

*Masked: The Hidden Impact on  
Substance Affected Families.*

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# Learning Objectives

1. Explore the role of Covid-19 pandemic on substance use.
2. Discuss the response of substance affected families to pandemic guidelines.
3. Examine trauma enactments amid ongoing pandemic influences.

# Objective 1

*Explore the role of Covid-19 pandemic on substance use.*

# Masked: Quarantines and Lockdowns

- The mandates impacted virtually every segment of the U.S. population.
- The healthcare system strained under the wait of COVID-19 cases<sup>1</sup>.
- Hospitals suffered economic losses from reductions in elective procedures, limitations on routine medical services and the high cost of personal protective equipment (PPE).
- Individually, overnight, fears over contracting this virus with unknown outcomes, altered life responsibilities including juggling home-schooling of children, worries about the health of their families and friends, and, in some cases, experiences of food insecurity, isolation and job loss.

# Masked: Physical Distancing on Substance Use

- Increased risk of infection for COVID-19 during procurement and intoxication.
- Personal hygiene is often neglected, therefore, if physical distancing is breached, greater risk to infection.
- The types of housing, food and economic insecurities associated with substance abusing individuals, limited ability to adhere to quarantine mandates
- If affected more likely to experience adverse outcomes
- Pervasive stigma and discrimination impeded health-seeking behaviors and this was further compounded during the pandemic

# Masked: Quarantine and other substance use associated concerns:

- Increased frequent social interaction either in retail stores or with drug suppliers
- Transmission by frequent hand to mouth actions smoking tobacco or cannabis or other substances
- Sharing vaporizers or smoking paraphernalia
- May be hesitant to use hand sanitizers as these pose fire hazards if used in proximity to lighting up
- Reliance on food banks and community food centers for daily meals might be unable to adhere to confinement

# Objective 2

*Responses of substance affected individuals and families to pandemic guidelines.*

# Responses

- When people experience increased psychological distress, they may rely on maladaptive coping mechanisms, including using alcohol and drugs, gambling and overeating.
- Over half of U.S. adults reported that the coronavirus outbreak has had a negative impact on their mental health.
- Of those adults, 12% reported an increase in alcohol or drug use.



# Responses

- Gambling has also increased considerably between March and August of 2020 with Global Poker, a gambling research firm, reporting a 43% growth in the poker industry.
- Americans have turned to food to alleviate stress. A WebMD poll in May 2020 reported that 44% of women and 22% of men had already experienced weight gain just 2 months into government-imposed shutdowns.
- The “Quarantine 15” and #quarantineweightgain have been trending on social media since the early days of the pandemic

# Responses

- Stress and low mood due to loss of income or social isolation can elicit an increase in motivation to consume substances evident by strong cravings and substance preoccupation, culminating in substance relapse.
- Increase in national sales of alcohol: studies reveal a 54% increase in national sales of alcohol during the week ending March 15, compared to this same week 1 year prior, with online alcohol sales increasing 234%.

# Responses

- While working from home, people may have access to alcohol during all hours of the day, which may contribute to drinking in the morning or during lunch breaks.
- One study reported that on average, alcohol was consumed 1 more day per month by 75% of adults.
- The frequency of alcohol consumption among adults in this study increased by 14% from 2019 to 2020.
- Heavy-drinking episodes increased by 41% in women since the COVID-19 lockdown

# Responses

- Previous studies suggested that stress predicted relapse to substance use among those who use tobacco, alcohol, cannabis, and cocaine or heroin.
- Paradoxically, COVID-19 interfered with regular supply of both licit and illicit substances and paraphernalia, leading to lapse in substance consumption or hazardous use.
- There has been some concern that limited access to vaping stores will cause relapse to tobacco smoking among those who exclusively vape nicotine via e-cigarettes or co-use with others.

# Responses

- Moreover, partial closures of safe consumption sites, decreased access to opioid agonist therapy (OAT).
- Fear of virus transmission pushed some 287 persons with SUD to inject illicit high potency opioids alone, risking opioid overdose and death.

# Responses

- To reduce the risk of COVID-19 infection in prisons, there has been rapid release of incarcerated individuals across the world.
- A public health measure given the risks of the pandemic in prisons. However, these sudden releases may result in lapses in continuity of OAT, loss of tolerance, relapse, and overdose.
- Recent calls to avoid administration of intranasal naloxone in fear of COVID-19 transmission to first responders, who might not have personal protective equipment, may further increase the number of untreated opioid overdoses and consequently increase mortality

# Objective 3

*Trauma enactments amid ongoing pandemic influences.*

# These Stress and Strain Experiences impact us....

- Physiologically – heightened arousal, startle response, heart palpitations, headaches, body pains, digestive concerns, other somatic responses
- Emotionally – fatigue, fear, anxiety, grief, irritability, anger, withdrawal
- Cognitively – poor concentration, tracking, memory disturbances, magical thinking, decline in work and school performance,
- Behaviorally – accidents, aggression, absent, absent mindedness, sleeping and eating changes, misuses and abuses, daydreaming.



# In Homes – Changing Dynamics

- The American Psychological Association surveyed 3,000 adults between April 24 and May 4, 2020. The survey showed that the average stress level reported by parents of children under 18 was 6.7 out of 10 compared with 5.5 out of 10 for adults with no children living at home.
- Additionally, 46% of adults with children under 18 stated that their stress level was “high” (between 8 and 10) compared with 28% of adults without children reporting the same level of stress

## **Case Scenario 1:**

Jon, aged 9 has been quieter than usual, not leaving his room and only talking to his school friends. Even his teachers have noticed his loss of enthusiasm and lack of engaging. His aunt was concerned and asked one of his friend's parents if they knew about any changes with Jon. In promising to hold a confidence, Aunt Mae learned that Jon was withdrawing at home because he discovered that his parents were using drugs and alcohol, a situation that never occurred prior to the pandemic. He felt lost in his home and unsafe. Upon further conversation with Jon's parents, they both had been in recovery prior to Jon's birth and were in relapse.

# Loss of confidence – New territory. Home School

- An August 2020 report by the U.S. Census Bureau stated that nearly 93% of households with school-age children reported some form of distance learning during the pandemic.
- Parents were often forced to facilitate online learning throughout the school day while juggling their own employment and attending to basic household needs.
- Over 70% of parents reported that managing distance learning for their children during the pandemic was a significant source of stress

## **Case Scenario 1:**

Tim aged 61/2 shared with his home room teacher during check in time, that his mom, shouted at him and called him slow, because he was not doing his school work faster. Say Tim, 'why can't I come back to school'

# Early Childhood – Compensatory Behaviors

- Among 602 Italians surveyed online between April and May 2020, almost half reported feeling anxious due to their eating habits and admitted to increasing their consumption of comfort foods to feel better.
- In addition, 86% of respondents reported that they felt unable to sufficiently control their diet .

### **Case Scenario 3:**

28 year old Sh'A talks about her early years being overweight, struggling with shame, guilt and depression. She had a case worker who worked with her from the age of 12 years. She learned coping skills to manage the depression and anxiety, and using food as comfort. She learned to speak up for herself.

In the past three years, after her job went remote and has remain 100% home based work, she has found the isolation demoralizing. She gained weight through compulsive snacking. The changes were slow but steady, and in 2022, she returned to therapy, almost 35 lbs. heavier, and significant depression.

## Case Scenario 4

Having survived years of childhood abuse, Ashley developed problematic sexual activity including chronic pornography and engaging in unsafe sexual encounters. Ashley reports that throughout his teens this had been a problem but since marriage and starting a family 6 years ago, he thought he was “cured”. Spending 7-10 hours a day on computers, along with increased irritability and conflict in the home, he started staying out with “friends” once the quarantines were lifted.

He states that he feels like he has recreated his family of origin climate, being absent from his children and feeling numb, and unable to stop the destructive behaviors.

# In Summary

- Loss of control
- Abrupt shift in relationships - Isolation and abandonment
- Grief and loss of normality
- Worsening of chronic physical health problems
- Worsening of chronic mental health problems
- Increased use of habit forming substances
- Access to resources and support
- Telehealth challenges



# Recommended Strategies

## **Native**

- Use of family and Social Supports
- Personal Hygiene
- Dietary and Sleeping Restoration
- Relaxation and Breathing
- Cry and Sigh – Get Real
- Talk not Silence
- GET outside
- Keep Purpose and Perspective

# Recommended Strategies

## **Acquired**

- Avoid Traps in Thinking
- Dissect and Challenge thoughts
- Tap Spiritual and Religious
- Review Values and World View
- Reinforce your priorities
- Talk, Talk, Talk – Know Where to Get Help
- Laugh, Laugh, Laugh – Get OUT!!!

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# Thank you

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