**Learning Journal Unit 8**

University of the People

PSYC 1504-01: Introduction to Psychology-AY2025-T2

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10 January 2025

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Addiction is often seen as a taboo subject due to a combination of societal beliefs, misunderstandings, and the stigma attached to it. Historically, addiction has been viewed as a moral failing or a lack of willpower, leading many people to overlook the underlying complexities of substance abuse. This societal perception not only harms individuals struggling with addiction but also deters them from seeking help, which compounds the issue.

The dominant beliefs surrounding addiction can significantly shape how addicts are viewed in society. In many cultures, there is a strong emphasis on personal responsibility and self-control, which is why addiction is often perceived as a personal weakness. In some circles, people might believe that if someone truly wanted to stop using drugs or alcohol, they would simply do so. This belief fails to account for the neurobiological and psychological components of addiction, which complicate the process of recovery. The persistent notion that addicts are simply "bad" or "weak" individuals leads to judgment and a lack of empathy, which only serves to stigmatize those affected.

These stigmas can significantly hinder an individual’s access to treatment. Fear of being judged or labeled can prevent individuals from seeking help, whether through therapy, rehabilitation, or support groups. People may avoid or delay treatment because they feel ashamed of their addiction or fear that their community will no longer accept them if they seek help. This is particularly true in communities where addiction is seen as a moral issue rather than a medical one. In such environments, an addict is often isolated, which makes recovery even more difficult.

The medical community, however, increasingly views addiction as a chronic disease, which reflects a more comprehensive understanding of its nature. Research has shown that addiction changes brain chemistry and function, reinforcing the idea that addiction is not simply a matter of choice or morality. Just as with other chronic diseases like diabetes or hypertension, addiction requires ongoing management, not simply willpower. This shift in perspective can help reduce stigma and encourage more people to seek help.

In my experience, I’ve witnessed the profound effect stigma has on individuals with substance use disorders. A close acquaintance, who struggled with alcohol addiction for many years, was often ostracised by friends and family. The cycle of guilt, shame, and isolation made the addiction worse. Despite numerous attempts to get clean, it wasn’t until they entered a treatment programme that focused on addiction as a disease that they started to understand their struggles in a new light. It was clear that without a supportive environment that encouraged empathy and treatment, recovery would have been much more difficult. The moment they received professional help, they started to break free from the grip of addiction, but the stigma around their condition remained a barrier they had to continuously overcome.

Society’s dominant beliefs about addiction hinder recovery by fostering a narrative that is shame-based and judgmental. However, as medical research continues to support the idea that addiction is a chronic disease, it’s important for society to shift its perspective and offer more compassion, resources, and opportunities for treatment. The more we educate ourselves and confront these prejudices, the more likely individuals struggling with addiction will feel empowered to seek help without fear of being judged.

Ultimately, addressing the taboo around addiction requires a collective effort to educate the public, reduce stigma, and create supportive environments that encourage recovery. Only then can we hope to combat the pervasive social and psychological barriers that addicts face.

**References**  
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