

How Addiction Precipitates Criminality

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Addiction as a Disorder

Addiction to drugs and alcohol is a psychological disorder that is most acutely addressed through treatment. Addiction has long been listed as a psychological disorder by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM); and a wide variety of treatment methods have been developed to relieve those suffering from addiction. Medical institutions are well equipped to treat addiction and provide support for recovering addicts. On the flip side, the criminal justice system addresses addiction through significantly less beneficent designs. The courts and penal institutions treat addiction like any other crime and inflict systemic punishment onto the bodies and minds of addicts just like any other offender. But addiction is not a crime. And the penal institution does not facilitate recovery.

Certain pleasurable chemical compounds (such as drugs and alcohol) may result in both psychological dependence and physical addiction. And some people are more genetically predisposed to addiction through no fault of their own. When someone with a predisposition to addiction is introduced to an addictive compound, the results can be profound. Addicts tend to experience the positive aspects of substances more profoundly than most folks, but they also suffer from torturous withdrawal symptoms more readily than other users. The combination of a genetic predisposition towards higher highs and lower lows results in a painful spiral of suffering that is hard to escape. Addiction results in a physiological and psychological response within the body that results in severe emotional and physical discomfort in the absence of the addictive source. To minimize the discomfort associated with withdrawal, recovering addicts often need the support of friends, loved ones, and medical professionals. Moreover, when

people receive the love and support that they need, the odds of their successful recovery are exponentially higher.

Unfortunately, the criminal justice system does not regard substance abuse any differently than any other offense. Those who are convicted of low-level drug offenses will spend time in jail alongside thieves and violent offenders. Moreover, multiple offenses can lead to increasingly more severe punishments and even prison time. Once incarcerated, those suffering from addiction will be confronted with a physically hostile environment where drugs are readily available. Understandably, the odds of recovery while incarcerated are limited. Under no reasonable metric has prison been shown to facilitate addiction recovery; and many federal and state penal institutions have such rampant drug trafficking issues that it is not uncommon for inmates to become addicts while behind bars. Penal institutions are not the right way to approach addiction.

Drug addiction can be medically treated, and the criminal justice system is counterproductive. There are proven ways to treat addiction, and there are dedicated medical professionals with the skills and experience to facilitate the greatest odds of recovery. There is hope! But that hope is not well sought behind bars. The penal institutions of America are draconian alcoves of overcrowded torment—nothing productive can be served by subjecting a human being to that kind of degradation. Recovery from addiction is actually inhibited by penal institutions. Therefore, it seems that the most enlightened way to deal with addiction is to treat it medically and to avoid the fallout of the courts entirely. Addiction is destructive enough—there is no need to inject the malevolence of the uncaring bureaucracy of the criminal justice system.

Seek medical help for addiction! Help those you love seek treatment!

AVOID JAIL AND PRISON!

The Sociological Impact of Marginalizing Addiction

The troubling reality is that many people suffering from addiction do not receive the love and support they need to succeed. People suffering from substance abuse often find themselves increasingly ostracized from their old community. As their lives are slowly consumed by addiction, an abuser of drugs or alcohol grows ever more isolated from the people who are most capable of helping them. As castoffs, those suffering from addiction are often forced to the fringes of society where the cumulative culture of marginalized people synergizes and exacerbates previous tendencies. In other words, those who have been driven from normative society will often take refuge amongst themselves and feed each other's addictions. Birds of a feather flock together! What's more, communities of addicts are categorically communities of criminals. And once labeled by society as criminals, many addicts will conform their behavior patterns to the social expectations placed upon them. Society first ostracizes addicts, and then labels them as deviants—and from that place of dark marginalization, the consequence of criminality strikes back at normative society.

Sub-cultures and countercultures emerge in response to any normative pattern in society. The human mind enjoys categorizing and taxonomizing what it observes, and humanity has consequently concocted interesting ways of delineating and dividing itself. For example, an ironic tension exists in America between the consumerist tendency towards excess and hedonistic revelry and the more reserved ideals of evangelical austerity and self-denial. This tension has historically manifested as a social binary between lawful non-users and the criminalized users. While the United States is by far the most voracious drug and alcohol market in the world, our society has long been repressed by temperance politics. The laws that circumscribe which substances can and cannot be sold and/or ingested in the United States are downright voluminous. And that body of law subsequently reinforces the highly negative social connotations people tend to attach to addiction. That underlying connotative fabric suffuses the psyche of every social member and thereby taints perception. As a result of the connotations that Americans tend to attach to ideas surrounding addiction, an addict becomes a symbol of deviance, rather than an individual that requires medical attention.

The way society prescribes labels and subsequently directs perceptions of reality ultimately affects the way individuals interact with one another. Everybody relies on symbolic shorthand to navigate reality. We understand addiction in relation to sobriety; we understand the depravity of the former only in relation to the righteousness of the latter. But it is important to remember that while these social connotations are not fixed (nor even objectively tangible), they nonetheless have real consequences on the way individuals are treated and view themselves. In the United States, addicts are considered criminals. Thusly, those suffering from addiction must either internalize the shame and gracefully suffer the derision of normative society, or reject the dominant cultural paradigm and seek community in the counterculture. The later is commonplace and often results in a downward spiral of increasingly deviant behavior. Once removed from the orderly nucleus of society, individuals tend to devolve into troubling states of chaos.

Let [Wasatch Defense Lawyers](#) help stem the degradation of those suffering from addiction! We see those suffering from addiction as people, and we treat them accordingly!