

Psychology and drug dependence

addiction

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isorders due to drug abuse currently constitute one of the most important public health problems, and both the use of drugs and its consequences are priority concerns for all Western countries, which dedicate large quantities of resources and personnel to their prevention and treatment.

The so-called bio-psycho-social model is, according to experts, the essential model of reference for the field of drug-dependence. The addictive behaviour (drug abuse) cannot be reduced to a neurochemical event that occurs in the brain. The probability that a person will consume a drug or become an addict is related not only to the biological effects of the substance, but also to individuals' degree of vulnerability (one of whose components is the biological substrate), their environment, and the processes of reinforcement involved.

The consequences of this perspective, as an alternative to the traditional medical model, are many and varied. For example, the concept of addiction does not necessarily imply that the addicted person will never be able to give up the behaviour in question. Phenomena such as self-change or natural recovery demonstrate this possibility; moving from high-risk to low-risk consumption or abstinence is fairly common. As occurs with other disorders, addictions can evolve favourably if the conditions for behavioural change come about.

Another clear implication of this model is that substance-abuse disorders require a multimodal approach, in the fields of both prevention and treatment. Thus, many risk and protection factors in relation to drug use are of an eminently psychological nature. Such factors constitute the essential objectives of prevention programmes, be they applied in the school, family or community context. The prevention of drug use is today a crucial area of activity, and the effective techniques and components of these programmes are based on solid psychological principles with a lengthy tradition.

From the healthcare and treatment perspective, despite the recent growth of pharmacological treatment, it is important to underline here the significant role of the psychological treatment of drug dependence. According to the reports and treatment guides on which the most important entities in this field have based their approaches in recent years, psychological treatments constitute a crucial element in the effective treatment of addiction. There is ample scientific support for the efficacy of certain psychological techniques, particularly behaviour therapy (including the cognitive-behavioural model), with or without pharmacological support.

It can thus be affirmed without any doubt that psychological intervention is essential for both the prevention and treatment of drug dependence.

In Spain, recent years have seen considerable progress in the implementation and dissemination of preventive and treatment programmes in the field of drug dependence. Nevertheless, there are still some shortcomings that must be corrected. Two clear examples are the focus on damage-limitation programmes, whose numbers have increased to the detriment of intervention initiatives of a psychosocial nature, and the implementation of prevention programmes in an unsystematic way and without adequate standards of quality.

The articles that follow here are aimed at informing the reader of Psychology's point of view on the evolution and current state of knowledge and professional activity in this area of intervention. We sincerely hope that the ideas set out in this issue are of interest, and can be of help in revitalizing the role of our discipline in the field of drug dependence.

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