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Trauma & Substance Use

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Abstract

An estimated 1.9 million people suffer from opioid use disorder alone in the United States (Opioid abuse, 2015). Out of that 1.9 million, the amount of individuals whom have experienced trauma is not available. However, a study was conducted concluding that those with substance use disorders were twice as likely as the general population to experience a traumatic event (Lawson, k, et. al. 2013). While the number of individuals with experienced trauma is so significant, there is a limited amount of trauma treatment available within rehab facilities. The researcher will be conducting a qualitative study by interviewing volunteer participants whom have a history of trauma and substance use. Their lived experiences will be documented to provide the why behind the connection between trauma and substance use, and highlight the need for appropriate services for trauma in rehab facilities. Trauma has everlasting effects that change people’s lives and the way they live them. Services should be put in place to address the central cause that initiated the path of substance use so one can be validated and supported throughout their journey in recovery.

Introduction or Background

It is a well known matter that there is a connection between trauma and substance use, but do we know why? The researcher’s purpose of this study is not to prove the connection, but demonstrate why there is a connection through individuals lived experiences.

Research Question

How is trauma and substance use connected?

Methods

- A qualitative study using a phenomenologist approach
- Approval from the IRB
- 2 key informants
- A recruitment guide
- An interview guide
- 3, 20-30 minute interviews
- Transcribing, memoing, coding

Results

Findings demonstrate that there are numerous causes that influence the why and how between the connection of trauma and substance use. Each experience shared by the 3 participants were unique to that individual, while similar emotions were expressed. The traumas experienced were either on multiple occasions, on going, or one occasion. It was also found that there is a lack of trauma informed counseling services available in general and in rehab facilities.

Discussion/Conclusions

My research provides the answers to the numbers that show a positive correlation between trauma and substance use. There are feelings associated with a traumatic event and the desire to seek a solution for immediate relief. The trauma endured ranged from sexual, emotional, and physical abuse, to being a witness to trauma as well.

Themes that answer how their is a connection between trauma and substance use include a lack of available trauma informed counseling, internal shame, the desire to escape ones emotions, to use substance use as a numbing tool against unwanted feelings and thoughts, and the desire to be wanted. 2 out of 3 participants also noted that initially what they were partaking in felt normalized by society and that they could make it work. It was not until the choice of substance grew stronger or the doses increased that they recognized an issue with substance could be occurring. Even then, their experienced trauma was not confronted and treated. While 2 of the participants sought assistance through multiple rehab facilities, not one informed trauma treatment option was discovered from these participants. This can be seen as an issue for various reasons, the most significant being the impact that occurs within an individual after not properly confronting and coping with the experienced trauma. It was discovered and supported by the participants that the self medication theory and avoidance coping are 2 very prevalent events that took place in their lives upon their traumatic experiences. The quotes offered on the left are examples of the supported evidence of these theories.

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References
