filling it the person then begins to use drugs. This is known as “getting stuck” in the stage of child rearing, and can increase the likelihood of addiction (Menicucci and Wermuth 2007). Addiction is a great way to feel something, and research has shown that lacking a purpose or boredom can increase chances of addiction.

A person’s environment throughout their life is a huge factor in addiction. Those who grew up in drug heavy neighborhoods felt that their only choice was to engage in these same activities (Knight et al. 2017). This shows how the cycle of addiction continues throughout society and communities. When in this environment you are not given the resources to get out. These areas make it seem easy and as a way of life. A study found that former addicts believed if they had been in a more knowledgeable environment about addiction they would have been less likely to use to begin with (Baciu, Alexandru, and Punga 2019). There are no community

resources that provide information on how dangerous and harmful addiction can be. It is almost seen as if there is no other option because everyone in that community is somehow addicted.

There are high amounts of certain types of addiction that a person is starting to be engulfed by without having the information to get out. After being a part of this environment for a period of time most likely that person will start to engage. Throughout the high addiction communities there is no one in it to be a role model. Having a role model, or person who sets examples for you, can be setting the foundation for you, but without that it is easy to lean towards harmful actions (Hing et al. 2024). The environment a person is in can increase the chance of falling into addiction.

Family is a weird concept. It is the roots and foundation to the person someone becomes. While those roots and foundations can be changed, it still plays a role in the formation of a person. While growing up the norms that are experienced become how a person views a functioning family. These functions can set the tone for how someone carries out adulthood and parenting. It has been found that family function, trauma, abuse, etc. are all predictors for drug use in adulthood (Crowley and Miller 2020). Being in a family that does not function very healthy can push a person to start falling into unhealthy coping. Kwok-Kei et al. (2010) found that non-intact families were associated with substance use among Hong Kong Chinese adolescents. Having these burdens that were created from the family can begin to weigh on a person, and have that person wanting to find an escape. This is where addiction comes into the picture and takes over. If a recovering addict connects with their family and gets the same unhealthy mannerisms, that person is more likely to relapse (Crowley and Miller 2020). Without realizing the functions that are associated with a family, play major roles in the increase of addiction throughout a person's life.

Theoretical Framework

In this section I will develop the ecological framework and the levels of society. The ecological framework explains that a person's experience at an age can relate to their development. There is an interconnection between everything that can increase the likelihood of addiction, even if it may seem unrelated. The majority of these factors that are experienced are not within a person's control. There is a reciprocation between the factors previously stated and the individual. It is a mutual relationship that creates influence on each other.

When looking at the ecological framework from the micro level of society, it explains boredom and not having a purpose. This is because it is the individual's feelings. Every person has a purpose but that is something that has to be recognized within. Not being able to be emotionally satisfied with your life is a mental issue. This feeling can affect the way you behave in day to day life. Behaviors could cause the individual to not work or go to school, not have hobbies, or not create relationships. If the individual does have a purposeful role then that can shape the experience. This can also be explained as a feeling of disconnect from society. The disconnect creates the mindset of "what's the point." Then driving the motivation to participate in society even lower. These are all subjective interpretations of the individual's social experience. Symbolic interactionism is a way to explain the lack of purpose as well. When going to said role the person could feel unappreciated which internally devalues themselves. Which links these feelings to the macro aspect of ecological framework. When participating in society individuals expect to receive a form of praise. Because of the capitalist economy many companies do not care about their workers. The focus of the company is to make the most profit for the owner and in an efficient way. This is where that disconnect at the individual level starts to be created. The employee does not see profit, change, or emotional connection to the employer

and job. It becomes an internal issue that was created by a social institution. Schools are driven by the government rules and regulations. Which in turn could make the students feel like their education is irrelevant. Without the individual being comfortable in these social institutions it makes creating relationships harder. These macro level institutions create that micro level internal problem of feeling bored and lacking a purpose.

The ecological framework looks at family function as the meso-relational level of society.

Meso-relational is a level of society that focuses on the medium social institutions. It is a structure that helps connect the micro and macro levels together. Families are a way for an individual to connect to culture, beliefs, and societal systems. Within the family there are values and norms that are being taught to the individual. The combination of these two factors create the relational aspect. Being in a place where those norms, culture, etc. are practiced teaches a person how to function. Language that should be used, actions towards one another, manners, and so many others are aspects of an individual that come from the family. There are set roles for each person in the family. Each role fitting together is a way for the family to develop emotional bonds. Those emotional bonds can be described as a way of supporting one another. The family needs are met because everyone in their set roles provides some form of support. If these norms in a family are negative then that is what the function will look like. For example, mother has a drug addiction, father is an alcoholic, oldest child is partying everyday, and the youngest becomes the caregiver. The addicts of the family will not change because they have someone that is doing their role for them. The oldest child does not see a problem in partying because of the example set by the parents. The youngest is filling these roles right now, but once old enough

there is a very high chance the child will fall into those same patterns. Having these close relations within a family can create how an individual participates in society.

At the meso-communal level of society in ecological framework an individual's environment can be explained. Previously was stated that the neighborhood you live in can increase the likelihood of addiction. An environment is influenced by larger structural forces that the individual has to interact with daily. The majority of the time these interactions are repeated everyday. The individual sees the same group of neighbors performing the same actions. These interactions are in a shared public place by the individual and neighbors. Over time these interactions create trust and relationships. This is a sense of community which often produces opportunity. The neighborhood can come together to share individual cultures, norms, hobbies, or language. In doing this it can assist a person in shaping their identity. These opportunities could form a false sense of identity. Which then becomes problematic for the individual. These structural forces that are flowing through the community can influence an individual's actions within that shared space. An opportunity in a neighborhood, good or bad, can be shared with those that participate in it. A sense of community cohesion becomes the dynamic when relationships and roles throughout the community are being fostered. Every environment is based on the people that decide to participate in it. This could have negative consequences when looking at influence on a person's actions. If a teen is hanging out with a group of addicts everyday in the park chances are that teen will follow down the same path. This shows how that meso-communal level plays into the increase of likelihood of addiction.

The macro level combines all of these societal levels to form a phenomenon, addiction. Lacking a sense of purpose and being bored all play into the societal structures. The way businesses, schools, and relationships interact with the individual are macro issues. Then create

the internal boredom as previously stated. Society as whole makes it known that lacking this feeling is a problem. The solution for most people is addiction. Why? Because the structure of society wants there to be oppression. The micro-relational level forms how a person is going to act, or react, in these social institutions. When addiction starts it is mostly a reaction to what relationships are being made. This creates a cycle of addiction throughout that structure. At the micro-communal level there are so many different communities. Society has socioeconomic status that decides which community you will be in. Meaning, if you are of low economic status you will most likely live in a neighborhood where everyone participating is too. This helps keep that macro institution, of socioeconomic status, alive. Within these lower status communities there are higher rates of addiction. The resources are scarce, it is all around you, and you do not have influence to get out. All of these link together to create a macro level phenomenon, addiction.

Discussion

So how do familial and societal factors increase the chances of addiction? Throughout this paper I have explained three main factors that increase the chances of addiction. As well as how the ecological framework explains these main factors. A person's environment, boredom or lack of purpose, and family dynamic are the main reasons that increase the chances of addiction. These reasons are not an exhaustive list, everyone is different. Starting at the micro level of society is boredom and feeling a lack of purpose. This is an external issue happening in the individual's life that is causing them to internalize it. That internalization is what creates the view of not having a purpose or feeling of boredom. This is an issue because when a person becomes bored they look for something to give them that feeling of doing something. Many people fall into an addiction to gain their feeling of purpose or entertain them. Zhang found that

boredom prone individuals would instinctively choose some interesting and challenging stimuli to alleviate this psychological discomfort. This reason also can be linked to the macro level of society. This is because the institution throughout society pushes certain perspectives to create this internal conflict. The micro-relational aspect of the ecological framework explains how family dynamics can increase chances of addiction. In families individuals are taught how culture, values, and so many other actions that shape identity. Family cohesion has been proven to prevent youth from engaging in addictive behaviors (Moazami Goudarzi, Azemoudeh, and Hoseini Nasab 2025). Without having that family cohesion than people in the family are more likely to fall into the addiction. Looking at the meso-communal level is an individual's environment. The environment a person puts themselves in is a way to create community. Communities with lower resources are more susceptible to high rates of addiction. When being a part of this environment then it has been shown to increase addiction probability. A child in a lower income community is more likely to consume and become addicted to alcohol at younger ages (Yaogo et al. 2014). Within all of these factors is the macro societal level. Society creates these different factors that form the lower societal levels. Addiction itself is at the macro level. Public policies on rehabilitation and harm reduction are based on addiction trends in society. Legal and pharmacy companies are able to be influenced by the prevalence of addiction. Policy and legislation can cause debates around legalization of drugs because of addiction patterns that may arise. My analysis and the past literature showed very consistent themes about the increase in chances of addiction.

Conclusion

Overall, this study was looking at a way to integrate the ecological framework into how familial and societal factors increase the chances of addiction. Throughout this study there was a

plentiful amount of past literature looking at different types of addiction. In society there is not enough awareness at presenting this information in a way for others to understand. A different perspective was present when analyzing the information.

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