



Addiction and other Problematic Behaviours

Health Psychology (CMED2006)

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Learning Objectives

At the end of the lecture, student should be able to

- Outline the characteristics of addictive behaviours
- Distinguish between normal behaviours, problematic behaviours, and behavioural disorders
- Identify the bio-psycho-social factors of problematic behaviours



Part 1

Health Compromising Behaviours



Health Compromising Behaviour

Harm people's current or future health

Usually habitual, addictive, and difficult to change

Often pleasurable, thus enhance ability to cope with stress

Has a window of vulnerability in adolescence

Often occurs gradually

Related to larger social structure (e.g., SES)



Addiction

Occurs when a person has become physically or psychologically dependent on a substance or a behaviour

Usually harmful, and might cause distress to individuals or people around them



Examples of Addiction

Substance

Alcohol

Caffeine

Cannabis

Cocaine

Heroin

Sugar

Tobacco

Non-Substance

Eating

Internet

Exercise

Gambling

Shopping

Video game

Working



Characteristics of Substance Dependence

Physical dependence

Tolerance

Craving

Withdrawal



Impact of Addictive Behaviours

Harmful effects of the substance/behaviour itself

Neglect of other (important) activities

Financial problem, possibly leading to crime

Distress (of self & others) associated with not being able to stop



Part 2

Example: Smoking Behaviour



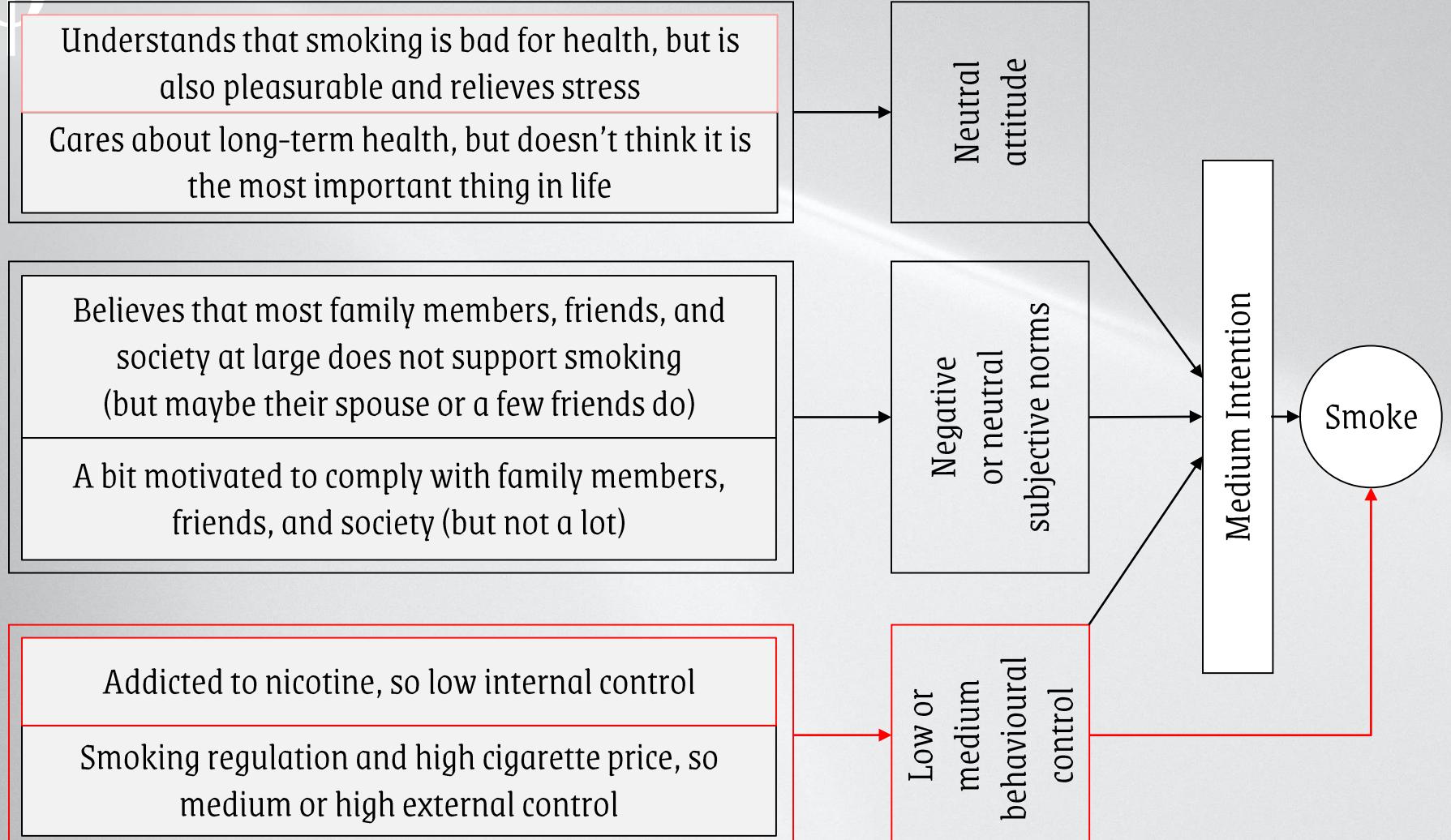
Harm of Smoking

Single greatest cause of preventable death

One out of two smokers die of smoking-related causes

Harmful to both first-hand & second-hand smokers

Precursor for the abuse of other drugs





“Traditional” Tobacco Control

Warn people about harmful effects of tobacco → now most people already knows that smoking is bad for their health

Denormalize smoking behaviour → smoking is often looked down on, and is not popular in most social situations/circles

Raise tax & set up more no-smoking areas → smoking is now expensive & inconvenient



Part 3

Abnormal Psychology



Abnormal Psy. & Maladaptive Behaviour

“Abnormal psychology is the branch of psychology devoted to the study, assessment, treatment, and prevention of maladaptive behavior.” (Dictionary of Psychology, APA)

“Maladaptive behavior is defined as behavior that interferes with an individual’s activities of daily living or ability to adjust to and participate in particular settings.” (Encyclopedia of Autism Spectrum Disorders)



Mental Disorder

Mental disorder refers to “any condition characterized by cognitive and emotional disturbances, abnormal behaviors, impaired functioning, or any combination of these. Such disorders cannot be accounted for solely by environmental circumstances and may involve physiological, genetic, chemical, social, and other factors.” (Dictionary of Psychology, APA)



What is Normal?

Cognitive and emotional disturbances (deviate from what one normally thinks or feels)

Abnormal behaviors (different from how most people behave)

Impaired functioning (work worse than previously, or compared to other people)



Examples of Disorders from ICD-11/DSM-5

Neurodevelopmental disorders; schizophrenia or other primary psychotic disorders; catatonia; mood disorders; anxiety or fear-related disorders; obsessive-compulsive or related disorders; disorders specifically associated with stress; dissociative disorders; feeding or eating disorders; elimination disorders; disorders due to substance use or addictive behaviours; impulse control disorders; disruptive behaviour or dissociational disorders; personality disorders; neurocognitive disorders.....



Examples of Abnormal Thinking Patterns

Excessive fear towards non-threatening objects (Phobia)

Difficulties determining what is real and what is not (Psychosis)

Lack of remorse, guilt, or empathy (Psychopathy)

Distrust & suspicion of others w/o adequate reason (Paranoia)



PHQ-2

Over the <u>last 2 weeks</u> , how often have you been bothered by the following problems?	Not at all	Several days	More than half the days	Nearly every day
1. Little interest or pleasure in doing things	0	+1	+2	+3
2. Feeling down, depressed or hopeless	0	+1	+2	+3



GAD-2

Over the <u>last 2 weeks</u> , how often have you been bothered by the following problems?	Not at all	Several days	More than half the days	Nearly every day
1. Feeling nervous, anxious or on edge	0	+1	+2	+3
2. Not being able to stop or control worrying	0	+1	+2	+3



Diagnostic Criteria for Major Depressive Disorder

Depressed Mood; Loss of interest/pleasure; Weight loss or gain;
Insomnia/hypersomnia; Psychomotor agitation or retardation;
Fatigue; Feeling worthless or excessive/inappropriate guilt;
Decreased concentration; Thoughts of death/suicide
(but also)

Symptoms cause clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning



Diagnostic Crit. for Generalized Anxiety Disorder

Feeling nervous/anxious; Unable to stop or control worrying;

Worrying too much; Trouble relaxing;

Being restless; Easily annoyed or irritable;

Afraid as if something awful might happen

(but also)

Symptoms cause clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning



Tool 56: Psychopathology

People's behaviour could be the result of cognitive and emotional disturbances

However, we need to be cautious about labelling people as having mental disorders just because of “abnormal behaviour”; rather, we need to check if their symptoms “cause clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning”



Part 4

Vices and Volition



*“You can live to be a hundred
if you give up all the things
that make you want to live to be a hundred.”*

Woody Allen



Everyone has a Vice?

A vice is a bad habit or shortcoming

(Traditionally it means moral flaw or evil practice)

Most people do not have mental disorders or addiction; but
most people have health-compromising behaviour; and
almost everyone has a vice (or two)



What is your Vice

And how do you justify it to yourself?

A habit that is bad for your health?

A habit that is (slightly) unethical?

A habit that damage the environment?

A habit that is harms the society?



Examples of Vices

Substance

Alcohol
Caffeine
Cannabis
Late night meal
Junk food
Sugar
Tobacco

Non-Substance

Gambling
Hateful comments
Pornography
Shopping
Sleeping
Speeding
Video-game

Deadly Sins

Envy
Gluttony
Greed
Lust
Pride
Sloth
Wrath



Autonomy

In the “four principles” approach of medical ethics, the first principle is the respect for autonomy – i.e., that the patient has the right to refuse or choose their treatment

In general, we also respect that people have the right to do, or refuse to do, things – as long as they do not harm someone else
(Or do we...?)



Argument for Intervention

Argument for stopping people from their vices most focus on the negative impact on the society (e.g., directly or indirectly harms other people; or costs that need to be borne by the society)

Another argument is to protect someone against themselves – but in most societies this is only a strong argument if the people in question are children or otherwise incapable



How Much do we Owe the Society?

In more collectivistic society, people might be expected to behave in ways that are best for the society (and not only best for themselves while not harming the society)

In more extreme cases, autonomy is respected if and only if it does not contradict the common goal of the society



Tool 57: Volition

People's behaviour are often the result of their own volition (even though we can identify various biological, psychological, and social reasons – and might even be able to come up with highly rational reasons why they should not behave in that way)

Note the importance of autonomy; the (sometimes limited) rights for anyone to pursue their own goals (for pleasure or otherwise); and our role in securing the common good



Part 5

Explaining and Suggesting Behaviours



Scenario 1

John, 50, is a very successful professor of psychology. He thinks about psychology all the time and spends most of his day working. Sometimes he is so focused on his work that he forgets to have lunch or dinner.

He prioritizes his work over other interests and daily responsibilities, which also led to him breaking up with his long time girlfriend. When asked by his parents, he always lies about how much he works.

He feels anxious and irritable when he is away from work. His ex also said that he uses work to escape negative emotions.

Comment on whether (i) work is a problematic behaviour for John; (ii) John is addicted to work; (iii) any third party should try to encourage John to work (or think about work) less



Scenario 2

John, 30, is a very successful streamer on Twitch. He thinks about gaming all the time and spends most of his day gaming. Sometimes he is so focused on playing games that he forgets to have lunch or dinner.

He prioritizes gaming over other interests and daily responsibilities, which also led to him breaking up with his long time girlfriend. When asked by his parents, he always lies about how much he games.

He feels anxious and irritable when he is away from gaming. His ex also said that he uses games to escape negative emotions.

Comment on whether (i) gaming is a problematic behaviour for John; (ii) John is addicted to gaming; (iii) any third party should try to encourage John to game less



Part 6

Behavioural Change



Case 13

Canice, 40, binge drinks with his friends every month. Every month, he invites his friends to come to his home, and they have a fine meal together and drink lots of wine.

Canice thinks binge drinking can cause liver disease and hangover, but is also an essential part of social life. He claims that he cares about his health and hates hangover, but he loves hanging out with his friends and they all love wine.

Although all his friends are OK with binge drinking, Canice's family is less enamoured with it. He sometimes invite his sister to come to the gathering. She is fond of all his friends, but she does not approve of the way everyone has to drink until they nearly pass out.

Canice is really close to both his family and his friends, and doesn't really want to do things they dislike – so he asks her sister not to tell the rest of the family.



Part 7

Conclusion



Conclusion

Problematic behaviours (including addiction) are behaviours that cause distress to the person themselves, people around them, or the society at large

When considering abnormal or problematic behaviours, we might consider the presence of psychopathology; but at the same time, we need to acknowledge and respect their volition



Reading / References

- Taylor, SE & Stanton, AL (2021) Health Psychology (11th ed.). Chapter 5: Health-Compromising Behaviors. McGraw-Hill.
- Dictionary of Psychology (American Psychological Association). Available at <https://dictionary.apa.org/>



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