

# Mental Health and Addiction Examined

By Jim Rachels



Mental health issues can affect anyone. Something that is quite common is people with mental health issues are also experiencing issues with substance abuse. The term used to describe this is co-occurring disorders, dual diagnosis or comorbidity. This is when someone is suffering from a mental health issue as well as addiction issues. A question that should be asked and explored is does one of these conditions cause the other and then which one causes which. This is something that no one has been able to give an answer on. I believe research being done in this area will be extremely beneficial to our understanding of this subject. And I think this research should be done with good reason as it is believed that close to 50% of people with mental health issues also suffer from an addiction issue. This is a sizeable part of the community.

Co-occurring disorders can be incredibly hard to manage. Having a mental health issue on its own can be quite difficult to manage on a day-to-day basis. There are many crippling things that happen to people while they are in a mental health crisis. I know for me during the mental health crisis that I had during the height of COVID I was barely able to get out of bed, I didn't shower or brush my teeth and I was having suicidal thoughts. And during all of this, I was also battling my addiction.

I think something that is important is to find an integrated approach to this issue. Many people will have different people in different roles. Some people may have a substance abuse counselor for their addiction issues, then a psychiatrist for the mental health issue they are facing.

It has been estimated that anywhere from 25-50% of people that have mental health issues also suffer from addiction issues. I think the first question that should be asked is "does our mental health directly affect our addiction?" I'm asking the question if I didn't suffer from mental health issues would I have ever picked up and got addicted to something? Or was it the fact that I had mental health issues that led me to use for the first time? I think these questions need to be answered to correctly move through the process of healing and getting sober.

Another thing that we should keep in mind is that "substance use disorder" is considered a mental illness. So this shows that the two go hand in hand. But not everyone with a mental health disorder ends up being addicted to something and not everyone who has addiction issues also has a mental health disorder. Nonetheless, I think these two things need to be treated separately. You need to overcome one of these to help the other.

It has been said that many of the drugs people take can alter their state of mind and lead to negative mental health episodes. It has also been shown that many of the people that are suffering are using these drugs as a form of self-medicating. Some more common things people are self-medicating

are depression, anxiety, and PTSD and a few other personality disorders. People will use in order to alleviate the symptoms they are suffering.

Mental health is an extremely important part of anyone's recovery. We must take a deep look into why we are doing many things that possibly hurt us instead of helping us. I think that mental health issues and addiction are misunderstood and no one has been able to come up with something that can be a solution to this issue. I think it may take some time and a lot of hard work but I believe that we will have much better ways of treating this as we do research and discover new things in the future.

Something that has also been looked at is does the substance abuse lead to mental health issues. Some believe it does as substance abuse can end up changing some areas of the brain. This is something that is still being researched.

I know for me my mental health is extremely important. For me, it can literally be the difference between life and death. I've had suicidal thoughts before during negative episodes in my life. I'm so thankful that my will to live overcame my will to die.

Something else that is under the umbrella of mental illness is our triggers. Triggers are things that bring up unpleasant feelings and memories that then make the person experiencing them want to use their addiction of choice. Triggers can be people, places and things that elicit a negative response. It can also lead to people acting out and being more trouble than they typically would be. And the dangerous part of triggers is they can bring up cravings that we typically wouldn't have, this then in turn leads to continued addiction issues. Triggers are something that needs to be properly investigated in order to help further our sobriety. Triggers are something that can be managed with a lot of hard work and effort. With the right help, these are things that can be overcome and handled better.

I think something else we should examine is isolation. Many of us isolate ourselves while we're in active addiction. This isolation can lead to more substance abuse and on the flip side of that coin using substances can increase our isolating ourselves. I know for me that I was doing both of those things, it just depended on the day. One of the four pillars of the Addicts Anonymous Ten-Step program is community. We need a community to help in our sobriety. I believe that having this is vital to our recovery. This is why isolation can stunt our growth. And this is the reason you need to work on this better. You need to do things that will get you to interact positively with other people. Have the right friends and family members as a support group that you can turn to in times of trouble. These are things that can be done to battle isolation and it is something that many of us must try to do.

An important thing to remember is that this is not your fault. The illness and diagnosis are not something that we chose, it just happened to us. I also liken things like anxiety and depression to a storm. The storm comes and it may not be pleasant but it eventually goes away. Nothing is permanent.

Another good question that needs to be asked is "which should be treated first?"

Another thing that I think should be examined a little closer is the withdrawal symptoms we are facing that are affecting our mental health. While we're going through withdrawals our mental health is heavily affected. Some people will sink into a deep depression while going through withdrawal. Some people might get manic during this process. Everyone will be affected differently while going through withdrawals. I think the one thing that might help us is the fact that we can identify these things and actually address them much better than we are currently doing. I think recognizing the signs and symptoms as they appear will help you to put together a more targeted approach to how are going to handle these things. With this, we need to educate those in need to make sure they can this under control.

I think we need to recognize that sometimes we might think that anxiety is being caused by our withdrawals but in reality, it's just part of our mental makeup. Or the other way around. We need to learn to see which is being caused by which. If we can't do that we don't know which part we should be working on. I think that one should consult the help of a professional to help in identifying which are the symptoms of one versus the other. Consulting a professional can be an immense benefit to the suffering addict.

So how exactly are we to treat this? I think the first thing that needs to be done is we need to be on the lookout for the starting signs and symptoms. We must be on top of our emotions. We must be consistent in our approach to our sobriety. We must be vigilant if we are to truly battle this and come out the other side.

I think the best way to start to battle this is to take an integrated approach to the issues. There are some different ways in which this can be approached. The first one is an integrated approach where we use one type of treatment to address both mental health issues as well as your addiction issues. The next one is called a parallel approach where you would be treating both mental illness and addiction issues at the same time but using different approaches in the treatment given. Then there is a sequential model where we treat one thing first and then treat the other. All of these models have been shown to work and have a great success rate.

The main thing to first assess is which approach should be taken based on the person trying to recover. Once someone is found the appropriate treatment this can be a life-changing event.

At the end of the day, there are a number of resources available to help deal with your mental health issues as well as your addiction issues. You just need to be able to put in the effort to find these resources that you can take advantage of. The resources are things like peer support groups like Addicts Anonymous, outpatient programs, drug counselors and professionals such as a licensed therapist or a psychiatrist if you're considering taking medication to help you along. The bottom line is the first thing that needs to be done is for you to acknowledge that you have a problem. From there the next thing you need to handle is finding these resources locally. With the right amount of effort, you can be on the way to a new and better life.