

Extended Summary

Life Experiences with Substance Use of Substance Addicts Being Treated a Second Time in AMATEM*

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Abstract

This study aims to show the life experiences related to substance use of patients being treated for substance addiction treatment at the Alcohol and Substance Addiction Treatment and Training Centre (AMATEM) who have applied to AMATEM for the second time for in-patient treatment. Descriptive analysis is used in this research, which was designed using the qualitative research method. In-depth interviews have been conducted with 12 substance addicts (1 female, 11 males) being treated as in-patients for the second time. As a result of the research, people stated their reasons for re-using substances after treatment to be: withdrawal, mental traps, being around old friends that use, cravings, and weakened relations with family members. The intrinsic motivation tool that leads substance-addicted individuals to their first in-patient treatment has been revealed as suffering related to the substance, while the external motivator has been revealed as family members. In addition, individuals in the in-patient treatment process report being adversely affected by persistent incentive discourses and the behaviours of other substance addicts; this situation has had a negative effect on their treatment processes. As a result of the research, allowing individuals' social environment to be part of the treatment process within the framework "being in one's environment" and increasing individuals' and their families' awareness regarding the substance is suggested. In addition; importance should be given to protective and preventive services related to the substance through team work and having the substance-using individual be reintroduced to the socialization process must be done by using positive discrimination in order to prevent social exclusion.

Keywords

Substance addiction • Relapse (Recurrence) • Substance addiction treatment • Life experiences • Qualitative research

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Although people know about the harmful consequences of substance addiction, which is defined as a brain illness that appears as an impulsive and repetitive chase and use of the substance (Tarhan & Nurmedov, 2011), has become widespread in Turkey and the age of use has shown a decline. Substance addiction has many negative physical, psychological, and social consequences (Aycan, Bıkım, Akcan, Samancı, & Bacioğlu, 2000). These problems negatively affect the biopsychosocial functioning of the individual, and the individual, group, and society are mutually affected by this process. Therefore, substance addiction is accepted as a chronic disease and should be treated.

The aim of substance addiction treatment is to prevent relapse during and after treatment. However, as Babaoğlu (1997) stated, substance addiction is a chronic disease with periods of relapse and remission. In particular, the risk of relapse after treatment happens usually between the first 6 and 12 months; however, the first 90-day period has the highest risk (Soyez & Broekaert, 2003). For this reason, the purpose of this study is to clarify the causes of relapse, which has a high risk of occurrence in the first three months after treatment, and individuals' experiences regarding substance addiction up to their inclusion in a second treatment process.

Method

This study has been designed as qualitative research in order to show the life experiences related to substance use of individuals who have applied to AMATEM for in-patient treatment for the second time. This research uses the phenomenological pattern, a qualitative research pattern.

This study also uses a semi-structured questionnaire form and in-depth interview technique, a data collection technique of the qualitative research method.

Study Group

In determining the study group of the research, criterion sampling has been used, which is an objective sampling method for qualitative research models. The criteria used for determining the participants is as follows. Individuals must have: had in-patient treatment once in AMATEM (in Turkey), applied to AMATEM between November 2016 and February 2017 for the second time for in-patient treatment, started and applied the treatment due to non-alcoholic substance use disorders, completed the detoxification process, and is over 18.

Data Collection Tools and Operation

In-depth interviews with 12 substance addicts were conducted between November 2016 and February 2017 using a semi-structured questionnaire in AMATEM's meeting room and were recorded with a digital voice recorder. The analysis of the study was

conducted in MAXQDA 12, a qualitative data analysis program. Descriptive analyses have been used to analyze the data.

Findings

The study has been carried out with 12 participants (11 males, 1 female). The participants' mean age is 25.6. Most participants are single men who dropped out of high school. The participants' mean age for first use of the substance is 14.5, and the first substance used is found to be cannabis.

Table 1
Participants' Sociodemographic Features

Nickname	Age	Gender	Education	Marital status	Age of first substance use	First substance used	Year of first treatment
Soil	25	Male	High school drop	Single	16	Cannabis	2013
Cloud	22	Male	Secondary school	Single	12	Heroin	2014
Rain	45	Male	Secondary school drop	Married	20	Cannabis	2016
Sun	21	Male	Secondary school	Single	10	Cannabis	2016
Air	25	Male	Secondary school	Single	15	Heroin	2015
Earth	26	Male	Secondary school	Divorced	18	Cannabis	2013
Fire	19	Male	High school drop	Single	12	Cannabis	2015
Space	19	Male	High school drop	Married	14	Bally	2013
Rainbow	21	Female	High school drop	Single	14	Cannabis	2016
Wind	31	Male	Primary School	Single	11	Cannabis	2010
Star	30	Male	High School	Married	16	Cannabis	2015
Water	24	Male	High school drop	Single	16	Cannabis	2015

Table 1 shows participants' age, gender, educational status, marital status, age when first using substance, first substance used, and first year of treatment.

First Substance Use Experience and First Treatment Process

Participants reported their reason for starting substance use as peer pressure, curiosity, experimenting with something new, and environmental effects. In this process, individuals are exposed to exclusion that is directed not only at the individual using the substance but also to all family members. In particular, the only female participant of the study stated experiencing gender-based exclusion from her social environment. Excluded individuals make their connections stronger with other substance addicts by weakening their relations with their families.

Reasons for Substance Reuse and the Second Treatment Process

Most participants reported reusing the substance within 90 days after completing their first in-patient treatment; most stated they had relapsed because they thought that "one time would be no problem," they experienced craving, they were in the company of old substance using friends, they felt withdrawal, they had argued with family members, they

felt hollow after being discharged, or they started reusing for no reason. The participants stated that they sought retreatment after starting to use the substance again.

Substance addicts think that they can positively affect and support those who've had the same experience. However, discourse on substance use that encourages it from other members of the group adversely affects the treatment process. In addition to these problems, the small number of women treated in AMATEM brings gender-based problems. The female participant, Rainbow, was reported to have been exposed to negative behavior from the male patients because of her gender. Participants frequently mentioned the addictive nature of the substitution drugs used for treatment in the interviews, adding that the substitution drugs are worth gold among substance users. In addition, they stated that AMATEM also forms an addiction in their lives.

Discussion

This research, designed as a qualitative research, presents the findings of interviews conducted with 12 participants using a semi-structured interview form. Female individuals are exposed to more stigmatization and exclusion from their families, social environment, and other individual(s) treated in AMATEM compared to the males, as stated by the study's lone woman. The research has revealed that women have more psychosocial problems compared to men when deciding to get treatment (Tucker, 2001). In many parts of the world, substance use is generally perceived as a male-specific problem, and prevention and treatment programs target mostly men (Kaya & Şahin, 2013). However, women and men have different needs in treating substance addiction, therefore treatment programs should not be targeted just to men's needs but should be planned and disseminated to be equally sensitive to women and men (Salvati & Sabet, 2015; Tang, Claus, Orwin, Kissin, & Arierira, 2012).

Substance addiction has recurrent properties in some cases, and the first 90 days after treatment have been defined as the period with the highest relapse risk (Soyez & Broekaert, 2003). This study reveals that all participants had had relapses immediately after their first treatment within this 90 days. The longest remission process was determined as two years in the study.

When examining the literature, not only were biochemical factors found to be effective in substance use after substance addiction treatment (Akpınar, Çevik, & Bağcıoğlu, 2014); depression, negative emotions, thoughts, attitudes and behaviors, exclusion, work stress, conflicts in interpersonal relations, old friends, longing and desire for the substance, and lack of social support are also found important (Daley & Douaihy, 2015; Hammerbacher & Lyvers, 2006; Kalyoncu et al., 2001a, 2001b; Rahman, Rahaman, Hamadani, Mustafa, & Shariful Islam, 2016; Polat, 2014; Saatcıoğlu, Yapıcı, Çiğerli, Üney, & Çakmak, 2007). In this study, the reasons for individuals' relapse after

treatment have been found as: feeling deprived, craving, returning to the environment of old addicted friends, thinking once will be no problem, feeling empty after discharge, and arguments with family members. In addition, statements from other members in the group that are enticing regarding the substance affect the treatment process negatively. Individuals with no motivation to quit the substance experience many negative processes such as quitting the treatment and relapse (DiClemente, 1999), and they convey these negative experiences to other individuals.

One finding from this study is that individuals get addicted to some drugs used in treating substance addiction. These drugs are considered to be “worth gold” among the individuals using substances, and individuals are provided with economic income through the sale of these drugs. In addition, individuals who go to AMATEM for substance addiction treatment do not want to leave because they have no self-confidence, feel unable to adapt to society after treatment, or they end up returning to AMATEM after they leave. In other words, AMATEM is transformed into a service addiction.

Conclusion and Suggestions

Although substance addiction treatment seems to be an individual concern, its effects are reflected onto the individual’s social environment and society. For this reason, individuals’ social environment should be included in the treatment process through the perspective of “the individual in one’s environment,” and awareness-raising activities should be conducted for the families. In addition, a holistic and systematic analysis of the causes of relapse would be effective at preventing subsequent relapses.

The most important reason why individuals use substance is that they are in an environment with friends who use the substance. Therefore, individuals should be provided with self-empowering psychosocial support services before being discharged, and individuals should be included in at least a one-year follow-up study. In order for individuals to regain their social functionality after treatment, positive discrimination against women should be established and employment opportunities should be provided to prevent these individuals from feeling emptiness.

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