



# Socio-Economic Impact on Opioid Addiction Susceptibility

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### Abstract

The primary purpose of the study is to determine the socio-economic impact on opioid addiction susceptibility. Over the last few years, there has been a general increasing population of people addicted to opioids. Although the drug is often used for pain management, it is highly addictive. A descriptive research design was used to conduct the study, where twelve journal articles were used to analyze the status of opioid addiction and relationship to socio-economic factors. The results section identified several socioeconomic variables increasing people's vulnerability to opioid addiction including unemployment, income level, family relationship, community participation, and opium usage in households. Additionally, easy access to opioids that are sold in local drug store increases susceptibility to addiction and the study also notes doctors are prescribing opioids for patients particularly those individuals enrolled in public health insurance programs. Low socioeconomic status is associated with higher risk of opioid addiction compared to high socioeconomic status, but individual decisions also play a critical role in facilitating the crisis.

**Keywords:** Opioid addiction, Drug, Pain management

### Introduction

#### Background of the study

Opioid addiction is a significant crisis facing the world today. Opium is an ancient drug whose usage is marred with numerous controversies throughout history. In medicine, opioids are critical for chronic pain management, but the drug is also widely abused in different parts of the world [1]. For example, America is dealing with an opioid addiction epidemic that is facing millions of people and is linked to thousands of deaths every year [2].

Due to the high prevalence of chronic pain in the population, more people are using opioids than ever before beyond the recommended period of three months. Easy access to opioids in the local pharmacies and chemists exacerbates the problem as individuals without opioid prescription can also purchase the drug. Notably, socioeconomic factors affect opioid addiction susceptibility.

Over the last few years, the focus has been on identifying factors influencing individuals' vulnerability to opioid addiction. The dangers of opioid dependence have become a frequent topic of discussion in mainstream media as governments and other stakeholders try to reign on the spreading of the epidemic. Although many people are aware of adverse health effects of opioid addiction, they knowingly get themselves involved in the vice and suffer the consequences of their choice. Numerous past studies on opioid susceptibility focus on genetic factors that are primarily associated with changes in the brain structure. Although genetic composition increases the risk of some people developing an opiate addiction, socioeconomic factors are the real driving force behind the crises [3]. Socioeconomic factors significantly affect people's decision-making process among other critical aspects of life.

Socioeconomic factors encompass the sociological and economic factors that are closely intertwined; changing one-factor changes the other. For example, educational advancements in a career are often accompanied by salary increment [4]. There are many types of socioeconomic factors and identifying the variables that specifically increase susceptibility to opioid is critical.

#### Research Objectives

The primary purpose of the study is to determine the socioeconomic impact on opioid addiction susceptibility. The core focus is on identifying the socioeconomic factors influencing people's decisions to misuse opioids leading to addiction.

#### Materials and Methods

The section will describe the procedural methods and processes followed in conducting the study. Adoption of systematic research is critical for the collection of relevant and accurate information on the topic, thus facilitating the formation of logical conclusions. Therefore, the section will outline the research design, procedures followed, and the materials used.

#### Design of the Study

Research design refers to the general plan of the study, and it influences data collection methods and analysis among other procedures. The study adopts the descriptive research design whose purpose is providing an accurate description of a phenomenon by the research objectives. Descriptive research is suitable because it aids in understanding how socioeconomic factors are currently affecting people's vulnerability to opioid addiction, and the information can be used to generate theories or possible solutions to the problem.

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Since the connection between socioeconomic factors and substance abuse has been widely studied, thus it is not a new area. Using a descriptive research design, the information will be customized to meet the study objectives.

### Procedures of the Study

Systematic methods were used in the study. In a secondary study, the first step was the selection of secondary sources of information utilized throughout the study. The task was accomplished by breaking down the topic to keywords used to search the web, thus the identification of the most relevant sources of information. The first search generated thirty-seven varying data sources including articles, book chapters, industry reports, and journal articles.

Articles were scanned based on a criterion; the source had to be a journal article published within the last five years. These requirements brought down the number of information sources to 18. The journal articles were scanned to determine their relevance to the topic and in the end twelve of the best journal articles were used in the study. Content analysis was conducted to identify the major themes in the topic that are comprehensively described in the results sections of the study.

### Materials

Twelve journal articles were selected for use in the study. These articles are primary and secondary research investigating the relationship between socioeconomic factors and varying types of substance abuse including opioid addiction. Decision to include articles that were less than five years old was essential in collecting recent information on the topic that is credible in making further arguments on the research issue. Undoubtedly, the information in the journal articles is true, high quality, and credible considering the fact that they were peer-reviewed.

### Results

Various socioeconomic factors impact individual's susceptibility to opioid addiction. Foremost, is the educational level that influences individual's awareness of dangers of opioid use and ideal frequency for using the drug. Lowly educated persons encounter many problems in life including weak employment opportunities; most of them find themselves working in low paying jobs and over long periods to meet their expenses.

Consequently, they are prone to getting more incidences of chronic pain and using opioids as a form of relief. Unfortunately, lowly educated persons are ignorant of risk of opioid addiction from continuous use of the drug, to relieve pain, which they do almost throughout their life [5]. Besides, others begin taking opioids to manage stress and slowly become dependent on the drugs. For example, a high illiteracy level in Afghanistan has condemned millions of young uneducated people to opioid addiction [4].

Unemployment is another risk factor of opioid addiction. Previous studies link unemployment to many types of social evils including substance abuse, crime, and violence. Unemployment leads to the development of high anxiety levels and stress and people respond by trying to find a coping mechanism [6]. As a result, they begin to experiment with drugs that are readily available in the market like opioids.

Moreover, unemployment increases amount of idle time increasing the risk that a person will fall into bad company and succumb to peer pressure of using opioids [7]. Undoubtedly, there is a positive relationship between unemployment and opioid addiction. Additionally, low-income levels increase the risk of opioid addiction.

Securing employment is no guarantee that a person gets adequate income to cover personal and household expenses particularly health insurance coverage. A significant proportion of Americans are enrolled into the Medicaid program that covers the basic medical costs, and they cannot afford to secure specialized treatment. Medic aid has been faulted for high prescriptions of opioids for patients increasing the number of people addicted to the substance [8]. On the other hand, individuals earning higher income access better quality medical services and opioid prescription are maintained at the recommended level.

Arguably, opioid dependence in public health can be explained by the high number of patients who visit the hospitals every day. Opioids are not expensive drugs; thus, they are affordable even for low-income individuals. Notably, individuals from wealthy families are also vulnerable to opioid addiction but the abundance of resources makes them better off. Besides, the rich have enough monetary resources to afford expensive opioid addiction recovery facilities to cope with the problem. Community participation significantly impacts vulnerability to opioids addiction. The perception that adolescents are the only group of people involved in drug abuse is a myth; everybody is susceptible to opioid addiction.

Human beings desire to belong to social groups within the community, and will do anything to preserve their value including avoiding abusing opioids. As the opioids crisis continues to rise, the society is looking for good role models that will guide people towards recovery and educate the rest about preventive measures to avoid falling into addiction. The impact of family relationships over the vulnerability of opioid addiction cannot be ignored. Family is a child's first contact with the world and is responsible for development of good behavior throughout a person's life. Children emulate their parents and siblings' behavior as they grow up, and setting clear rules and guidelines is essential in setting the right code of conduct. Functional families have elaborated behavioral regulations that every member must adhere to and a common guideline is avoiding substance abuse.

Strong family relationships motivate people to abide by the rules to receive approval for others, while weak family attachment gives people the right to act independently as they do not have to meet other persons expectations. As a result, people with weak family attachment are more likely to abuse opioid and develop an addiction to the drug compared to individuals with strong attachments.

Therefore, it is not surprising that family structure breakdown due to divorce, separation, or death is a genesis of opioid abuses as people try to escape and deal with the pain [9]. Continuous opioid usage in the family increases vulnerability to opioid addiction. Living with relatives suffering from drug abuse is difficult, and people may begin to unconsciously pick-up the same behavior. Children living in households with long-term opioid usage begin using the substance early in life.

Parents give children opioids for quick pain relief without doctors' prescriptions, and in the long haul they become addicted to the painkiller. If there is a person abusing opioid in the household, addiction develops faster. This observation is consistent with other forms of substance abuse like smoking and alcoholism. Given the easy access to opioids in the society, opioid abuse and addiction is expected to continue unless relevant stakeholders take drastic measures to control the problem.

### Discussion

The primary aim of the study was to determine the socioeconomic impact of susceptibility to opioid abuse. A number of socioeconomic factors associated with opioid abuse and addiction were identified including education level, unemployment, income level, community participation, family relationship, and opioid usage within the family.



Putting these aspects into perspective, it is evident that individuals with low or poor socioeconomic factors are more vulnerable to opioid addiction than persons of high socioeconomic status. People with low socioeconomic status have increased risk of opioid addiction due to a number of factors [10].

They often live in poverty making it hard for them to pursue promising education prospects, thus the probability of landing good employment is highly limited. Moreover, working in a poor environment and longer periods than usual increases the risks of chronic body pain, and consequent prescription of opioids. Notably, the majority of unemployed persons have low economic status and it does not go unnoticed that they are prone to substance abuse particularly opioid [11].

However, these observations do not mean that people with high socioeconomic status are not susceptible to opioid abuse. Money increases the purchasing power of buying opioids and addiction. Wealthy people use opioid for self-pleasure and managing family or professional stress. Nonetheless, the fact that they are well educated and have a high awareness of adverse effects of using opioids is not guarantee they stay away from abusing opium.

Undoubtedly, easy access to opioids and increased rate of doctors' prescriptions of opioids contribute to the current crisis. Although opium is one of the oldest drugs in history, the world has never witnessed such a high number of people addicted to opioids like today. It is important to note that socioeconomic factors affecting drug abuse have remained relatively the same over the years, thus there is a need to understand why opioid addiction has recently emerged as a problem in the global setting. Increased opioid prescriptions mean that many households have accumulated the drug and there is high risk of addiction [12].

## Conclusion

Opioid addiction is an epidemic that grows by each passing day. America is one of the countries suffering from opioid addiction forcing the government, medical professionals, community leaders, public, and a host of other relevant stakeholders to try to find a permanent solution to the problem. Research shows that controlling opioid addiction should not begin at limiting prescriptions to the drug; instead the initiative should begin with tackling the socioeconomic factors driving people to opium abuse. They include unemployment, income level, family attachment or relationship, education, community participation, and rate of household opioid usage.

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