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**Recreational Substance Abuse Amongst College Students**

The health behavior of substance abuse and misuse among college students is a growing problem we face today. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse it states (2019), “Newly released Monitoring the Future (MTF) survey data on drug use in college-age adults ages 19-22 shows an increase in marijuana use in the past five years.” (NIDA, 2019). Marijuana is showing a steady increase in the last 5 years with vaping marijuana growing in popularity.  Marijuana is not the only drug that has been on an increase for misuse and abuse.  The common party drug cocaine has also been on an increase. The National Institute on Drug Abuse states (2019), “The five-year trend in annual prevalence of cocaine use among college respondents increased significantly to 5.2% in 2018 from 2.7% in 2013 and is at the highest it has been over the past decade.” (NIDA, 2019).  The rate of cocaine usage among college students has been at its highest in years. With rates of cocaine and marijuana usage and abuse being on an incline the issue is clear and needs to be fixed. There needs to be programs put in place to help prevent these numbers from increasing. In Long Beach, California drug abuse among college students is a prevalent issue. For instance, the economic impact of drug abuse according to the addiction center, (2020) “In one year, $10.3 billion was forfeited in healthcare and lost productivity costs due to substance abuse.” (Bezrutczyk, 2020).  The behavior of substance abuse has had a major economic impact on the Long Beach community.  The issues of drug abuse and misuse is a major problem impacting Long Beach, and among the college community at Long Beach. Overall, the problem of substance use and misuse is a health behavior that is not going to go away overnight. There is a real need to help the issues of drug abuse and misuse among the Long Beach and the college community in Long Beach.

College students and drugs are so common that by the time of their sophomore year of

college they have already had an opportunity to use alcohol, marijuana and tobacco (Arria et al.,

2008). The fact that they are just college students exposes them to all types of drugs, whether

they are party drugs or just academic drugs. Marijuana became the most used drug within

college students and the rate of use only got higher as the years went by. Drugs can have a long

term effect on the brain and the need to use them over and over. College students are faced with

a huge risk of either experiencing or becoming addicted to drugs for the sole reason of being a

college student. The college environment poses a great threat to incoming students and current

students because the environment influences the students heavily. The environment that college

students are currently in determines whether they would use and abuse drugs or not. A study

concluded that those college students who live off campus are at a higher risk to use illicit drugs

(Benz et al., 2018). College students who live off campus have a sense of independence which

poses a higher risk of them engaging in drugs because their parents are not around or college

RAs are not constantly checking on them. The study concluded that 71% of students at the age

18 used some type of substance. This number is such a huge number that prevention and help to

these college students should be focused on those who live off campus.

 A poor home environment is also a contributor for an increased risk towards addiction

tendency in students. Studies have found a significant negative association between family

members’ emotional relation and addiction (Ranjbaran et al., 2018). Financial issues are one of

the main reasons behind family conflict. Therefore, substance abuse was reported more in people

with weak socioeconomic classes. This is because the low economic status or large family size

takes entertainment and other enjoyable opportunities away from people and puts them at risk for

drug use (Ranjbaran et al., 2018). Other studies have found a relationship between

socioeconomic status and the type of drug that is being abused. High socioeconomic status was

associated with high intake of cocaine, marijuana, and alcohol (Ranjbaran et al., 2018). Having

high status has been shown to be a protective factor against cheap and dangerous substances like

crystal methamphetamines. Students with low socioeconomic status were associated with higher

consumption rates of cigarettes than any other group.

In the community level, social consequences of substance abuse and addiction in college lead to unprotected sex, impaired driving, medical problems, injuries, association with the police, suicide, vandalism and property damage (Gateway Foundation, 2020). This clearly reveals how the negative impacts substance abuse among college students can harm the well-being of community members.

Numerous college students begin to engage in substance abuse each year in order to

obtain the full college experience, and also many of them consume to overabundance, create

difficult patterns of substance intake, and put themselves at risk for long-term harm that can be

avoided. Substance abuse and addiction are a very significant public health issue for young

people in the United States -- creating poor health, social, and economic outcomes for users,

their families, and communities. In all, it is significant to apply interventions in order to prevent

risks that come along with the modifiable behavior of college substance abuse.

College students continue to experience significant problems related to alcohol and other drug abuse. There are two intervention programs being implemented to address this problem. The first program that targets alcohol and drug abuse in college students is called Brief Motivational Interventions (BMI). This program consists of a variety of sessions, including one to two sessions and last about ten to sixty minutes. It consists of a consultation and includes information on decisional balance, readiness to change, goal setting and/or a discussion on social norms (Ickes et al., 2015). In addition, this program is effective because it expands a student’s knowledge on preventing the usage to drink and use drugs during their college years.

Secondly, alcohol and drug abuse remain a high concern in college students. A second program that is being used is a parent-based intervention (PBI), as parents being the focal point. The intervention is being used during the first years of college and it allows parents to be the first source as guidance. Before a student goes off to college, an informational pamphlet is given to parents and its focus on skill-building, communication skills, and strategies for parents to help college students to avoid risky situations (Ickes et al., 2015). Researchers found a parent-based program to be effective in younger adults.

Furthermore, the two intervention programs being used as is an effective way to help college students with minimizing the usage of alcohol and drugs. These programs are appropriate in addressing the target population because it focuses on college students. Both programs measure an individual’s readiness to change as a primary factor alcohol and drug abuse. Moreover, the importance of using a theory-based design is that it offers empirically tested constructs which can be used to increase the likelihood of behavior change (Ickes et al., 2015). Longer term studies would give more accurate results since the researchers will be able to see how it affects the college students in the long run. A solution can be meeting up with the college students after graduation to see if they are still being responsible.

Substance abuse is very common amongst young adults, and it is important to spread awareness on how drugs like cocaine, marijuana, hallucinogens, and many more affect the brain and their overall health. Since college students are most likely younger than the age of twenty-five, these drugs can alter their brain development. Peer pressure is very common at parties and can be one of the top reasons college students take these drugs. All drugs can lead to addiction and it is important that colleges address the issue in some form. Some steps that can be taken to promote awareness of the use of drugs off-campus include: speakers coming into GE classes, informational stands on campus, and even informational pamphlets/stands at the on-campus gym. Having speakers who have either experienced negative side effects from these drugs, or someone who has seen things happen to others; will help keep the information in these young college students’ heads. GE courses are usually taken at the beginning of college, so during the freshman/sophomore year. The earlier they know, the more effective the plan will be. For example, there is an on-campus program at California State University Long Beach called Beach Recovery that can provide these speakers to the classes. They can also discuss the many resources they have, and the other possible programs discussed previously like Alcoholics Anonymous/ Narcotics Anonymous, Safe Refuge, and NIDA.

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