

An Exploration of Relapse Patterns Among Former Poly Substance Users

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Background: Short-term relapse rates

- Substance abuse and dependence are increasingly viewed as chronic disorders and often described as 'relapse-prone'.
- Most knowledge about relapse comes from addiction treatment evaluation studies.
- While clients reduce drug use after treatment, gains are often not maintained. High abstinence rates at 6-months post-treatment decline sharply one to two years after treatment.
- Overall 25% to 50% of substance users resume substance use within 2 years after treatment.– typically the longest available data period (Fiorentine, 1999).¹

e.g., Fiorentine R. (1999). After treatment: Are 12-steps program effective in maintaining abstinence? *American Journal of Drug Alcohol Abuse*, 25(1), 93-116.

Background: Long-term relapse rates

- Most studies use follow-up periods that are short in the context of a lifelong chronic disorder (1 to 24 months).
- Data are sparse on relapse rates after 2 years of abstinence.
- Indication that the risk of relapse is considerably reduced for those who maintain abstinence for a minimum of 5 years.
- However, there are reports of relapses after 5 years or more of continuous abstinence. One study found that 25% of a large sample of opiate users *relapsed after 15 years of abstinence*,² suggesting that although risk of relapse diminishes over time, it remains a reality.

² HserY., Hoffman, V.,Grella, C., Anglin, D. (2001). A 33-year follow-up of narcotics addicts. *General Archives of Psychiatry*, 58, 503-508.

The cost of relapse to active addiction

- Cost of relapse to the individual and to society are many and they are high; they include financial ('revolving door' treatment episodes, lost productivity); social (strains on family and community, crime); and public health.
- Relapse may be particularly costly when it occurs after stable abstinence is reached – individual has moved toward healthier life, relationships and behaviors (e.g., education and legitimate employment).
 - Relapse after recovery is more visible.
 - Relapse after recovery affects more people and contributes to the stigma of addiction faced by recovering person seeking to reintegrate with society.

Study Objectives

- There has been little research on longitudinal relapse patterns or on reasons for relapse as perceived by substance users themselves.
- The study of relapse and recovery requires we adopt a long-term perspective.
- This retrospective study investigates the relapse experience and lessons learnt from the perspective of persons in recovery. With time, introspection, and with the desire to maintain recovery, such individuals gained insight into their "addiction career," seeking to understand past behaviors and their context to minimize risks of returning to active addiction.

Pathways to Long-term Abstinence

Overview of Method and Procedures

- A NIDA-funded prospective investigation of factors associated with stable recovery over time.
- Pathways to Long-term Abstinence is a 5 year study that is being conducted in New York City.
- Naturalistic prospective study: Data collected 4 times at yearly intervals.
- Eligibility criteria: (1) self-reported abstinence of one month or longer; and (2) not currently in residential treatment.
- Voluntary participation based on informed consent.
- Semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 2 hours.
- Participants receive \$30 for baseline interview.
- This presentation bears on the baseline cohort of 354 completed interviews

Pathways to Long-Term Abstinence

Sociodemographics and Background (n=354)

Men	56%
Age (median)	43 (range: 19 to 65 years old)
Race/ethnicity	
African American	62%
Caucasian	16%
Mixed/Other	22%
Education (median years)	12 (range: 5 to 19)
Employed full/part time	40%
Primary Income	
Job on/off the books	34%
Govt. assistance	59%
Other legitimate income	7%
HIV +	22%
Psychiatric disorder (ever)	39%
No legal involvement	82%

Pathways to Long-Term Abstinence

Drug and Alcohol Use History

	Ever %	Primary Problem %	Other Problems ³ %
Crack	86	58.3	14.2
Heroin	64	18.6	12.4
Cocaine	92	10.1	22.7
Alcohol	99	8.1	28.3
Marijuana	97	2.3	5.6
Hallucinogens	60	2.1	3.1
Nothing else	NA	NA	36.0

³ Adds to over 100 because up to three responses were coded.

Pathways to Long-Term Abstinence

Substance Use: Length, Severity and Current Status

GENERALLY LONG AND SEVERE HISTORY OF POLYSUBSTANCE USE

Years regular use alcohol	Mean= 17.4	St. Dev=10.6
Years regular use of drugs	Mean= 18.7	St. Dev=12.0
Dependency Severity ⁴	Mean= 11.6	St. Dev= 2.4
Times since last use (median)....		
Alcohol	14 months (range = .1 to 528)	
Illicit drugs	14 months (range = .1 to 231)	

⁴ Sheedan DV & Lecrubier (2002) Mini International Neuropsychiatric Interview
University of South Florida-Tampa. Possible Score range: 0 to 14. Primary
substance only.

Pathways to Long-Term Abstinence

Utilization of Treatment and 12-step

	<u>Ever</u>	<u>Current (past month)</u>
<u>ANY FORMAL TREATMENT-SUMMARY</u>	<u>87%</u>	<u>34%</u>
Detox	77	0
Methadone Maintenance	27	5
Therapeutic Community	53	0
Inpatient Rehab	59	0
Outpatient treatment	72	29
Treatment in Jail or person	29	0
<u>ANY 12-STEP ATTENDANCE-SUMMARY</u>	<u>90%</u>	<u>60%</u>
Narcotics Anonymous	88	56
Alcoholics Anonymous	72	47

Relapse History

71% (N=253) reported one or more period (s) of complete abstinence of one month or longer followed by return to substance use.

Number of clean periods of one month or longer followed by relapse⁵

One	16.5%
Two	21.4
Three	11.3
Four to five	16.2
Six to nine	6.8
Ten to nineteen	17.3
Twenty and over	10.4

Range 1 to 90 Mean= 7.56 Std dev= 10.6

OVER 50% REPORTED 4 OR MORE ABSTINENT PERIODS OF ONE + MONTH FOLLOWED BY RELAPSE

⁵ Among those who report one or more such periods: N=248-5 'don't know'

Length of longest 'clean' period before relapse⁵

OVER 50% OF PARTICIPANTS HAD ONE OR MORE CLEAN PERIODS OF A YEAR OR LONGER BEFORE SLIP/RELAPSE

Under one year	<u>43.7%</u>
One month	8.3
Two to five months	17.1
Six to eleven months	18.3
Over one year	<u>56.3%</u>
One to under two years	15.5
Two to under three years	12.3
Three to under five years	11.5
Fives years and over	17.0

Ranges= 1 to 120 Mean = 23.6 Std dev= 27.9

⁵ Among those who report one or more such periods: N=253.

Relapse History

Age at longest clean period⁵

	<u>%</u>
Under 20 years old	9.6
20 to 24	10.8
25 to 29	20.4
30 to 34	27.2
35 to 39	17.2
40 yrs old or over	14.8

Range = 14 to 53 Mean= 31.0 Std dev= 7.9

⁵ Among those who report one or more such periods: N=253

Length of relapse after longest clean period⁵

RELAPSE LASTED OVER ONE YEAR FOR 2/3 OF RESPONDENTS

Under one year	<u>36.5%</u>
Under one month	4.0
One month	5.6
Two to five months	15.9
Six to eleven months	11.0
Over one year	<u>63.5%</u>
One to under two years	19.8
Two to under five years	18.3
Five years and over	25.4

Range = > one month to 16 yrs Mean= 36.3 Std dev= 49.3

⁵ Among those who report one or more such periods: N=253

Longest clean period before slip/relapse

How did you stop? Top answers (<10%)⁵

	<u>First mention</u> %	<u>Any mention</u> ⁶ %
Went to treatment	23.8	32.9
Just stopped/sick & tired	23.4	28.2
Incarcerated/restricted environment	14.7	17.1
Attended 12-step meetings	11.9	15.1

⁵ Among those who report one or more such periods: N=253

⁶ Up to four answers coded

Relapse after longest clean period⁵

What got you back to using? Top answers (<10%)

	<u>First mention</u> %	<u>Any mention</u> ⁶ %
Exposed to triggers (e.g., drugs money, users)	21.3	38.9
Stressful event/situation	23.3	32.2
Urge/craving/wanted to use	9.5	12.3
Felt I could handle it/forgot I was addicted	6.0	10.3

⁵ Among those who report one or more such periods: N=253

⁶ Up to four answers coded

Relapse after longest clean period⁵

Lessons learnt Top answers (<10%)

	First mention %	Any mention ⁶ %
Must want recovery/work on it continuously/make it a priority	17.3	21.8
Being clean is a positive/drugs negative/bad place to be	17.4	18.7
Learn about/stay away from triggers	17.4	18.3
Cannot recover without support	12.2	15.1
Need to address underlying issues/ express feelings	8.7	11.5
I am an addict/can't use socially	8.4	10.3

⁵ Among those who report one or more such periods: N=253

⁶ Up to four answers coded

Summary of Findings & Implications

- Consistent with previous findings, this study found a **high rate of relapse** (71%) as well as patterns where **multiple relapses are the norm** (an average of 8 per participant).
- In addition and rarely reported in the literature, over one half reported **relapses occurring after one year “clean” or longer**, 29% after three years clean or longer.
- **Exposure to triggers and stressful events/situations** cited most frequently as ‘reason’ for relapse, suggesting insufficient skills to cope with both ‘temptation’ and stress.
- Two-third of relapses after longest ‘clean’ period lasted one year or longer, underlining the importance of teaching/acquiring skills to prevent relapse over the course of recovery (not just early on)– **changing situations... changing threats**

Summary of Findings & Implications contnd

- **LESSON #1: MAKE RECOVERY A PRIORITY** – Need to want recovery, to work on it continuously and to not lose sight of it as a priority. **This is consistent with the prevalent view of addiction as a chronic disorder**, and emphasizes the need for developing **models of sustained recovery management** to assist in this lifelong recovery work, including the acquisition of skills to cope with the changing challenges of (threats to) recovery over time.

Summary of Findings & Implications contnd

- LESSON #2: RECOVERY GIVES HOPE – Recovery is positive and worth having, whereas drug use is negative (“a bad place to be”). This finding complements Lesson #1 by telling recovering persons that the continuous hard work of recovery is well worth it – drug use never solves anything.
- OTHER LESSONS:
 - Identify triggers and avoid them
 - Seek recovery support.

Questions?

Thank you.

