

Handout

Extract from Lexicon of alcohol and drug terms

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Available at

http://www.who.int/substance_abuse/terminology/who_lexicon/en/

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Addiction

Addiction, drug or alcohol - Repeated use of a psychoactive substance or substances, to the extent that the user (referred to as an addict) is periodically or chronically intoxicated, shows a compulsion to take the preferred substance (or substances), has great difficulty in voluntarily ceasing or modifying substance use, and exhibits determination to obtain psychoactive substances by almost any means.

Typically, tolerance is prominent and a withdrawal syndrome frequently occurs when substance use is interrupted. The life of the addict may be dominated by substance use to the virtual exclusion of all other activities and responsibilities. The term addiction also conveys the sense that such substance use has a detrimental effect on society, as well as on the individual; when applied to the use of alcohol, it is equivalent to alcoholism.

Addiction is a term of long-standing and variable usage. It is regarded by many as a discrete disease entity, a debilitating disorder rooted in the pharmacological effects of the drug, which is remorselessly progressive. From the 1920s to the 1960s attempts were made to differentiate between addiction; and "habituation", a less severe form of psychological adaptation. In the 1960s the World Health Organization recommended that both terms be abandoned in favour of dependence, which can exist in various degrees of severity.

Addiction is not a diagnostic term in ICD-10, but continues to be very widely employed by professionals and the general public alike. See also: dependence; dependence syndrome

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Addiction and dependence

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Dependence

Dependence (F1x.2.) - As a general term, the state of needing or depending on something or someone for support or to function or survive. As applied to alcohol and other drugs, the term implies a need for repeated doses of the drug to feel good or to avoid feeling bad. In DSM-IIIR, dependence is defined as "a cluster of cognitive, behavioural and physiologic symptoms that indicate a person has impaired control of psychoactive substance use and continues use of the substance despite adverse consequences". It is roughly equivalent to the dependence syndrome of ICD-10. In the ICD-I0 context, the term dependence could refer generally to any of the elements in the syndrome. The term is often used interchangeably with addiction and alcoholism. In 1964 a WHO Expert Committee introduced "dependence" to replace addiction and habituation*.

The term can be used generally with reference to the whole range of psychoactive drugs (drug dependence, chemical dependence, substance use dependence), or with specific reference to a particular drug or class of drugs (e.g. alcohol dependence, opioid dependence).

While ICD-I0 describes dependence in terms applicable across drug classes, there are differences in the characteristic dependence symptoms for different drugs. In unqualified form, dependence refers to both physical and psychological elements. Psychological or psychic dependence refers to the experience of impaired control over drinking or drug use (see craving, compulsion), while physiological or physical dependence refers to tolerance and withdrawal symptoms (see also neuroadaptation). In biologically-oriented discussion, dependence is often used to refer only to physical dependence.

Dependence or physical dependence is also used in the psychopharmacological context in a still narrower sense, referring solely to the development of withdrawal symptoms on cessation of drug use.

In this restricted sense, cross-dependence is seen as complementary to cross-tolerance, with both referring only to physical symptomatology (neuroadaptation).

*WHO Expert Committee on Addiction-Producing Drugs. Thirteenth report of the WHO expert Committee. Geneva, World Health Organization, 1964 (WHO Technical Report Series, No.273).