



The Impact of Peer Groups and Media on Increasing Trends in Substance Use and Abuse Among the General Population During COVID-19

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To Editor,

More than 4 years have passed since the COVID-19 pandemic in the world; its effects on various aspects of human life are still being discussed. One of the topics that is of interest is the reason for the increase in substance use during this epidemic. Rajashree Shankar has recently discussed the impact of COVID-19 on the increase in drug use in an article. We, a group of researchers and therapists in the field of addictive disorders, considered it necessary to mention a few issues regarding the findings of this valuable article. We believe that the role of the media and the influence of peer groups have been very effective in spreading the incidence of drug use. Peer groups can indirectly affect survival by shaping behaviors that impact health. For example, peer pressure to engage in risky behaviors, such as drug use, smoking, or unsafe sex, can increase the likelihood of illness, injury, or death.

The influence of peer groups can vary depending on the context and individuals involved. However, in high-risk and life-threatening situations, the influence of the peer group can often increase. In situations where there is a perceived threat or danger, people tend to look to others for cues on how to behave. This can be particularly true for adolescents and young adults who are still developing their sense of identity and may be more likely to seek the approval of their peers. In high-risk situations, such as engaging in COVID-19, the influence of the peer group can be even stronger. In some cases, peer pressure can override an individual's judgment or sense of self-preservation, leading them to engage in behaviors that are dangerous or even life-threatening.

The emergence of pseudo-scientific statements related to COVID-19 can be attributed to a combination of factors, including the novelty and complexity of the virus, the rapid spread of information on social media, and the lack of clear and consistent communication from

health authorities in the early stages of the pandemic. At the beginning of the pandemic, there was still much that was unknown about COVID-19, including its modes of transmission, effective treatments, and the severity of its impact. This led to conflicting information being shared, and some individuals and groups took advantage of this uncertainty to spread misinformation and pseudoscientific statements. Furthermore, the rise of social media and the ease with which information can be shared online meant that these pseudo-scientific statements could reach a wide audience quickly. This was further compounded by the fact that many people were searching for answers and information about COVID-19, and may have been more susceptible to believing false or misleading claims. The lack of clear and consistent communication from health authorities may have also contributed to the spread of misinformation. In the early stages of the pandemic, health experts were still learning about the virus and how it spread, which may have made it difficult for them to provide clear guidance. New peer groups have been formed in the media and their influence is much stronger than that of other peer groups. In addition to being more influential, these groups have a much wider and larger target population under their influence. With the first comments about the protective role of drugs in cyberspace, these peer groups influence each other and the following population and incredibly increase drug consumption. The coronavirus epidemic can be a wake-up call for health and medical systems to pay special attention to the role of the media and peer groups and to be aware that they should be more active in the media and not be alien to new human communication. Neglecting the media and its effects on people, especially young people, turns it into a breeding ground for profiteers to create bias in people through advertisements and basically take control of society.



Finally, it is recommended that adequate education and training be provided for different target populations including healthcare staff, particularly mental health professionals, to be aware of this potential influence and to seek out support from trusted sources when making decisions in these situations.

Competing Interests

None.

Ethical Approval

Not applicable.