

# Something is wrong: The crisis of modern addictions

Something is wrong with our society. We have access to unprecedented material wealth, and yet so many people are suffering in the United States.

We have the technology to end hunger and homelessness. We have the resources to provide an education and healthcare to everyone. But, we do not. Why?

Instead, we waste our wealth, time and resources on destructive activities. We spend trillions on illegal drugs. We spend five hours a day watching porn. We gamble away our earnings. We drink, shoot up or smoke in dark, unseen corners.

We can put aside the hardships of people living under a dictator, escaping a war or experiencing genocide in our current assessment. We can also omit the poor and underprivileged. Modernity has not been kind to a Syrian refugee or an individual in the slums on Haiti. Everyone agrees on that point.

Let us take a look instead at the people living the dream: the middle class of the United States, people living in peace, with money and access to education and healthcare. They are hurting, hurting badly!

Many statistics undermine the notion that the modern world, even for the most privileged, is an advancement over the past. The number of people on antidepressants and committing suicide in the Western world is alarming, but for this blog post, I want to focus only on statistics associated with addictions.

Most of us would be hard-pressed to find even one person not impacted by addiction, that is, personally impacted or impacted through a friend or family member. What follows is shocking and sad, but please take the time to review the statistics associated with addiction at the end of this commentary. They are wake-up calls, and should enable us to realize that we have been lied to for generations.

One myth of the Enlightenment is that humanity is on a constant course of improvement. Scholars argued that humans in the modern age will reach new

heights as science replaces religion and reason replaces faith.

Auguste Comte, the father of Positivism, was one individual who promoted this worldview, and he argued that society develops in three stages: 1) theological 2) metaphysical 3) scientific, with the climax of society in the last stage. Karl Marx, a scientific socialist, predicted the advancement of society through periods based on economic principles in his theory of Historical Materialism. Charles Darwin explained the development of species by natural selection, and his followers applied his theory to humans, through Social Darwinism.

In sum, they all forecast a better society to come based on scientific inquiry.

The optimistic predictions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, fell flat in the twentieth century. Was humanity *really* better off after the World Wars, the atomic bomb, countless genocides, the Cold War, the bloody process of decolonization, and the rise of fascism and communism?

People have short historical memories, especially young people. They do not remember the horrors of Stalin or Pol Pot. They do not remember drills for atomic bombs. Some do not even remember the events of 9-11.

Moreover, a distorted view of history prevails. Even after all the evidence of the last century, people still assent to the creed that modern is always good and change is always desirable.

The modern world has seen major advancements in the realms of technology, medicine and science. No one could have predicted the amount of knowledge and dissemination of it through the Internet. The capabilities of the smartphone touch on the inconceivable. These and many others are advancements over previous iterations, but is the modern world a better place because of them?

Modernity is not a constant movement towards progress. Instead the modern worldview has a gaping hole right in the middle of it. There are no winners in a world without purpose and morality, only varying degrees of losers. The best piece of evidence that something is wrong with the modern world might be the sheer number of people suffering from addictions.

## **Statistics on addiction**

### *General Drug Use*

- According to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), 21.5 million American adults (aged 12 and older) battled a substance use disorder in 2014.
- NSDUH reports that in 2014, approximately 5 percent of the American adolescent population suffered from a substance use disorder; this equates to 1.3 million teens, or 1 in every 12.
- About one out of every six American young adults (between the ages of 18 and 25) or 16.3 percent, battled a substance use disorder in 2014, NSDUH.
- In the first ever U.S. surgeon general's report on addiction in 2016, it concluded that 21 million Americans have a drug or alcohol addiction.
- Drug overdose is the leading cause of accidental death in the US, with 52,404 lethal drug overdoses in 2015.
- More than 200,000 people worldwide die every year from drug overdoses and drug-related illnesses.

### *Cocaine addiction*

- Among those 18 to 25, 9 percent of those surveyed said they had used cocaine (including crack).
- Among high-school students, 5 percent of twelfth graders had used cocaine at some point in their young lives.

### *Opioid addiction*

- Opioid addiction is driving the overdose epidemic, with 20,101 overdose deaths related to prescription pain relievers, and 12,990 overdose deaths related to heroin in 2015.
- In 2015, 2 million had a substance use disorder involving prescription pain relievers and 591,000 had a substance use disorder involving heroin.
- It is estimated that 23 percent of individuals who use heroin develop opioid addiction.

- ASAM publishes that over 2 million Americans over the age of 11 struggled with an opioid pain reliever abuse disorder in 2014.

### *Tobacco addiction*

- There are 1 billion tobacco users in the world.
- Tobacco kills up to 50 percent of its users.
- In 2015, an estimated 15.1 percent (36.5 million) U.S. adults were current cigarette smokers.
- Tobacco is implicated in the top five causes of death.

### *Alcohol addiction*

- In 2013, an estimated 16.6 million American adults (18 and older) battled an alcohol use disorder, NIAAA.
- 100,000 people die each year from alcohol-related causes: drinking and driving crashes, other accidents, falls, fires, alcohol-related homicides and suicides. (NCAAD)
- In 2013, 24.6 percent of people ages 18 or older reported that they engaged in binge drinking in the past month. (NIAAA)
- Approximately 17 percent of men and 8 percent of women will be dependent on alcohol in their lifetime.
- Nearly one of every 20 adults worldwide is addicted to alcohol.

### *Compulsive gambling*

- Compulsive gambling affects 2 percent-3 percent of Americans,

### *Gaming addiction*

- Research by scientist Douglas A. Gentile, Ph.D., examined video game usage rates of 3,034 children and teenagers.
  - The average length of time spent playing video games was 20 hours per week.
  - An estimated 72 percent of American households play video games.
  - Nine percent of participants in the study showed signs of video game

addiction.

- Four percent of study participants were categorized as extreme users who played video games 50 hours per week on average.
- Nearly one in 10 of the gamers (8.5 percent) to be pathological players and pathological gamers in the study played video games 24 hours per week.

### *Compulsive shopping*

- About 6 percent of women and 5.5 percent of men are compulsive buyers, according to a 2006 study from Stanford University in the American Journal of Psychiatry.
- Shopping addiction affects about 18 million adults in the United States.

### *Food addiction*

- The prevalence of 'food addiction' was 5.4 percent (6.7 percent in females and 3 percent in males) and increased with obesity status.
- Binge eating disorder (BED) affects many men and women across the globe. According to research, 5 percent of women and 2 percent of men will develop the condition at some point in their lives.

### *Sex addiction*

- A 2014 review in the journal *Current Pharmaceutical Design* explores sex addiction studies in detail, and at the low end, this review indicates that about three out of every 100 adults have serious sex-related issues. At the high end, the level of impact rises to 16 out of every 100 adults. The most accurate estimates likely fall in the 3 to 6 percent range.
- 55 percent of sexual offenders are sex addicts.
- 71 percent of child molesters are sex addicts.
- 94 percent of sex addicts have filmed themselves having sex.
- 3 out of 4 addicts have admitted that they regularly post naked photos of themselves online.
- More than half (54 percent) of young adults ages 18-22 admit to sexting as minors.

## *Pornography addiction*

- 1 out of 3 men self-report that they are addicted to pornography.
- The pornography industry alone generates \$12 billion of revenue per year.
- 66 percent of Internet-using 18- to 34-year-old men look at online pornography at least once a month.
- 70 percent of Internet pornographic traffic occurs during the 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. workday.
- The percentage of internet sites that are pornographic in nature right now: 12 percent.
- More than half of the men who identify themselves as an Evangelical Christian admit that they have an addiction to pornography and used it in the last week for self-satisfaction.
- 55 percent of Christian pastors admitted to visiting a pornographic site.
- 7 percent of internet users view pornography.
- 17 percent of women describe themselves as addicted to pornography.

## *Internet addiction*

- According to new research just published in the journal *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, University of Hong Kong researchers estimate that 6 percent of the world is addicted to the internet.
- Out of 3,560 students, 4 percent met the criteria for problematic Internet
- The survey of 1,300 young adults, conducted by marketing agency Digital Clarity, found that 16% of the 18- to 25-year-olds displayed symptoms of net addiction.
- Almost all of these 16 percent admitted to spending over 15 hours a day