

**HOW TO UNDERSTAND ADDICTIONS:  
ADDICTION FACT SHEET**  
**William Doverspike, Ph.D.**  
**Drdoverspike.com**  
**770-913-0506**

Addiction is often described as the only disease that says it does not exist. Yet addictions are increasingly prevalent in our society and they impact our communities directly.

**What is addiction?**

According to the American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM; 2011), “Addiction is a primary, chronic disease of brain reward, motivation, memory, and related circuitry. Dysfunction in these circuits leads to characteristic biological, psychological, social, and spiritual manifestations. This is reflected in an individual pathologically pursuing reward and/or relief by substance use and other behaviors.”

Whether the addiction involves substances or other behaviors, it is characterized by impairment in behavioral control, inability to abstain from the substance or process, obsessing about or craving related to the substance or process, a dysfunctional emotional response, and diminished recognition of maladaptive consequences (e.g., significant problems with one’s behaviors and interpersonal relationships). Without treatment or engagement in recovery activities, addiction is progressive and can result in impairment, disability, and death.

**How does addiction impact our community?**

The level of drug use in the U.S. is believed to be the highest in the industrialized world (Perkinson, 2012, p. 12). Although heroin is often described as the most addictive drug, prescription pain killers account for the majority of opiates used by those who are addicted in the U.S. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2015) reports that since 1999 the amount of prescription painkillers prescribed and sold in the U.S. has nearly quadrupled, yet there has not been an overall change in the amount of pain that Americans report. With only 5% of the world’s population, Americans consume more than 80% of the world’s supply of pain medications, 84% of the world’s supply of oxycodone, and 99% of the world’s supply of hydrocodone (United Nations, 2009). According to the International Narcotics Control Board (2013), the U.S. consumes approximately 124 tons of thebaine-based opiates annually (e.g., oxycodone, oxymorphone).

**Opioid addiction.** Although crystal methamphetamine is often described as the most deadly drug, the leading cause of accidental death is prescription drug overdose, resulting in more deaths than crystal meth, cocaine, and heroin combined (Centers for Disease Control, 2015). With one overdose death every 14 minutes, since 2009 prescription drug overdoses have surpassed motor vehicle accidents as the major cause of accidental deaths (Warner, Chen, &

Makuc, (2009). According to preliminary data compiled by *The New York Times*, opioid deaths in 2016 most likely exceeded 59,000, representing 19% more than the previous year and the largest annual jump ever recorded in the U.S. (Katz, 2017). Drug overdoses are the leading cause of death among Americans under age 50. Yet the number of drug-addicted Americans is exceeded ten-fold by those addicted to America’s most popular legal substance—alcohol.

**Alcohol dependence.** Alcohol contributes to over 200 diseases and injury-related conditions, including injuries, liver cirrhosis, cancers, injuries, and alcohol dependence (World Health Organization, 2014). Roughly 20 percent of U. S. college students meet the criteria for Alcohol Use Disorder (Blanco et al., 2008). In 2013, almost seven percent (6.8%) of adults reported that they engaged in heavy drinking in the past month and approximately one-fourth (24.6%) reported binge drinking in the past month. As a source of antisocial behavior, alcohol is implicated in nearly 70% of fatal car accidents, 65% of murders, 65% of spouse battering, 55% of violent child abuse, and at least 30% of suicides (Steele & Josephs, 1990).

**Process addictions.** Addiction can also involve behavioral processes or *process addictions*, such as compulsive shopping or pathological gambling. *Social gambling* is time limited, occurs with friends, and incurs acceptable losses. *Professional gambling* involves discipline and limited risks. *Pathological gambling* involves impairment in functioning and loss of control (e.g., “chasing” losses). Severe forms of pathological gambling affect approximately one percent of the U.S. population (Kessler et al., 2008; Petry, Stinson, & Grant, (2005), with an average cost to society of almost \$10,000.00 per gambler (Grinols, 2011).

Closer to home for many Americans, process addiction can involve sex, food, and smoking. Regarding sex, it is estimated that at least 30% of all data transferred across the Internet is pornography, with those websites getting more visitors each month than Netflix, Amazon, and Twitter combined (The Huffington Post, 2013). Sixty-four percent of Christian men and 15% of Christian women report watching pornography once a month (Covenant Eyes, 2015). Whereas regular church attendees are 26% less likely to look at porn, self-identified fundamentalists are 91% more likely to look at porn (Covenant Eyes). Patrick Means, author and licensed mental health counselor, reports that 63% of pastors surveyed confirm that they are struggling with sexual addiction or sexual compulsion including, but not limited to, the use of pornography,

compulsive masturbation, or other secret sexual activity (Means, 2006). Aside from visual pornography, romance novels have been described as “easily the most-hidden literary habit in America” (Wendell & Tan, 2009, p. 3). With \$1.26 billion in sales, giving them the largest share (i.e., 55%) of the overall trade-book market (Bosman, 2010), romance novels are sometimes considered to be the female equivalent of pornography (Giles, 2011).

**Eating disorders.** Regarding food, until surpassed by Mexico in 2013, the U.S. had the highest rate of obesity in the world (Global Post, 2013). Yet the U.S. still has the world’s highest prevalence rate of anorexia nervosa, which for more than two decades still has had the highest mortality rate of any mental illness (Barlow & Durand, 2015; Sullivan, 1995). The mortality rate associated with anorexia nervosa is 12 times higher than the death rate associated with all causes of death for females 15-24 years old (Sullivan, 1995).

**Nicotine addiction.** In contrast to sex, drugs, and rock-n-roll, smoking is still America’s most wanted killer. According to Nora D. Volkow, M.D., Director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), tobacco use is still the leading preventable cause of death in the United States (NIDA, 2009). Although the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that there has been a decline of almost 50 percent in tobacco use since 1965, tobacco results in more deaths than any other drug in the U.S., with one in every five U.S. deaths the result of smoking. In fact, tobacco kills more Americans than alcohol, cocaine, heroin, homicide, suicide, car accidents, fire, and AIDS combined (NIDA, 2009).

#### **What treatments are available for addiction?**

Addiction affects 23.2 million Americans—a number roughly equivalent to the entire population of Texas—of whom only about 10% are receiving the treatment they need. This *treatment gap* means that almost 20 million Americans do not receive the treatment they need. Yet two National Institute of Health institutes—the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) and the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA)—have revealed startling new advances in the fight against alcohol and other drug addiction. The U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s (SAMHSA; 2015) National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices (NREPP) includes 356 interventions, dozens of which have application in the treatment of addiction. Three of the most widely-used evidence-based treatments are Motivational Enhancement Therapy, Twelve Step Facilitation Therapy, and Cognitive Behavioral Skills Training (e.g., Cocaine-Specific Coping Skills Training).

#### **What can we do?**

Do you want to save lives? Do you want to witness the miracles that can occur in the biological, psychological, and spiritual transformation of lives wrecked by addiction? Then consider a career in addictions counseling. Future counselors and marriage and family therapists can do their part in closing the treatment gap by doing the following:

1. Increase awareness of addiction and its impact on the lives of family members.
2. Respond to and reduce addiction risk factors that exist in the community.
3. Provide quality care to individuals and families suffering from addiction.

#### **References**

- American Society of Addiction Medicine. (2011). Short definition of addiction. Adopted by the ASAM Board of Directors April 19, 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.asam.org/for-the-public/definition-of-addiction>
- Barlow, D. H., & Durand, V. M. (2015). *Abnormal psychology: An integrative approach* (7th ed.). Stamford, CT: Cengage Learning.
- Blanco, C., Okuda, M., Wright, C., Hasin, D. S., Grant, B. F., Liu, S-M., & Olfson, M. (2008, December). Mental health of college students and their non-college-attending peers: Results from the National Epidemiologic Study on Alcohol and Related Conditions. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 65(12), 1429–1437. Retrieved from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2734947/>
- Bosman, J. (2010, December 8). Lust tales and hot sales: Romance e-books thrive. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from [http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/09/books/09romance.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/09/books/09romance.html?_r=0)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2015). Injury, prevention, & control: Prescription drug overdose. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/>
- Connors, G., DiClemente, C., Velasquez, M., & Donovan, D. (2013). *Substance abuse treatment and the stages of change* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Giles, K. (2011, May 30). Romance novels can become addictive. Retrieved from <http://www.ksl.com/?nid=1010&sid=15609384>

- Global Post (2013, July 8). Mexico takes title of “most obese” from America. CBS News. Retrieved from <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/mexico-takes-title-of-most-obese-from-america/>
- Grinols, E. L. (2011). The hidden social costs of gambling (pp.19-28). In R. B. Kruschwitz (Ed.) *The gambling culture. Christian Reflection: A Series in Faith and Ethics*. Waco, TX: Baylor University, Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University. Retrieved from <http://www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/144582.pdf>
- International Narcotics Control Board (2013). Report 2013. Estimated World Requirements for 2014— Statistics for 2012. Part Three: Supply of opiate raw materials and demand for opiates for medical and scientific purposes (pp. 99-100). Retrieved from [https://www.incb.org/documents/Narcotic-Drugs/Technical-Publications/2013/Part\\_3\\_supply\\_E.pdf](https://www.incb.org/documents/Narcotic-Drugs/Technical-Publications/2013/Part_3_supply_E.pdf)
- Katz, Josh. (2017, June 5). Drug deaths in America are rising faster than ever. <https://www.nytimes.com/>
- Kessler, R. C., Hwang, I., LaBrie, R., Petukhova, M., Sampson, N. A., Winters, K. C., et al. (2008). DSM-IV pathological gambling in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication. *Psychological Medicine*, 38(9), 1351-601.
- Means, P. A. (2006). *Men's secret wars*. Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, a division of Baker publishing Group.
- National Institute on Drug Abuse (2009). Nicotine addiction. Retrieved from <http://www.nida.nih.gov/ResearchReports/Nicotine/nicotine2.html>
- National Institutes of Health and Friends of the National Library of Medicine. (2007, Spring). The science of addiction: Drugs, brains, and behavior. *NIH Medline Plus*, 2(2), 14-17. Retrieved from <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/magazine/issues/spring07/articles/spring07pg14-17.html>
- Perkinson, R. (2012). *Chemical dependency counseling: A practical guide* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. Page 18.
- Petry, N. M., Stinson, F. S., & Grant, B. F. (2005). Comorbidity of DSM-IV pathological gambling and other psychiatric disorders: Results from the National Epidemiological Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions. *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, 66(5), 564-574.
- Covenant Eyes. (2015). Pornography statistics: Annual report 2015. Owosso, MI: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.covenanteyes.com/pornstats/>
- Steele, C. M., & Josephs, R. A. (1990). Alcohol myopia: Its prized and dangerous effects. *American Psychologist*, 45(8), 921-933.
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2015). National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices. Retrieved from <http://www.nrepp.samhsa.gov/ViewAll.aspx>
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2015). National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH). Table 2.46B – Alcohol Use, Binge Alcohol Use, and Heavy Alcohol Use in the Past Month Among Persons Aged 18 or Older, by Demographic Characteristics: Percentages, 2012 and 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/NSDUH-DetTabsPDFWHTML2013/Web/HTML/NSDUH-DetTabsSect2peTabs43to84-2013.htm#tab2.46b>
- Sullivan, P. F. (1995, July). Mortality in anorexia nervosa. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 152(7), 1073-1074.
- The Huffington Post. (2013, May 4). Porn sites get more visitors each month than Netflix, Amazon, and Twitter combined [Blog post]. Retrieved from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/05/03/internet-porn-stats\\_n\\_3187682.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/05/03/internet-porn-stats_n_3187682.html)
- United Nations. (2009). International Narcotics Control Board Report, United Nations Publications 2008. New York, NY: Author. Page 20.
- Warner, M., Chen L. H., & Makuc, D. M. (2009, September). Increase in fatal poisonings involving opioid analgesics in the United States, 1999-2006. *NCHS Data Brief*, No. 22. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db22.pdf>
- Wendell, S., & Tan, C. (2009). *Beyond heaving bosoms: The smart bitches' guide to romance novels*. New York, NY: Fireside, A division of Simon and Shuster.
- World Health Organization. (2014). Global status report on alcohol and health. p. XIII. Retrieved from

[http://www.who.int/substance\\_abuse/publications/global\\_alcohol\\_report/msb\\_gsr\\_2014\\_1.pdf?ua=1](http://www.who.int/substance_abuse/publications/global_alcohol_report/msb_gsr_2014_1.pdf?ua=1)

**Copyright © 2016 by William F. Doverspike, Ph.D.**  
**Content last updated 2017**

The correct citation for this article is Doverspike, W. F. (2016, June 27). How to understand addictions: Addiction fact sheet. Retrieved from <http://drwilliamdoverspike.com/>