

Drug Addiction: Understanding the effects of Drug Abuse.

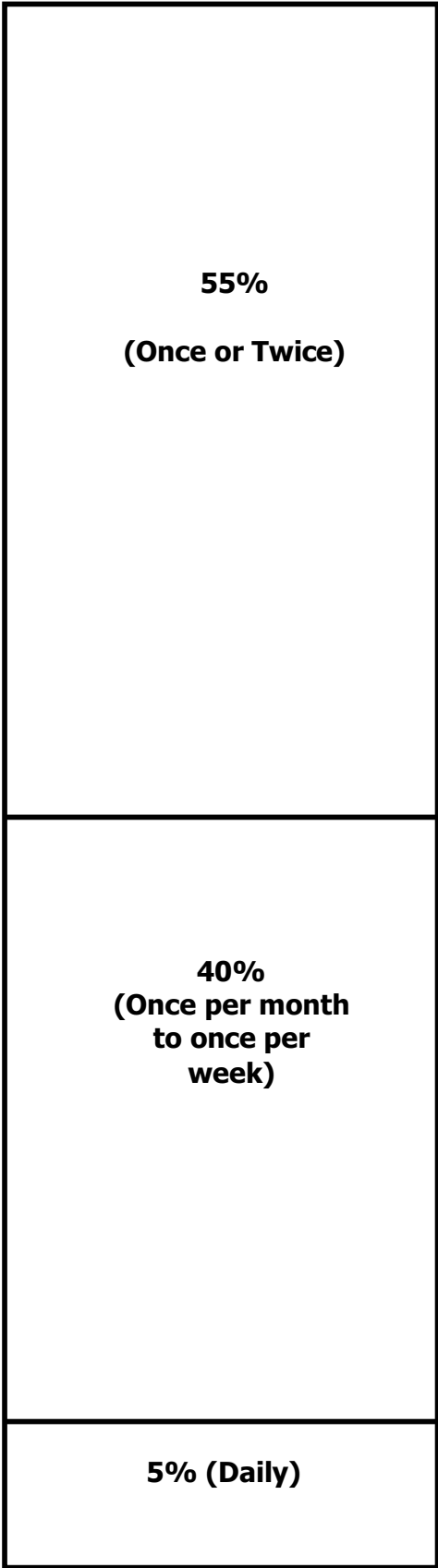
Assignment 2.

Why do people subject their bodies and minds to the harmful effects of drug use, eventual addiction and relapse back into drug use?

Most people will be neither surprised nor disturbed to be reminded that almost every adult in Britain and America uses drugs everyday of their lives in the form of caffeine, alcohol or tobacco (although tobacco does receive bad press these days). In a recent survey of British teenagers, it was suggested that by the age of 16 the vast majority (94%) will have sampled alcohol, two-thirds described themselves as regular drinkers, and only 1 in 5, denied ever having been drunk. In sharp contrast, is a growing awareness that almost half of these same 16-year-olds have experimented with at least one 'street' drug is extremely disturbing, especially as I myself am a mother, with a son of eight years old.

So why do people take/become involved/experiment with drugs?

There are many reasons why people become involved with drug abuse, though this is only a transient phase. Many young people try one or more of the available drugs through curiosity or because of peer group pressure, but do not become regular users. Some do however, remain occasional users, becoming dependant upon their drug and dose. The following diagram shows 'The motivation for drug consumption (nicotine and alcohol not included) in 16 – 25 yr olds American respondents with an indication of the frequency of use and the percentage of respondents involved – See Page 2.



Curiosity.

Boredom,
For pleasure,
Spiritual Search,
Peer influence,
Social alienation.

Psychological alienation,
Lack of self-identity, Apathy

If asking a teenager why they use drugs, most will simply reply they are pleasurable or exciting. Other reasons include getting rid of unpleasant feelings of shyness, anxiety or lack of confidence, fitting in with their friends, or because it makes them feel sophisticated or pleasantly rebellious and independent. In a survey of Oxford undergraduates, the main reason for using alcohol and drugs was pleasure; with around a fifth stating the principle benefit was stress relief. It is thought that several factors make drug or alcohol use at University more likely: emergence from the controls of family and school life, the excitement of a new environment and circle of friends, social and academic pressure and the enhanced availability of legal and illegal substances.

The importance of low self-esteem in the development of drug-related problems remains uncertain but it is certainly true that many of the personal characteristics which have been linked with vulnerability to compulsive drug use are also associated with poor self-esteem: submissiveness, a tendency to depend on others and constantly crave approval, lack of confidence, a sense of helplessness, anxiety, low expectation for the future, and a readiness to give up if the going gets tough. The development of self-esteem is a multifaceted business, but the role of the family is felt to be of great importance. A child's upbringing, should include love and acceptance from reliable adults, who evolve clearly defined rules and boundaries for the child's behaviour.

In the teenage years interrupted schooling, academic failure and truancy are associated with a greater prevalence of drug use, these children are more likely to come from large or broken families.

Risk taking is generally accepted to be part of the normal process of developing independence and individual identity during the progression from childhood through adolescence into adulthood. Society deems some risks acceptable some not. Adolescents approach risk taking differently to adults, they are unlikely to sit down and consider the pros and cons. Having

indulged in risky behaviour and apparently got away with it unscathed it is extremely rewarding and will probably encourage further exposure. This can be linked closely with drug use as using drugs is often a 'risky business'.

Drug addiction is a term that is widely used but is gradually being replaced by the term Drug Dependence, that is where a person is drug dependant if he/she feel compelled to take the drug on a periodic or continuous basis to experience its psychic effect or to avoid the discomfort produced by its abstinence. **Physical dependence** – is when the drug or one of its metabolites has become necessary for the continued functioning of the body. This means that by withdrawing the drug there are physical symptoms, which are often very unpleasant. **Psychological dependence** – consists of just emotional components with no physical symptoms on withdrawal. The emotional changes may amount to only mild discomfort or may be such that the person is led to persist in using the drug. At its extreme, it may lead to changes in lifestyle and behaviour where life revolves around drug taking and the company of others likewise involved.

