

Assumptions and Truths About Drug Addiction

Written by Arizona Foothills Magazine

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The image many people have of the average drug addict is someone who is low income, possibly on welfare, and often minority. There's this prevailing belief that drugs, and the problems associated with them, only occur in urban areas, and never make their way into the suburbs. These beliefs often form the basis of misguided legislation, including cuts to public assistance programs and [mandatory drug testing](#) for people on public assistance. These beliefs also make it difficult for people who are struggling with drug addiction to get the help they need.

Separating Fact from Fiction

While the movies and TV shows tend to show the poor, urban, and minority face of drug use and addiction, the reality is that drug addiction affects people across all genders, age groups, races, and socio-economic statuses. In fact, there is evidence to support that [rates of drug use](#) and substance use disorders are actually lower among African Americans than other ethnic groups, including Whites, Native Americans, and Latinos. Rates of drug use are fairly evenly dispersed among geographic areas, with 9.8 percent in small metropolitan areas, 9.6 percent in large metropolitan areas, and 7.8 percent in non-metropolitan areas. Additionally, rates of drug use among children and teens are on the rise.

However, assumptions about ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and geography aren't the only issues that we have to contend with. There are other assumptions about the nature and cause of addiction that can cause roadblocks to care and treatment, including:

- The assumption that all addicts experienced some kind of mental or physical trauma, or had an inherent mental weakness, which triggered their addiction;
- The assumption that all addicts are incapable of being productive members of society; and,
- The assumption that an addict has to "hit bottom" before he can get help.

The truth of the matter is that the reasons why people start using drugs, and become addicted, are as diverse as the people who use them. While there are those who use drugs to mask some type of pain, there are also those who use drugs for enjoyment, and those who started with valid prescriptions to treat injuries and illnesses.

Also, there are as many people who would be considered [functional addicts](#), as those who fit the stereotype of the homeless person or "crack whore." These high-functioning addicts can hold down jobs, pay their bills, and maintain relationships while in the midst of their addiction; and the fact that they are so high functioning means that they are less likely to hit bottom before the addiction kills them. Or, perhaps, a better way to put it is that their "bottom" will be death, as opposed to the loss of a job or home.

Drug Treatment and Recovery

There are also assumptions about drug treatment and recovery that can prevent addicts from getting help, and can also prevent them from staying sober, including:

- The assumption that treatment alone is enough;
- The assumption that recovery is solely the responsibility of the addict; and,
- The assumption that relapse means the treatment program failed.

The reality is that treatment is only the first step in the very long process of recovery. Once the treatment phase is complete, [Tucson Transitional Living](#) recommends recovering addicts transfer into a structured program that can ease them gently back into sober life, and continue with counseling long after they have successfully transitioned.

Additionally, the addict is not alone in his need for treatment and recovery. Addiction is often considered a [family disease](#). Even if the family unit was not dysfunctional before the addiction, the stress of the addiction can certainly make it dysfunctional. Family members are just as responsible for their own recovery as the addict is for his. If recovery is one-sided then old wounds will never heal, and that is more likely to create a situation where the addict can relapse.

Regarding relapse, addiction is a very difficult process that causes long-term, and even life-long, changes in the addict physical and mental state. Even with the best possible treatment and after care, it's possible for an addict to encounter something that triggers him to start using again. However, this does not mean that the addict will completely backslide. It is possible for the addict to get back on the wagon after a slip, but it involves him having a strong support system where he can go for help, and not judgment, if he does slip.

The Importance of Understanding the Truth

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It's important to understand the truth about drug use and substance abuse because the impressions that we have of people with substance abuse issues colors not only how we treat them, it also affects whether or not they get the recognition and treatment they need.

Suburban families who believe that drug addiction is something that only happens in the inner cities will be less likely to recognize the signs and symptoms of addiction in their loved ones. The same goes for people who live in rural areas and believe that it is only a problem in urban areas, or people of one ethnicity who believe that it only happens among other ethnicities.

The people who believe that addiction renders people incapable of functioning in society will fail to recognize the signs and symptoms of drug abuse in their high-functioning loved ones.

People from relatively healthy families will fail to recognize the signs of drug abuse and addiction in their family members, or people they view as being psychologically stable.

By recognizing the truth about how drug addiction manifests, people can take steps toward getting the addict help, and the addict will be better able to help himself.