

Prevalence of substance use disorder. A question of definition?

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ABSTRACT

Background: The introduction of the 5th edition of the DSM has changed the dimensionality of addiction from a two- to a one-dimensional structure, leading to changes in the classification of individuals and the prevalence of disorders. The symptom-oriented view has been criticized for dramatic changes over the past 40 years, inflation of psychiatric diagnoses and lack of precision in distinguishing between normal and diseased. Most recently, it has been challenged by arguing that it formulates an explanation rather than a description, and that a redefinition in terms of “heavy use over time” better fits the epidemiological data, would reduce stigmatization and help initiating early lifestyle changes and interventions. This study aims at (1) investigating changes in substance-use disorders between DSM-IV and -5, and (2) analyzing the link between the current criteria definition and indicators of consumption.

Methods: Data from the German Epidemiological Survey of Substance Abuse on 12-month DSM-IV and -5 criteria for substance use disorders (alcohol, tobacco, illicit drugs and analgesics) and consumption indicators will be used. **Results:** Concordance between DSM-IV and -5 vary depending on the substance. The correlations between number of DSM-5 criteria and use indicators are substantial. DSM diagnoses miss a substantial part of the heavy consumer population and concordance with heavy consumption is higher for the 5th compared to the 4th DSM version. **Conclusions:** Demonstrating the sensitivity of DSM diagnoses to changes in criteria and linking them to heavy consumption raise doubts on the validity of the symptom-oriented concept of addiction. Implications for treatment and prevention will be discussed.

Declaration of interest

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Keywords

Substance use disorder, addiction concept, psychiatric diagnoses