

Addictive Behavior A Behavioral Economics Perspective

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Abstract

Why do people often behave in ways that are known to have dire consequences for their long-term health and happiness? Why does someone decide to act against his or her wellbeing? How do we best motivate individuals to act according to their long-term goals? The purpose of this talk is to provide an understanding of these questions using the framework of behavioral economics. An understanding of what drives self-defeating decisions is a critical part of the prevention and treatment of addiction. The main focus is on the motivations why people use drugs?

The main idea in this talk is that addiction is a consequence of falling victim to decision failures that leads to a preference for addictive behaviors. That is, addiction is viewed as a valuation disease, where the nervous system overvalues cues associated with drugs or drug-taking.

Viewing addiction as a failure in decision making leads to a number of solutions for reducing addiction, such as teaching economic rationality to emphasize the importance of long-term rewards, strategies to promote self-control behaviors to resist immediate gratification, and changing context in which individuals make decisions. These interventions help to reduce impulsive urges and encourage individuals to behave in their own best self-interests.

patterns and thereby reducing the harmful use of substances to cope with them. As an education program, this talk can be considered as an evidence-based prevention program, recognizing the critical roles of impulse control and resiliency.

In sum, this presentation intends to raise awareness of the general principles underlying human behavior and the nature of decisions that people so often make that bears a mixed relationship to their happiness.

Biography:

Shahram Heshmat is an emeritus (and currently Adjunct) professor of Addiction and Health Economics at the University of Illinois Springfield. He received a PhD in Managerial Economics in 1984 from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI), with a specialty in Health Economics. His research has focused particularly on the behavioral economics of addiction and self-control, with broader implications for behavioral change. His recent books include *Eating Behavior and Obesity: Behavioral Economics Strategies for Health Professionals*, NY: Springer (2011); *Addiction: A Behavioral Economics Perspective*, NY: Routledge/Psychology Press (2015). Overall, these two texts expose readers to errors of judgment, oddities of choice, and identify obstacles to sensible and socially desirable choices that serve their best interests. He regularly writes the Addiction blog for the *Psychology Today*. He is regularly invited as an expert on Addiction for an interview by *Radio talk show*, podcast, and magazines.

Speaker Publications:

[Joint event on Neuropsychiatry and Addiction](#); July 27-28, 2020.

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The presentation is designed to empower participants through education. The aim is to provide them with skills that allow them to cope with their vulnerabilities better. They are instructed to recognize their distorted thinking and counter it. The ultimate goal is to direct people to change their behavior toward healthier choices by mitigating dysfunctional thinking