

OVERCOMING ADDICTION- ABSTINENCE V. HARM REDUCTION

INTRODUCTION

Historically, the use of drugs has been prevalent within our society for centuries for a variety of reasons ranging from experimentation to addiction. The drive towards overcoming addiction though has amounted in various programs with abstinence-based and harm reduction methods being the topic of this presentation.

Abstinence based programs to help overcome drug addiction by completely stopping one's use of a certain substance. As for harm reduction programs, a more integrated model that ranges from or even combines teaching addicts ways to use substances safely to tackling the underlying reasons behind addiction to points which this sometimes leads to sobriety.

The impacts of these programs will be discussed moving forward into the rest of the presentation, with each having its own benefits and detriments.

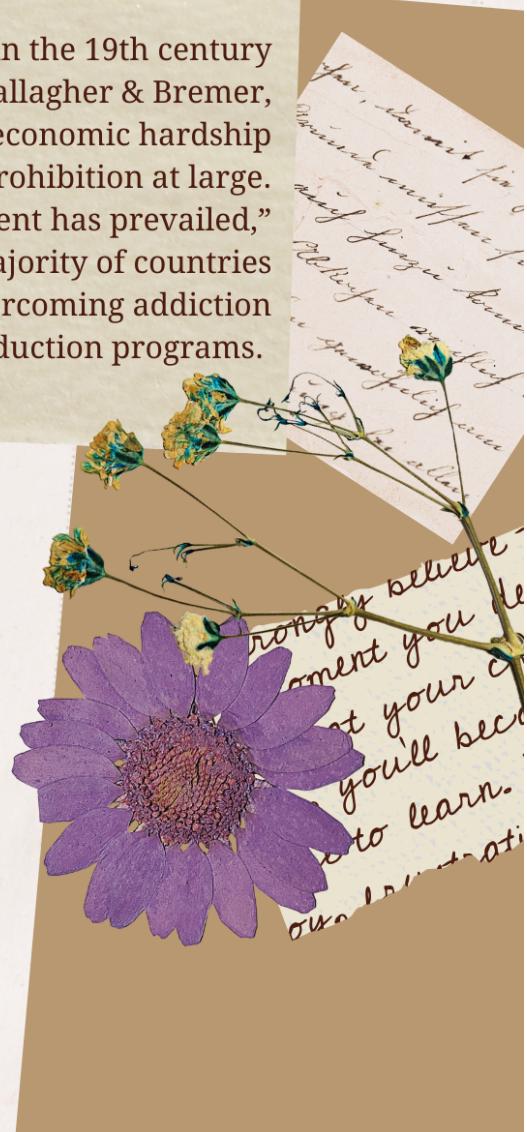
HISTORY

The concept of an abstinence-based drug recovery program began in the 19th century throughout a time where the temperance movement was strong (Gallagher & Bremer, 2017, p. 115). This continued into the 20th century in times of great economic hardship and policy aimed at restricting alcohol consumption with prohibition at large.

“Within the past 35 years, the abstinence-based model of treatment has prevailed,” remaining the most common methods to overcome addiction in a majority of countries (Gallagher & Bremer, 2017, p. 116). However, another form of overcoming addiction rose in the 20th century called harm reduction programs.

Harm reduction programs arose in the 20th century, becoming popular in countries such as Canada, Australia, etc., leading to the changing of definitions and labels relating to addiction (O’Malley, 2019, pp. 191-192). These harm reduction programs have evolved within the short time span they have been created, showing promising developments within the sphere of overcoming addiction. The rise and changes are largely due to the increased knowledge of the effectiveness of harm reduction models along with the drawbacks of abstinence-based alcohol recovery programs.

As more research comes to light, countries are beginning to favour harm reduction programs over abstinence-based recovery methods, also allowing us to present the impacts of both models below.



IMPACTS ON CANADA

ABSTINENCE MODEL

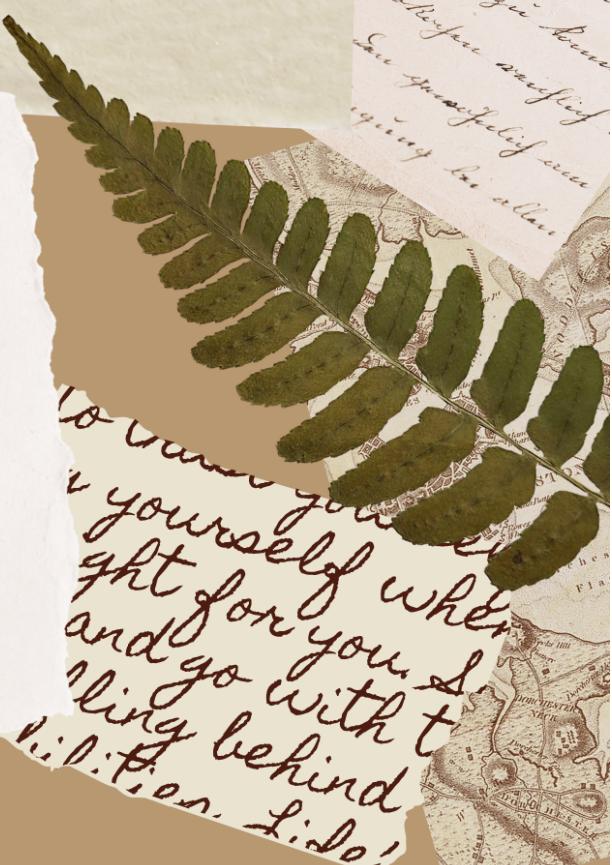
An abstinence model of drug recovery involves the complete cessation of drug usage. In common speech it is known as “quitting cold turkey”. While discontinuing drug usage has definite health benefits, it can be difficult to follow through on.

A study by Salo et. Al (2009) found that there was a positive association between the duration of abstinence and recovery of behavioural regulation and top down control in methamphetamine users. The longer the individuals went without taking the drugs, the more improvement they saw in their overall health. However, another study by Jones et al. (2016) found that complete abstinence of methamphetamine usage led to greater impulsivity among users, which is “an important factor in the initiation and maintenance of addiction” (pg. 501).

This makes sense as amphetamines can be used to treat attention deficit disorders such as ADHD, so people who self-medicate using methamphetamine could be left with no other coping mechanisms. Abstinence could leave these individuals without the tools to deal with their recovery.

Furthermore, some studies have found that abstinence-based approaches can actually increase the likelihood of a non-fatal overdose by as much as 3.67 times and other risky behaviours such as sharing needles (Vo et al., 2021).

While there are clear health benefits to abstinence in theory, it appears to not be an effective method of recovery. It has the most immediate impact on the body, but does not appear to be sustainable.



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IMPACTS ON CANADA HARM REDUCTION MODEL

Harm reduction policies in Canada offer a realistic approach to addressing the intersection of mental health and addiction recovery. Bartram (2020) highlights that harm reduction does not demand abstinence from substances and hence is different from the abstinence model. This potentially widens the gap between mental health and addiction services (Bartram, 2020). However, harm reduction aligns well with mental health recovery principles by accepting ongoing symptoms and prioritizing overall wellbeing. This approach has led to increased treatment engagement and reduced harm among substance users, hence bridging the gap between the two recovery models (Bartram, 2020).

Wood et al. (2012) acknowledge the effectiveness of harm reduction strategies, demonstrating their success in avoiding drug-related harm and promoting health and safety within the community. The authors note that despite substantial investment in drug law enforcement, such efforts have proven ineffective and extremely costly, with numerous unintended consequences. In contrast, harm reduction strategies, such as needle exchange programs and supervised injecting sites, offer significant public health benefits without adverse effects.

By treating addiction as a health problem rather than a criminal justice issue, harm reduction creates a supportive and integrated service environment. This approach promotes self-determination through non-judgmental support, representing a significant step towards a more comprehensive and inclusive model for addressing addiction and mental health care in Canada.

FINAL THOUGHTS

CONCLUSION

In summary, understanding the impacts of abstinence-based and harm-reduction methods for drug recovery gives insight into the complexity of drug addiction.

Abstinence-based methods have been present for a longer time although they pose major significant challenges compared to the benefits. On the other hand, harm reduction methods are prevalent now as they are inclusive and align closely with mental health recovery principles leading to less harm among the users.

Research throughout Canada shows the public health benefits associated with harm reduction programs such as needle exchange programs and supervised injecting sites, which give users safety and health benefits without restricted use.

Comparative research between harm reduction and abstinence-based methods shows that integrating both could offer a wider solution to the drug problem. Policy makers, health care workers and community advocates ought to consider the impacts of each method to create holistic strategies for combating addiction.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are some of the impacts of abstinence based recovery programs
2. What are some of the differences between abstinence and harm reduction models of overcoming addiction
3. What are some of the impacts of harm reduction based recovery programs
4. In your opinion, which recovery program method is more effective





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