

Psychological Stress, Coping and Crack Cocaine Use

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Abstract : Background: Research has identified a strong link between stress and drug use behaviours. Also, it has been established that the prolonged use of crack cocaine stimulates emotional, cognitive, neurological and social changes. This paper examines the psychological stressors associated with crack cocaine use and the coping mechanisms used to mitigate them. Methodology The study is qualitative and adopts a critical realist approach. The coping circumplex model is the theoretical model that underpins this study. Data was collected through 26 face-to-face in-depth semistructured interviews with people who use crack cocaine. Participants consisted of 15 males and 11 females between the ages of 24-57 years. Data were analysed using thematic analysis. Results Cravings, financial burdens, relationship breakdown and emotional /cognitive stimulation were revealed as psychological stressors associated with crack cocaine use. Maladaptive coping which includes self-harm, isolation, not speaking about/not dealing with emotions and using substances were adopted by persons who use crack cocaine. Positive coping such as seeking help and keeping busy were also adopted. Social and environmental factors such as stigma, easy accessibility of crack cocaine and flashbacks served as barriers to positive coping. Positive coping was linked to the availability and easy accessibility to social support and strong family bonds. Conclusion Persons who use crack cocaine do not cope well with its psychological stresses. The study findings linked social and family support to positive coping. There is a need for addiction and mental health services to liaise with family support services and social services to promote stronger family relationships and social systems using family-focused and social interventions.

Keywords : psychological stress, substance misuse disorder, coping, mental health

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