

# Drug Abuse and Relapse Prevention Mechanisms: A Phenomenological Study on The Lived Experiences of Former Drug Users in Yogyakarta Indonesia

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**Abstract**—The relapse of drug abuse is the most difficult problem that former drug users must face. This problem will continue to exist until the moment when the drug users are able to stop consuming the drugs. The process of recovery is a process which the drug users take as their efforts to stop consuming drugs and this process could be affected by many factors. The study aims to explore former drug abuse users' experiences in an attempt to stop consuming drugs and relapse prevention. Qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach was used in this study. Eight former drug users in Yogyakarta were involved as the participants. The data was collected through in-depth interviews within 60-90 minutes for each participant. The data analysis used was the Colaizzi seven stages method. Three emergent themes were drawn: internal triggers of drug abuse relapse, external triggers of drug abuse relapse, and memorable life events supporting drug abuse users in stopping the drug consumption, such as family, religious, government policy, police arrests and drug outbreaks. The conclusion of this study is that it is found that there are induced factors of internal and external factors and the protective factor of self-awareness in drug abuse prevention efforts developed from the most important event of the lives of former drug abuse users.

**Keyword**—drug users; self-awareness; relapse prevention; drug abuse

## I. INTRODUCTION

Drug abuse conditions in Indonesia has occurred in various levels of society [1]. Nowadays, the number of drug abuse users in Indonesia cannot be precisely counted as there is only an estimated number of drug users [2]. Drug abuse happened in different age groups, for instance, adolescence, adult, and even older people. An adolescent who is 16-20 years old belong to the vulnerable group of drug abuse in which they begin to use more drugs at this age [3]. The negative impacts of drug abuse include both direct and indirect repercussions. The immediate effects include the effects on the physical/body and mental abuse, while the indirect effects linked to the disruption of another's life [1,4].

Drug abuse can develop into a stage of drug addiction. The difference between drug abuse and drug addiction is that drug abuse is a process of untherapeutic psychoactive drugs or of illicit prescription drugs. Meanwhile addiction is a condition in which alcohol or other psychoactive drugs continued to be used despite such negative consequences as a significant functional problem in everyday life [5]. The Development of drug abuse into drug addiction can result from some factors

such as negative peer influence [6]. Peer influence can be both direct and indirect factor in the way of citing the negative behavior. It is widely known that drug abuse is negative and therefore requires efforts to overcome it.

Efforts made to cope with drug abuse can be seen in a wide variety of ways that highly require the attention of the government. The government has currently made efforts to deal with drug abuse such as drug health education, drug abuse rehabilitation, socialization, anti-drug integration curriculum, training of trainer, child assembly, and child cadre of young anti-drug children [7]. In efforts to deal with drug abuse, obstacles are often encountered.

The problem with drug abuse is the relapse. Relapses have been the biggest obstacle to drug abuse because those who have used drugs are at high risk of developing a relapse. The rates of relapse for drug addiction are similar to other chronic illnesses such as diabetes, hypertension, and asthma. An addicted person has a 40-60% drug attack [8]. It often happens when a person has finished rehabilitation and is recovered from an addiction to drugs. Many factors allow for a relapse.

Based on exposure of the problem it seems important to understand the underlying causes of drug abuse. It is expected that a good cause of relapse will increase recurrence efforts. In additions the author feels the need to seek out protective factors in which it can prevent a former drug user from relapse. This study aims to understand the perspective of a former drug abuse users based on his life's experience in trying to stop drug use and preventing the relapse.

## II. METHOD

It was a qualitative study with a phenomenology approach. Qualitative research was used to explore and understand the meaning of a person or group to a problem [9]. The phenomenology approach describes the experiences of a person's life related to a phenomenon in which this research was the experience of relapse and experiences in maintaining abstinence of drug abuse recovery.

This study was conducted in several places in the Special Region of Yogyakarta area. The ethical clearance of this study was approved by the ethics committee of the Universitas Indonesia department of Faculty of Nursing was evidenced by the review ethics passes with a number of 0390/UN2.F12.D/HKP.02.04/2016. The sampling technique was used purposive sampling where the researchers chose

particulates with a view to getting the greatest opportunity to obtain data. The sampling method was used because the study involved former drug users to gather the data easier rather than using another data collection technique. In sample selections, the researchers involved key informants to connect between the researchers and the participants. The key information involved is a drug counselor from the province of Yogyakarta social service and a member of a non-governmental society that are frequently involved in social issues particularly on drugs. Among the participants involved in the study there were eight people with incline criteria, who had a history of drug abuse, were able to communicate and were willing to be the research participants.

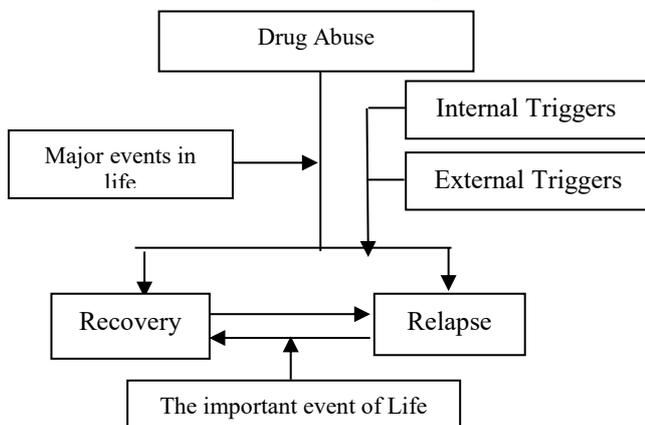
The instrument used to acquire the data was the in-depth interview guide that features questions to explore experiences in relapse and recovery and maintaining abstinence. Data collection was equipped with digital audio recorders and A notebook to record participants' response during the interview. Data retrieval was gradual. The process of taking data was carried out through the data Until the data gathered were saturated so that when data saturation was reached, data collection was stopped. Data processing to produce the theme of research used Colaizzi's method of reading interviews; took a significant extraction statement; Formulated meaning for any significant statement; Managed meaning to be grouped into theme groups; Integrated results into full descriptions of phenomena; Formulated a full description in basic structure identification report; and returned to participants for validation [10].

To support the data validity, some ways such as a peer debriefing and bracketing were done. Peer debriefing was done in a way that the researchers invited other researchers to check to gain another perspective from other researchers so that misinterpretation can be avoided. Peer debriefing strongly supported the validity of the data on the principles of conformability (11). Another way that the researchers use to show the validity of the data is useful in bracketing to obtain data of participants' nature.

**III. RESULTS**

The process of recovering drug abuse users through various processes and leading to two outside options was to recover or relapse. The process of recovery and relapse can be repeated (picture 1). During the recovery process was highly affected by the internal and external trigger factors.

**Picture 1. Recovery Process of Drug Abuse**



The study produced three themes, such as internal relapse triggers, external relapse triggers and major events in life that led to the stopping of using drugs.

**Theme 1. Internal relapse triggers**

Statements expressed by participants as follows:

"... Not yet use the drug because strong suggest, fear, we can't hold the suggest dan our desire.... We have a post-acute withdrawal syndrome...." (Participant 2)

"...it can be said, self refugee ... our body asks for that ..... the problem that we keep..." (participant 8)

The internal relapse factor consists of a psychic urge suggesting a strong and physical urge the post-acute withdrawal syndrome (picture 2). The two triggers increased the urge to use drugs again and lead to relapse.

**Theme 2. External relapse triggers**

Statements expressed by participants as follows:

"... as mutual respect because they know that I was drug user..." (participant 1)

"... suggest is the place, thing, money, friends, problem..." (participant 2)

"... ya because have a lot of friends..." (participant 4)

"... ya after we have problems..." (participant 5)

"... also meet with friends who happen to be like that..." (participant 8)

The external trigger factor found consists of four factors a form of mutual respect, an environment on drugs, a community with drugs and problem faced (picture 3). These factors increase the desire to return to drug use and to triggers relapse.

**Theme 3. Major events in life that led to stopping of using of drugs**

Statements expressed by participants as follows:

"...it's like when I was in 2014, I used it, it was an overdose, coma, so my parents trying to do, how to do it, try harder, the child must be rehabilitated, healed..." (participant 8)

"... at that time we had baby children and don't think about drug anymore..." (participant 7)

"... begin to stop because of the government programme, anti-drug..." (participant 5)

"... given the verse of the word of God by the priest..." (participant 3)

"...at that time my friend was arrested.....evidently can't be enjoyed as before..." (participant 1)

During the recovery process of drug abuse, major life events influence the drug abuse users to stop using drugs (picture 1). The significant events occurred not only to themselves but also to those closest to them. Self-Important events include having an overdose, having a family, and government programs, while other events, for instance, police arrests also affect the desire to stop from drug consumption.

#### IV. DISCUSSION

Drug addicts tried to stop ineffectively on their first attempt [5]. In this study, the causes of relapse of drug abuse could come from both the internal and the external factors. The internal relapse triggers were suggestions and post-acute withdrawal syndrome. Long-term drug use results in significant changes in brain function can last long after the individual ceases to take drugs. [8]. Significant changes in brain function are due to changes in structure in the brain. Changes in brain structure affect brain function according to the location of the damage and in this case causing a change in one's thoughts, feelings, and behavior. A change in mind is one of the most powerful suggestions [12]. The suggestions could appear after an external stimulus that creates such pleasant impressions as earlier drug use and eventually recreates drugs relapses. The relapse caused by the suggestion in this study coincide with studies carried out in Bengkulu where the majority of participants relapse because of suggestion [13]. The absence of inadequate strong factors that help to prevent the relapse increases the chance of the relapse of the former drug abuse users. Strong suggestion also affects the defense mechanisms of the drug abuse users. Weak defense mechanism in drug abuse users could influence relapse [14].

Another internal factor affecting relapse is post-acute withdrawal syndrome. Post-Acute withdrawal syndrome is the second stage of the first week through the second sign of various physical symptoms in people who stop using drugs. The physical symptoms of the post-acute withdrawal syndrome vary depending on the type of drugs used [15]. Symptoms caused during the relapse process were similar [16]. Uncomfortable physical conditions, unstable psychological conditions, and an instinctive threat will lead a person to search for his comfort zone again. In this case, the former users have tried to find comfort zones both physically and psychologically by taking drugs back because there is a high dependence on them due to changes in the structure and function of the brain of drug users [3].

An external factor in this study was seen in the environment of former drug users in which their friends are from the community where they consumed drugs. During the treatment, there are many relapses since they are known to bring alcohol and drugs. [17]. This proved to be consistent with studies [18] where the causes of drug abuse stemmed from an external factor which are the environmental factors (peers). A negative/user friend factor causes a former user to relapse and return to drugs [19]. This may be due to the tendency of humans as social creatures to spend time with their communities. These conditions are combined with former users who tend to favor proximity to their peers over their families and have a feeling and a desire to be appreciated and acceptable to their peers. The environment figured in the transition period from drug use to drug addiction [20]. Alcohol is easy to find in general celebrations, parties, or other leisure activities [21].

The development of adolescent brain still in the maturing process makes them into a critical phase in which they are increasingly at risk of making wrong decisions such as taking drugs [3]. In adults, divorce and unemployment could have impacts on drug use. Drug abuse increases steadily during this transitional phase [3].

In addition to finding the causes of drug relapses, drug addicts have been exposed to protective factors that could prevent former users from returning to drugs. It has been found in the that study protective factors make a major impact on the life of drug abusers. Major life events overdoses, family support, governmental anti-drug programs and the authorities' arrest of drug abusers.

A study in British Columbia mentioned that mostly, overdoses occur in men (69%) who are >30 years of age (61.5%) of 2350 samples and only 1310 people perform the emergency call [22]. An overdose could develop and increase self-awareness for drug abuse users because they have experienced pain, both physically and psychologically while taking excessive drugs. People who have committed drug abuse for a long time will have various physical health problems and could influence the perception of quitting drugs [23]. An education on drug overdose prevention by on computers could increase knowledge and reduce the risk factor of relapse behavior [24]. Another aspect that promotes the prevention of abuse is the family support.

Family factors can be an additional protective factor. The role of the family in some parents will have a significant impact on drug abuse prevention efforts [25]. The problem solving of drug abuse will be especially appropriate to use the family's approach to adolescent abusers [26]. With a family approach, it can be that the major causes of an adolescent using drugs are family conflicts, communication problems, parenting and violence in children. That warmth in the family could be a protective factor from drug abuse [27]. Drug abuse therapy with a family approach could directly affect both sides of the abuse users and the family so that self-awareness in both sides will also increase and is expected to increase the protective factor of former users. Addictions are a family problem, so the support for the family is vital for recovering drug abuse [5]. Another protective factor found is anti-drug programs.

Anti-drug programs have also been a key event for ex-addicts to stop and to be protected from relapse. It has been found that some participants finishing the anti-drug programs and recovering from the addiction after rehabilitation who successfully stopped consuming drugs and even became counselors for other drug abuse users. The state of Indonesia, in particular, has a related unit that is responsible for the prevention of drug abuse. The government-run programs do not only involve the police force but also health-care workers, the society, non-governmental organizations and even former drug addicts themselves to be protective factors against drug abuse. Other studies also indicate that opioid drug addicts have less chance of a relapse against a drug addict who has voluntarily committed a trip administration that is only held in a drug detention center [28]. The selection of programs for implementation should have been tailored to the individual areas. An example of a study conducted in Canada shows the government-issued overdose prevention program for deaths [29].

The latest found was an arrest of drug abuser by authorities. This turned out to be a psychological effect of shock therapy, which manifests self-awareness that drug abuse behavior is both negative and illegal. Law enforcement is enforcement of non-negotiable criminal regulations in execution [30].

## V. CONCLUSION

The relapse of drug abuse could happen because of internal and external factors. Internal factors include suggestions and post-acute withdrawal syndrome while influential external factors include the environment and friends. Besides contributing to relapses, the study has also found things or events that could lead to developing awareness in the process of stopping drugs as a protective factor. The major events in life that could be protective factors include overdoses, family support, following government anti-drug programs and the authorities' arrest of drug abusers. Such major events can initiate and increase self-awareness and be a factor in protective drug abuse. It is important for a nurse to understand the underlying causes of relapses and protective factors in the recovery process of drug abuse to support relapse prevention in drug abuse.

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