
Substance Abuse and Serious Mental Illness (SMI)

BEACON HEALTH OPTIONS

Topics

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What is Dual Diagnosis?

- > The term “dual diagnosis” is used to describe people with mental illness who have coexisting problems with drugs and/or alcohol.

Did You Know?

- > Individuals with a substance abuse disorder are more likely to get treatment if they have a co-occurring mental disorder rather than if they only have a substance abuse disorder.
- > When consumers with dual diagnosis recover from alcohol abuse, their treatment response improves greatly.

(NAMI)

Warning Signs of Co-Occurring Disorders

- > Some warning signs of co-occurring disorders include:
 - > Suddenly having money problems
 - > Appearance of new friends
 - > Valuables disappearing from the house
 - > Drug paraphernalia in the house
 - > Long periods of time in the bathroom
 - > Dilated or pinpointed eyes
 - > Needle marks

(CPS Facts)

Causes of Co-Occurring Disorders?

- > Alcohol or drugs could be used as a way of coping with a serious mental illness (self-medication).
- > Alcohol and other drugs also could cause or aggravate symptoms of a mental illness.
 - > For example, drinking heavily more than once a week is linked to an increased risk of depression.

(CPS Facts)

Risk Factors

- According to CPS Facts, some risk factors for co-occurring disorders include:
 - Poverty or unstable income
 - Difficulties at school
 - Unemployment or problems at work
 - Isolation or lack of a social network
 - Lack of decent housing
 - Family problems
 - Family history of mental illness, substance abuse, or co-occurring disorders
 - Past or ongoing trauma or abuse

(CPS Facts)

Substance Abuse with Serious Mental Illness (SMI) and Serious and Persistent Mental Illness (SPMI)

- Substance use and SMI frequently co-occur (Perron et al. 2010).
- 41-65% of people with a substance use disorder (SUD) also have a serious mental illness (SMI) (Perron et al. 2010).
- Nearly one-third of people with all mental illnesses and about half of people with SMI also experience substance abuse (NAMI).
- According to SAMHSA, over 8.9 million people have co-occurring disorders (both SMI and substance abuse) and only 7.4% of individuals with co-occurring disorders receive treatment for both.
- In 2009, 9.8 million adults had any mental illness and substance abuse, while 2.8 million adults had a serious mental illness and substance abuse (SAMHSA).
- Of the 2.8 million adults with both substance use and SMI, only 62% received some sort of treatment (SAMHSA).
- According to SAMHSA, among the individuals who had a SMI in 2011, 25.7% had a co-occurring substance use disorder. However, only 4% of adults had a co-occurring substance use disorder with any mental illness that was not considered a serious mental illness (SMI).

Relationship Between Substance Use and Mental Illness

- > Drugs and alcohol can be a form of *self-medication*. People with mental illnesses may have untreated conditions that feel better when the person is on drugs or alcohol.
- > Drugs and alcohol can worsen mental illnesses.
- > Drugs and alcohol can cause people without mental illnesses to experience symptoms of an illness for the first time.

(NAMI)

Types of Mental or Emotional Problems Seen in People with Co-Occurring Disorders

- > Mood disorders (ex: depression and bipolar disorder).
- > Anxiety disorders (generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), and phobias).
- > Other psychiatric disorders (schizophrenia and personality disorders).

(ADA Facts)

Treatment Options for Individuals with Dual Diagnosis

- > Treatment for individuals with dual diagnosis is complicated.
- > Hospitalization
- > Inpatient detoxification
- > Medications
- > Psychiatric treatments (studies have shown that these treatments are more effective in people who are not actively abusing drugs and alcohol).
- > People who are trying to avoid relapse on drugs and alcohol can use inpatient rehabilitation centers or supportive housing or therapy.
- > Integrated treatment
- > Often, the two conditions are treated separately.

(NAMI)

Integrated Treatment

- > There is a need for better integrated treatment. Only a small percentage of people with both substance use disorders (SUD) and serious mental illness (SMI) receive treatment that effectively treats both (Perron et al. 2010).
- > In a study done in 2010, 19 treatment guidelines were retrieved from the National Guideline Clearinghouse (9 for SUD, 10 for SMI). More than half of these had at least one recommendation for co-occurring disorders (Perron et al. 2010).
- > Integrated treatment is still not made widely available to consumers.
- > Effective integrated treatment consists of the same health professionals, working in one setting, providing treatment for both SMI and substance abuse.
- > Individuals with dual diagnosis have to proceed at their own pace in treatment.
- > Treatment should take a gradual approach.

(NAMI)

Integrated Treatment Approach

- > This approach includes:
 - > Listening to what the individual wants (whether or not the individual is ready to start treatment for co-occurring disorders).
 - > Trying a variety of treatments to see which one works best for the individual.
 - > Working with others the individual would like to help support them (help others better understand co-occurring disorders in order to better support the individual).

(CPS Facts)

References

- > Perron, B.E., Bunger, A., Bender, K., Vaughn, M. G., & Howard, M. O. (2010). Treatment guidelines for substance use disorders and serious mental illnesses: do they address co-occurring disorders?. *Substance Use & Misuse*, 45(7-8), 1262-1278.
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