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Background

Substance abuse among older African-Americans is a significant, understudied problem that is expected to expand dramatically over the next 20 years as the Baby Boomer generation ages. Cohorts like the Baby Boomers, with high rates of illicit drug use in youth, demonstrate higher rates of associated problems throughout the lifespan such as, homelessness, HIV, and hepatitis C.

Some social structures exert pressure upon certain groups in the society to engage in nonconformist, sometimes deviant behavior rather than conformist conduct. Adverse social conditions such as racism, violence, and high rates of unemployment in the lower socioeconomic areas of the black community would be examples of such pressures.

Purpose: The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the underlying social forces that have exerted pressure on older African Americans involved in illicit drug use.

Social and environmental factors can be important determinants of the onset and maintenance of substance use but also potential targets for nursing interventions.

Method and Sample



Method: The study used a Grounded theory design.

Data Collection: Data was generated from private, taped recorded, in-depth interviews, using a semi-structured interview guide.

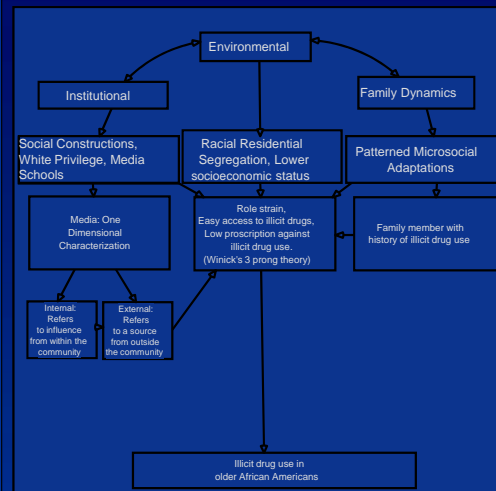
Data Analysis: The data was transcribed and coded. Small-group analysis of codes by a team of six other GT researchers was employed.

Participant Profile: A purposive sampling of patients from a Northern California Treatment and Recovery Program; 5 men, 1 woman, mean age=62.

References: On-site and available upon request

The Social Determinants of Substance Abuse in Older African American Street Drug Users

Factors influencing illicit drug use in older African Americans



Above is a proposed model of factors influencing illicit drug use in older African Americans. Three themes emerged as potential explanatory factors: (1) Family, (2) Media Images, and (3) Targeted marketing of commodities. Below, the respondents express these themes in their own words.

Respondent expressed Family influence

R: My sister was 2 years younger than me; my brother's 4 years younger than me. I was always the oldest. I tried to shield them from what I was doing because my mother always instilled upon me: "They're going to follow you."

I: And how do you feel about - and I don't mean to hurt you, how do you feel about leading your family into drugs?

R: I don't feel good about that. (SA1)



Respondent expressed the influence of Media Images

I: How about "Super Fly" (the movie)?

R: Of course. I went and saw that I don't know how many times.

I: Tell me about it.

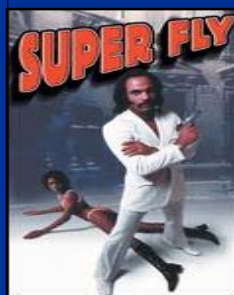
R: I was paying attention to the glamour of him doing what he was doing...

I: OK. Anything else?

R: He had the nicest clothes, the finest woman, and the finest car.

I: And what did you feel about that?

R: I felt that was all right. I had some of that. (SA5)



Respondent expressed the Influence of Targeted Marketing of Commodities

R: "You had a 24/7 drug house right there on the corner. You could buy any kind of drug that you wanted. The white administration thought that this is all gonna happen to the Black people right here. But integration came along and, and it didn't stay right here in the jungle. You could find every kind of drug you wanted right here in this area."



Discussion and Conclusions

Findings suggest that multiple environmental and societal forces are involved in the construction of older African American substance abusers. Additional data are needed to confirm these findings and to assess whether similar forces are true within other cultures and health care settings. Data also suggest that nurses are in a unique position to lead change and help build healthier nations through advocating for early intervention with families, a more responsible media, and equitable enforcement of drug laws. Such change is necessary to prevent the myriad of undesirable social, psychological, and health outcomes of substance abuse in the later stages of life, such as homelessness, HIV, and Hepatitis C.

Clearly, there is a need for future studies on all three of the emerging themes, due to the limited amount of literature on each topic, but specific attention to the influence of media is needed, as there is no literature on this as a factor in initiating drug use in this population.



The need for a concerted effort from an inter-disciplinary approach is also clear because the core issues of substance abuse, such as the environment and larger societal forces, cannot be addressed by one discipline and mandate that clinicians move to an interdisciplinary approach. There must be a concerted effort from many disciplines to achieve a plan of care for this growing population.

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