

“I Hit My Rock Bottom”: A Qualitative Analysis of Narratives Seeking Financial Assistance for Addiction through GoFundMe.com

Monica Bixby Radu, Ph.D.¹ & Lisa McManus Rodriguez, Ph.D.²

Abstract:

This study qualitatively explores how individuals frame their requests for assistance through the crowdfunding website, GoFundMe.com when seeking financial support for someone struggling with drug or alcohol addiction. With a focus on the intersection of lack of social capital and the stigma surrounding addiction, this study investigates the ways in which individuals navigate these barriers while seeking help for themselves or their loved ones. Through thematic analysis, the study uncovers the strategies, language, and narratives employed by individuals to solicit support through the crowdfunding platform. By examining the framing of requests for assistance, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the social dynamics surrounding addiction, help-seeking behavior, and the role of online platforms in addressing the needs of individuals and families affected by addiction. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of addressing stigma and building social support to facilitate recovery in populations struggling with addiction.

Keywords: addiction, stigma, crowdfunding, social capital

1. Introduction

“Hitting rock bottom” is an expression commonly used within the context of substance abuse, indicating reaching the lowest point in a person’s life (Bellaert, Van Steenberghe, De Maeyer, Vander Laenen, & Vanderplasschen, 2022). This could include financial problems, strained relationships with loved ones, legal issues, such as driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs (Aynural, 2017), loss of employment, deteriorating physical and mental health, and overall loss of hope or purpose (Wnuk, 2017). When someone hits rock bottom, they may realize the extent of the damage caused by their addiction and may feel a sense of desperation (Shamsalinea, Ghaffari, Khayeri, & Masoudi, 2018). However, this can also be a turning point for some, as it can serve as a catalyst for seeking help and making positive changes in their life to overcome their addiction (Ballaert et al., 2022).

According to the 2022 United States National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), approximately 46.8 million Americans, representing 16.7% of individuals aged 12 and older experienced a substance use disorder within the previous year (American Addiction Center, 2024). Research suggests that addiction transcends demographic boundaries, affecting individuals across diverse age groups and socioeconomic backgrounds. Among adolescents aged 12-17, approximately 8.7% or 2.2 million individuals experienced substance use disorders in the past year. In the young adult population aged 18-25, substance use disorder rates were notably higher, with 27.8% or 9.7 million individuals reporting such issues in the past year (American Addiction Center, 2024). Among adults aged 26 or older, 16.6% or 36.8 million individuals struggled with substance use disorders in the past year, indicating a significant prevalence within this demographic (American Addiction Center, 2024). American Indians and Alaska Natives exhibited the highest prevalence at 24%, followed by White Americans at 17.6%, African Americans at 18.4%, Hispanics or Latinos at 17.4%, and Asian Americans at 9% (American Addiction Center, 2024). Employment status was also found to be associated with substance use disorder prevalence, with higher rates observed among unemployed individuals. Approximately 27.9% of unemployed individuals reported past-year substance use disorders compared to 20.1% of full-time employees, and 20.5% of part-time employees. Additionally, incarceration rates indicated a substantial prevalence of substance use disorders among incarcerated individuals, with approximately 63% in jail and 58% in prison meeting criteria for such disorders (American Addiction Center, 2024).

¹Associate Professor, Southeast Missouri State University. Email: mradu@semo.edu

²Assistant Professor, Wake Technical Community College. Email: lmcmamus@waketech.edu

*Corresponding Author: Monica Bixby Radu, Ph.D. Email: mradu@semo.edu

Drug and alcohol addiction have far-reaching consequences across multiple aspects of an individual's life (Patel & Preddy, 2022). In terms of education, substance abuse can impede learning abilities, lead to poor academic performance, and increase dropout rates among students, which can hinder future opportunities and limit career prospects (Townsend, Flisher, & King, 2007). Employment can also be severely impacted by substance abuse, with decreased productivity, absenteeism, workplace accidents, and job loss being common outcomes (Henkel, 2011). Research shows that substance abuse often strains relationships within families, leading to conflict, neglect, and emotional trauma for children and other family members (Saladino, Mosca, Petruccioli, Hoelzlhammer, Lauriola, Verrastro, & Cabras, 2021). Legal issues frequently arise as well, with substance-related offenses resulting in arrests, legal fees, and potential incarceration (Evans, Stalker, & Brown, 2021). From a health perspective, substance abuse can cause a myriad of physical health problems, including liver disease, cardiovascular issues, respiratory problems, and an increased risk of overdose (Newcomb & Locke, 2005). Richert, Anderberg, and Dahlberg (2020) suggest an overlap between mental health issues and substance abuse, as both are closely linked to conditions such as depression, anxiety, and schizophrenia.

The stigma associated with being addicted to drugs or alcohol can exacerbate the challenges individuals face and further hinder their ability to seek help and recover from substance abuse (Wakeman & Rich, 2018). Stigma can manifest in various ways, including judgmental attitudes, labeling, and ostracization from family, friends, and society at large (Matthews, 2019). As a result, individuals may internalize feelings of shame, guilt, and worthlessness, which can perpetuate a cycle of addiction and prevent them from accessing support services and treatment. Stigma can also impact employment opportunities, housing stability, and access to healthcare (Room, 2005). Therefore, in our study, we explored the experiences of individuals confronting addiction-related financial constraints and the stigma associated with soliciting aid. Through systematic coding and memoing, we revealed the diverse ways in which individuals articulate their requests for assistance, often reflecting emotional labor and social isolation, but also hope. The narratives suggested that the individuals suffering from addiction, their family members, and friends were hopeful that they could beat addiction, which is why they were asking for help. Our research sheds light on the complex interplay between addiction, financial constraints, and societal perceptions, advocating for a more empathetic response to individuals navigating addiction and its repercussions.

2. Drug and Alcohol Addiction

Drug and alcohol addiction presents a profound and multifaceted challenge within the United States, exerting far-reaching impacts on individuals, families, and communities. Over the years, substance abuse has emerged as a persistent and pressing public health issue, necessitating comprehensive approaches to prevention, intervention, and treatment (Alexander, 2011). The spectrum of substances implicated in addiction spans a wide array, encompassing illicit drugs such as cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine, as well as legally available substances like alcohol, prescription opioids, and other medications (Strang, Volkow, Degenhardt, Hickman, Johnson, Koob, Marshall, Tyndall, & Walsh, 2020). Alcohol addiction, in particular, permeates American culture, often commencing as social or recreational drinking before escalating into problem drinking or alcohol use disorder (AUD), where individuals develop both physical and emotional dependence on alcohol (Ahern, Galea, Hubbard, Midanik, & Syme, 2008). The rise in prescription drug abuse, notably opioids, has precipitated a nationwide crisis of staggering proportions (Strang et al., 2020). Factors such as over-prescription, misuse, and illicit distribution of prescription painkillers have fueled a dramatic surge in opioid-related fatalities and instances of addiction across the country. The opioid crisis has underscored the overlap among healthcare practices, pharmaceutical regulations, and societal attitudes towards pain management, highlighting the need for concerted efforts to curb the epidemic and mitigate its far-reaching consequences (Strang et al., 2020).

2.1 Efforts to Combat Addiction

Efforts to combat substance addiction in the United States represent a multifaceted endeavor, incorporating prevention, treatment, and recovery strategies aimed at addressing the complex factors contributing to addiction and its pervasive impact on individuals and communities (Schroeder, 2005). Prevention initiatives serve as a cornerstone of addiction mitigation efforts, emphasizing the importance of education and awareness campaigns targeted at diverse demographic groups, with an emphasis on adolescents and young adults who may be particularly vulnerable to substance experimentation (Watson, 2012). These initiatives strive to impart comprehensive knowledge about the risks and consequences of substance abuse while promoting the adoption of healthy coping mechanisms and decision-making skills to resist peer pressure and societal influences conducive to substance use (Ashford et al., 2019). By fostering a culture of prevention and resilience, these programs seek to mitigate the onset of substance abuse and lay the groundwork for a healthier future generation.

Treatment modalities for substance addiction encompass a diverse array of interventions tailored to address the unique needs and circumstances of individuals struggling with addiction (McGaffin, Deane, Kelly, & Blackman, 2018). Central to the treatment continuum is the process of detoxification, which aims to safely manage and alleviate the physical symptoms of withdrawal associated with ceasing substance use (Sofin, Danker-Hopfe, Gooren, & Neu, 2017). Following detoxification, individuals may engage in a multifaceted therapeutic approach encompassing individual and group counseling, cognitive-behavioral therapies, motivational interviewing, and medication-assisted treatment, among other evidence-based interventions (Ray, Bujarski, Grodin, Hartwell, Green, Venegas, & Miotto, 2019). These modalities are designed to address the interplay of physiological, psychological, and social factors underlying addiction, empowering individuals to cultivate coping strategies, identify triggers, and develop relapse prevention skills essential for sustained recovery (Ray et al., 2019). Support groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA) provide peer support, encouragement, and accountability as individuals navigate the challenges of recovery within a supportive community framework (McGaffin, Deane, Kelly, & Blackman, 2018). However, one criticism of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) is its reliance on a one-size-fits-all approach to recovery. While AA has helped countless individuals achieve and maintain sobriety, its adherence to the 12-step program and emphasis on abstinence may not be effective for everyone struggling with alcohol addiction.

In addition to treatment interventions, recovery support services play a pivotal role in facilitating the transition from active addiction to sustained sobriety (Jason, Salomon-Amend, Guerrero, Bobak, O'Brien, & Soto-Nevarez, 2021). These services encompass a range of care including vocational training, educational opportunities, housing assistance, legal advocacy, and mental health services (Davidson, White, Sells, Schmutte, O'Connell, Bellamy, & Rowe, 2010). Studies also suggest that initiatives such as peer mentoring, recovery coaching, and alumni networks provide ongoing encouragement, guidance, and mentorship to individuals navigating the challenges of early recovery and beyond (Reif, Braude, Lyman, Dougherty, Daniels, Ghose, & Delphin-Rittmon, 2014)

Despite the strides made in advancing prevention, treatment, and recovery efforts, it is essential to acknowledge the historical context of drug and alcohol policy in the United States, which has often been characterized by punitive approaches and the criminalization of substance use and abuse (Alexander, 2011). Decades of punitive drug policies, including mandatory minimum sentencing and punitive sanctions have disproportionately impacted marginalized communities, perpetuating cycles of incarceration, poverty, and intergenerational trauma (Alexander, 2011). Due to injustices inherent in punitive drug policies, there has been a growing movement towards harm reduction, diversion programs, and alternative approaches to drug policy that prioritize public health, social justice, and compassion over punitive measures (Kim, Morgan, & Nyhan, 2020).

2.2. Challenges to Recovery

Recovery from drug and alcohol addiction is often characterized by various obstacles, including pervasive stigma and discrimination that pervade attitudes towards addiction (Morris, 2022). Individuals with substance use disorders often encounter societal judgment and prejudice, which not only compounds their emotional distress but also serves as a barrier to seeking help and engaging in treatment (Rundle, Cunningham, & Hendershot, 2021). Inadequate funding and resources further compound the challenges of addressing addiction (Amaro, 1999). Insufficient investment in prevention, education, and treatment programs hampers efforts to develop and implement evidence-based interventions, constraining the provision of essential services to individuals in need. Budgetary constraints at the federal, state, and local levels exacerbate funding disparities, leading to resource shortages and impeding the sustainability of treatment initiatives (Pullen & Oser, 2014).

The opioid epidemic represents an evolving crisis within the broader landscape of addiction. Fueled by overprescribing practices and the proliferation of illicit opioids, the opioid epidemic has precipitated a surge in overdose deaths and opioid-related morbidity and mortality (Vadivelu, Kai, Kodumudi, Sramcik, & Kaye, 2018). Addressing this crisis demands a comprehensive approach encompassing enhanced prescribing guidelines, monitoring systems to curb diversion and misuse, and expanded access to evidence-based treatments such as medication-assisted therapy and overdose reversal medications like methadone (Calcaterra, Bach, Chadi, Chadi, Kimmel, Morford, & Samet, 2019). Studies suggest that efforts to combat the opioid epidemic must be accompanied by initiatives to address the underlying factors driving opioid misuse, including socioeconomic disparities, structural inequalities, and barriers to accessible healthcare (Brady, McCauley, & Back, 2016).

A holistic approach that acknowledges the combination of biological, psychological, social, and environmental factors is essential to address the root causes of addiction. Adverse childhood experiences, trauma, mental health disorders, and social determinants of health have profound influences on susceptibility to addiction and recovery outcomes. By addressing these underlying causes of addiction through trauma-informed care, integrated behavioral health services, and initiatives aimed at addressing social inequities, policymakers and healthcare stakeholders can foster more resilient and supportive communities that promote health and well-being for all individuals affected by addiction.

3. Social Capital and Recovery Capital: Their Vital Roles in Recovery

Social capital refers to the networks of relationships and the norms of reciprocity and trust within those networks that facilitate collective action within a group or community. Social capital encompasses both bonding social capital (ties within homogenous groups) and bridging social capital (connections between diverse groups) (Coleman, 1988). It encompasses the resources embedded within social relationships, such as emotional support, practical assistance, and access to information and opportunities (Coleman, 1987).

Recovery capital refers to the internal and external resources that individuals can draw upon to initiate and sustain recovery from addiction (Chen, 2018). These resources can include personal assets such as motivation, coping skills, and self-efficacy, as well as external supports like social networks, access to treatment, and community resources (Chen, 2018). Chen suggests that for individuals addicted to drugs or alcohol, recovery capital can be a lifeline towards recovery and sustained well-being. While recovery capital can involve elements of social capital, such as supportive relationships and access to recovery-oriented networks, it is a broader concept that encompasses a range of individual and environmental factors beyond just social connections. Social capital, meanwhile, focuses on the social resources available within a community or network and the benefits that result from those connections.

We argue that social capital plays a crucial role in the journey of recovery from addiction. Social capital provides access to resources and assistance that can help individuals address these practical needs, reducing stress and increasing the likelihood of successful recovery (Bourdieu, 2018). Positive social connections can serve as a source of accountability and motivation for individuals in recovery. Knowing that they have people who believe in their ability to overcome addiction can inspire individuals to stay committed to their recovery journey, even during challenging times. Addiction often leads to feelings of alienation and disconnection from mainstream society (Bluc, Best, & Moustafa, 2020). Building social capital allows individuals to cultivate a sense of belonging within supportive communities, reducing the risk of relapse, and promoting long-term recovery (Coleman, 1988).

Addiction can profoundly diminish or deplete an individual's social capital (Patton, Best, & Brown, 2022). The destructive behaviors associated with substance abuse, such as lying, manipulation, and withdrawal from social activities, can strain or sever existing relationships. As addiction consumes more of the individual's time, energy, and resources, it may lead to neglect of important social connections, further eroding their support system. Additionally, addiction can foster a sense of isolation as individuals prioritize their substance use over meaningful social interactions (Patton et al., 2022). Room (2005) suggests that the stigma surrounding addiction can result in social exclusion and discrimination, further isolating individuals from potential sources of support. Fear of judgment or rejection may prevent individuals from seeking help or disclosing their struggles to others, perpetuating a cycle of secrecy and shame (Room, 2005).

4. Addiction, Stigma, and Asking for Help

Stigma, as understood from a sociological perspective, encompasses a process of devaluation or discrediting of individuals or groups based on perceived characteristics, behaviors, or attributes that are considered socially undesirable or deviant. This phenomenon manifests through negative beliefs, attitudes, and stereotypes perpetuated by society, ultimately resulting in the marginalization and discrimination of the stigmatized group. In the realm of addiction, individuals grappling with drug or alcohol dependence encounter profound societal stigma rooted in various cultural, historical, and ideological constructs (Atkins, Dopp & Temaner, 2020). Individuals are often subjected to labeling and stereotyping, characterized by terms such as "junkie" or "addict," which not only oversimplify the complexities of addiction but also reinforce negative stereotypes portraying affected individuals as inherently flawed or morally weak. Consequently, this labeling process contributes to the formation of societal attitudes that perpetuate stigma and marginalization (Atkins et al., 2020).

Societal stigma towards addiction can lead to social exclusion and discrimination, depriving individuals of opportunities for employment, housing, healthcare, and meaningful social connections (Rundle, Cunningham, & Hendershot, 2021). Fear of discrimination may dissuade individuals from seeking help or

disclosing their addiction, further exacerbating their isolation, and hindering their path to recovery. Structural stigma further reinforces societal-level conditions, cultural norms, and institutional practices that perpetuate the stigmatization of individuals with addiction (Hatzenbuehler, 2017). Policies that criminalize drug use or restrict access to addiction treatment are examples of structural stigma that exacerbate the challenges faced by affected individuals (Alexander, 2011). According to Brownell (2023), stigma surrounding addiction often ascribes personal responsibility and blame to individuals, framing addiction as a result of moral failings or lack of willpower. This perception overlooks the role of biological, psychological, and social factors contributing to addiction, perpetuating misconceptions, and hindering efforts to address the root causes of substance dependence.

Research suggests that the impact of societal stigma on the identity and self-esteem of individuals facing addiction is profound, as they may internalize societal judgments and experience a diminished sense of self-worth (Rundle et al., 2021). The intersectionality of stigma complicates the experiences of individuals with addiction, as they may face overlapping forms of discrimination based on factors such as race, gender, socioeconomic status, or other identities. Intersectional stigma exacerbates the challenges faced by marginalized groups, compounding the barriers to recovery and social inclusion (Brownell, 2023).

5. Aim and Methodology

GoFundMe has emerged as a transformative tool for individuals and communities seeking financial assistance (Radu & McManus, 2018). From covering medical expenses and supporting disaster relief efforts to funding educational endeavors and aiding families in need, GoFundMe empowers individuals to rally support from their communities and beyond, effectuating positive change in their lives and the lives of others (Radu & McManus, 2019). The process of utilizing GoFundMe typically begins with the creation of a fundraising campaign. Once the campaign is crafted, organizers leverage various communication channels, including social media platforms, email, and word-of-mouth, to disseminate their message and appeal to potential donors (GoFundMe, 2024). By sharing their campaign within their network and beyond, campaigners garner support and contributions from a broad spectrum of individuals. Supporters interested in contributing to a campaign can do so directly through the GoFundMe website or mobile app, utilizing a range of payment methods including credit/debit cards and online payment systems. Encouraged to leave messages of encouragement and solidarity, donors can demonstrate their support for the cause and their commitment to making a meaningful impact.

Over six months, we examined a total of 25 GoFundMe campaigns explicitly mentioning drug or alcohol addiction as the motivation for the fundraising request. These campaigns were authored by a diverse array of stakeholders, including family members, friends, colleagues, and the individuals coping with addiction themselves. To ensure the integrity and relevance of our analysis, we excluded campaigns associated with organizations seeking financial support for their operations or on behalf of specific individuals. In addition, campaigns soliciting funds for memorials were omitted from our sample. Our search initially yielded over 500 results containing the keyword “addiction.” Employing stringent inclusion criteria, we systematically filtered out campaigns that did not align with our specific parameters, resulting in a sample size of 25 campaigns. Because all data included in analysis were publicly available through GoFundMe.com, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was unnecessary. The data collected consisted of publicly accessible information voluntarily shared by individuals seeking financial support for themselves or others. This study adhered strictly to ethical guidelines, ensuring the anonymity and confidentiality of all individuals referenced in the analysis.

Utilizing adductive reasoning, we developed a comprehensive codebook comprising relevant themes, informed by our pre-existing knowledge of crowdsourcing dynamics and the stigmatizing labels often attached to addiction (Radu & McManus, 2018). Our analytical approach aimed to uncover common threads, discern recurring patterns, and elucidate any anomalies present within the data. Through the iterative process of coding and memoing, we examined the multifaceted ways in which individuals framed their appeals for assistance, shedding light on the emotional labor, social isolation, embarrassment, and shame inherent in seeking help for addiction-related challenges.

6. Findings

Five major themes emerged from the data, including (1) hitting rock bottom and wanting to get better, (2) lack of insurance or financial support, (3) personal success prior to addiction, (4) family history of trauma and/or addiction, and (5) mental health challenges. Firstly, the theme of *hitting rock bottom and wanting to get better* underscores the pivotal moment of realization and the desire for change. It reflects a crucial turning

point where individuals acknowledge the severity of their addiction and seek support to embark on the path to recovery. Secondly, *the lack of insurance or financial support* theme shows the practical barriers individuals face in accessing addiction treatment. Individuals may find themselves unable to afford the high costs associated with rehabilitation programs or therapy sessions, making crowdfunding platforms a vital resource for financial assistance in their journey towards recovery. The theme of *personal success prior to addiction* speaks to the narratives of individuals who once thrived in various aspects of their lives before addiction. This narrative often emphasizes the stark contrast between their past achievements and their current struggles, serving as a reminder of the potential for redemption and renewal. The theme, *family history of trauma and/or addiction* explores the underlying factors that contribute to addiction. It highlights the intergenerational cycle of trauma and substance abuse within families, demonstrating the importance of addressing underlying trauma in the recovery process. Lastly, the theme of *mental health challenges* demonstrates the intricate relationship between addiction and co-occurring mental health disorders. Many individuals seeking support through crowdfunding platforms may grapple with underlying mental health issues that exacerbate their addiction, emphasizing the need for integrated approaches to treatment and support.

6.1 Hitting Rock Bottom and Wanting to Get Better

The first narrative embodies the theme of *hitting rock bottom and wanting to get better* through a personal narrative of struggle, realization, and determination. The individual openly shares their journey of struggling with mental health issues and addiction over the past few years, culminating in a recent moment of reckoning where they believe they have reached their lowest point. This acknowledgment of hitting rock bottom signifies a pivotal moment of self-awareness and readiness for change. The individual expresses a sense of hope and optimism for the future, recognizing the sober living home they have found as a potential turning point towards “forever and authentic sobriety.” This language suggests a longing for sustained recovery and a commitment to making significant life changes. By acknowledging the need for external support and actively seeking out resources such as the sober living home and outpatient mental health care, the individual demonstrates a proactive approach to addressing their struggles and building a foundation for recovery.

I have been struggling with mental health and addiction for the past few years of my life. I recently felt like I hit my rock bottom that I can only now move forward from. I have found a sober living home called (NAME) that may be the life changing turn in my life towards forever and authentic sobriety. While living here, I plan to focus on myself for the first time ever. I am going to be receiving outpatient mental health care from (NAME) here in (LOCATION). This will help me overcome my personal trauma and gain tools to help me achieve my goal towards sobriety. (36 donations, \$2,676 raised of \$5,000 goal)

The comment shows the importance of focusing on self-care and personal growth, signaling a shift towards prioritizing their own well-being after years of battling mental health issues and addiction. By investing in outpatient mental health care to address personal trauma and acquire coping tools, the individual acknowledges the interconnectedness of mental health and addiction recovery, recognizing the need to address underlying issues to achieve sobriety. Additionally, this comment exemplifies the first theme of hitting rock bottom and wanting to get better by depicting a narrative of struggle, self-awareness, and proactive steps towards recovery. It underscores the resilience and determination of individuals facing addiction and mental health challenges, highlighting the transformative potential of reaching a point of readiness for change and seeking support to embark on the journey towards healing and sobriety.

The next comment provides an emotional portrayal of the theme through the lens of familial support and intervention in response to a loved one's addiction. The narrative centers around the speaker's niece, who has struggled with addiction since a young age and recently reached a critical juncture described as her “rock bottom.”

My niece, (NAME) has struggled with addiction since she was only 14 years old. She finally hit her “rock bottom” this summer when she became homeless on the streets of (LOCATION). My family answered her call for help and took her home. For many weeks we cared for her while she went through withdrawals and detox. (NAME) has a long way to go on her healing journey with many layers of trauma to work through. (19 donations, \$1395 raised of \$8,000 goal)

The mention of the niece becoming homeless on the streets of a specific location serves as a stark illustration of the depths of her struggle and the severe consequences of addiction. This event represents a turning point that prompts the family to intervene and provide the necessary support and care. The family's response to her call for help underscores the importance of social capital and familial bonds in times of crisis. The comment further emphasizes the challenges associated with addiction by describing the niece's experience of going through withdrawals and detox under the care of her family. This portrayal humanizes the process of recovery, highlighting the physical and emotional toll of addiction and the arduous journey towards sobriety. The mention of the niece having “many layers of trauma to work through” acknowledges the complexity of addiction and its often intertwined relationship with underlying psychological and emotional

issues. This underscores the importance of addressing the root causes of addiction and providing comprehensive support to facilitate healing and recovery. By depicting a narrative of struggle, intervention, and the enduring commitment of family members to support their loved one's journey, this comment demonstrates the resilience of individuals facing addiction and the transformative power of familial support in overcoming obstacles on the path to recovery.

6.2 Lack of Insurance or Financial Support

In the United States, lack of health insurance presents a significant barrier to accessing treatment for individuals struggling with addiction. This issue is particularly acute considering the high costs associated with addiction treatment, including detoxification, rehabilitation programs, therapy sessions, and medications. Without adequate insurance coverage, many individuals find themselves unable to afford the necessary care, leaving them vulnerable to the devastating consequences of untreated addiction.

One of the primary challenges related to insurance coverage for addiction treatment is the limited duration of coverage provided by many insurance plans. As highlighted in the next comment, most insurance policies only cover a fraction of the recommended treatment duration for addiction recovery. For instance, while the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) recommends at least 90 days of treatment for optimal outcomes, insurance plans often cover only 20 to 30 days of inpatient treatment, leaving individuals with inadequate support to address their addiction effectively.

Hi my name is (NAME) and I am fundraising for my daughter who is in a Rehab Center. Parents of addicts have a whole separate layer to their own story. It is about Hope and not giving up but mostly sadness and pain. It is a very lonely place to be. But I am reaching out to friends and family and my community to tell them that one person that I know is asking for help and is asking for change. As some of you may know true support for an addict is very hard to come by. It's not as easy as many may think. If we can all come together and try to save one life that would be fantastic. My daughter is in a place that has the right support and approach to overcome her physical and mental challenges. Her journey is not over. Did you know that most insurances cover only 20 to 30 days in house treatment? The time needed to recover from addiction can be different for everyone. The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) recommends that people spend AT LEAST 90 DAYS in an addiction recovery program. I am asking for help to continue for 2 more months. (15 donations, \$1,550 raised of \$9,000 goal)

In this narrative, the parent's outreach to friends, family, and the community underscores the importance of social capital in addressing the financial barriers to addiction treatment. By mobilizing support networks, this individual endeavors to rally collective assistance for their daughter's recovery journey. This appeal for community support sheds light on the stark reality that true support for addicts is often elusive and emphasizes the need for collective action to bridge the gap in accessing necessary resources. The comment also captures the challenges posed by the lack of insurance or financial support in accessing adequate addiction treatment. Through a heartfelt plea for assistance and a candid portrayal of the emotional toll of addiction on families, this parent's narrative underscores the urgent need for community support and systemic reform to ensure that individuals battling addiction receive the comprehensive care they deserve.

The lack of insurance coverage for addiction treatment not only jeopardizes the health and well-being of individuals struggling with addiction but also imposes significant societal costs. Untreated addiction can lead to a range of negative outcomes, including increased healthcare utilization, involvement in criminal justice systems, and loss of productivity, placing strain on families, communities, and healthcare systems. Advocacy efforts aimed at expanding insurance coverage for addiction treatment, enhancing parity laws to ensure equitable coverage for mental health and substance use disorders, and increasing funding for addiction treatment programs can help mitigate barriers to access and improve outcomes for individuals seeking recovery from addiction.

6.3 Personal Success Prior to Addiction

Individuals suffering from addiction often had successful and productive lives. They may have held stable jobs, pursued higher education, owned businesses, or excelled in creative or athletic pursuits. Their success may have earned them recognition, respect, and a sense of fulfillment, contributing to a positive self-image and a strong support network. However, the onset of addiction can disrupt and unravel these achievements, often leading to a downward spiral of consequences. Substance abuse can impair cognitive function, decision-making abilities, and overall well-being, jeopardizing one's career, financial stability, and interpersonal relationships. What was once a life characterized by success and productivity can quickly deteriorate into a cycle of chaos, instability, and despair.

Despite their previous accomplishments, individuals struggling with addiction may find themselves facing a myriad of challenges, including legal troubles, financial strain, health problems, and strained relationships with loved ones. The stark contrast between their past successes and their current struggles serves as a poignant reminder of the insidious nature of addiction and its ability to dismantle even the most promising of lives.

I've taken the steps to a cleaner life and completed 90 days in (NAME) treatment center. I'm currently living in a active drug using home and want to leave that in the past, my parents are active users since I can remember! I had my life set, the youngest in the family and most successful, I ran a impact window and door business for 4 years strong, 3 cars, 2 houses and had everything I asked for but then came the addiction and it took everything and everyone out of my life. I'm currently living in a situation I can't be in with active users and I'm 93 days sober I need \$1,500 to complete my deposit to move out. Please help I want my life back! (2 donations, \$25 raised of \$1,500 goal)

Highlighting previous success and productivity on a crowdfunding website where individuals are asking for help can serve as a powerful tool in destigmatizing asking for assistance. By sharing their stories of past achievements and struggles with addiction, individuals not only humanize their experiences but also challenge societal perceptions surrounding addiction and help-seeking behavior. The stigma surrounding addiction often discourages individuals from seeking help due to fear of judgment, shame, or social ostracization. By openly discussing their experiences with addiction and asking for assistance on crowdfunding platforms, individuals challenge stereotypes and misconceptions surrounding substance abuse, demonstrating that addiction is a complex issue that requires empathy and support, rather than condemnation and judgment.

6.4 Family History of Trauma and/or Addiction

A family history of addiction can significantly increase the risk of substance misuse for an individual. Growing up in an environment where substance abuse is prevalent can normalize addictive behaviors and influence attitudes towards drugs or alcohol. Additionally, genetic factors may predispose individuals to inherit vulnerabilities to addiction, further amplifying the likelihood of developing problematic substance use patterns. The intergenerational transmission of addiction within families can perpetuate a cycle of substance abuse, where patterns of behavior are learned and replicated across generations. Family members may unknowingly enable or reinforce addictive behaviors through codependent relationships or dysfunctional dynamics, making it challenging for individuals to break free from the cycle of addiction.

The following comment demonstrates the profound influence of family history on an individual's journey through addiction and recovery. By revealing that this individual began drinking and using drugs at the age of 13, coinciding with her mother's passing from alcoholism, highlights the role of familial trauma in shaping her experiences with substance abuse. The tragic loss of her mother not only introduced this individual to the world of addiction, but also established a familial pattern of substance misuse and its devastating consequences.

(NAME) is a recovering addict who has been drinking and using drugs since she was 13 years old, when her mom passed away from alcoholism. (NAME) comes from a family with a history of addiction and has wanted to get sober for a while. (22 donations, \$1,055 raised of \$5,000 goal.)

Individuals may stress their family history of trauma or addiction in their narratives for several reasons. First, by sharing their family history of trauma or addiction, individuals provide context for their current circumstances. This helps potential donors understand the underlying factors contributing to their need for assistance and may garner empathy and support. In addition, sharing personal stories of trauma or addiction can make narratives more relatable and humanize the individual's experience. It conveys authenticity and vulnerability, which can resonate with potential donors and prompt them to help. Finally, by revealing their family history, individuals may seek to dispel misconceptions or stigma surrounding addiction and trauma. They may hope to foster understanding and compassion among donors, encouraging them to support their cause without judgment.

6.5 Mental Health Challenges

The overlap between mental health challenges and addiction is significant, often presenting a dual diagnosis where an individual experiences both conditions simultaneously. This intersection underscores the interconnectedness of mental health and substance use disorders, with each condition influencing and exacerbating the other in a cyclical manner. Many individuals with mental health challenges turn to substances as a form of self-medication to alleviate symptoms such as anxiety, depression, or trauma. Drugs or alcohol may provide temporary relief or escape from distressing emotions, leading to a pattern of substance misuse as a coping mechanism. Environmental factors, such as exposure to stress, trauma, or social disadvantage, can

contribute to the development of both mental health disorders and addiction. Adverse childhood experiences, socioeconomic stressors, or peer influence may increase the risk of experiencing co-occurring conditions. The following illustrates the intricate overlap between mental health and addiction to drugs, as it portrays a situation where both factors are deeply intertwined and exacerbating each other's effects.

Hi my name is AJ. This fundraiser is for my son he needs treatment for his addiction to drugs. I can't turn my back on him he needs help. The funds will be used for inpatient rehabilitation services. During the pandemic he suffered from depression unable to provide for himself & since then he's been doing heavy drugs. As a parent I will try anything to help my son. I won't give up on him. (8 donations, \$261 raised of \$50,000 goal)

By highlighting the interconnectedness of mental health and addiction, the narrative provides context for the individual's circumstances. It helps potential donors understand the complexities of the individual's struggles and the broader context in which their need for assistance arises. In the narrative, the emphasis on the connection between mental health and addiction prompts donors to support holistic approaches to treatment and recovery. It clarifies the importance of addressing both mental health challenges and addiction simultaneously, acknowledging their interdependence. This perspective emphasizes the value of comprehensive interventions designed to promote lasting healing and overall wellness.

Both mental health issues and addiction are often accompanied by stigma, which can significantly impact individuals' willingness to seek help, their access to appropriate care, and their overall well-being. The stigma attached to both mental health and addiction often intersects, compounding the challenges faced by individuals dealing with co-occurring disorders. This dual stigma can exacerbate feelings of shame, isolation, and self-blame, further hindering efforts to seek help and engage in treatment. Fear of judgment or discrimination may lead to reluctance to access treatment, exacerbating symptoms and prolonging suffering. This reluctance to seek help can perpetuate a cycle of stigma and silence, further marginalizing individuals in need of support.

7. Discussion and Conclusion

These findings serve as a testament to the diverse and multifaceted nature of addiction and the enduring resilience of individuals and families in their pursuit of healing and recovery. While the qualitative findings provide valuable insights into addiction and crowd sourcing, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the research context. The data analyzed are from specific crowdfunding campaigns, which do not represent a diverse or random sample of the entire population dealing with addiction. Those who utilize crowdfunding platforms may have different characteristics and needs compared to those who do not seek financial support in this manner. Participants in crowdfunding campaigns self-select to share their stories and seek financial assistance. Their motivations and circumstances may differ from those who choose not to seek support through crowdfunding. This bias might influence the themes identified in the study. Participants in crowdfunding campaigns might present their situation and recovery goals in a manner they believe will elicit support and donations. This can introduce a bias in the data towards presenting a more positive or socially desirable image. Why did some campaigns earn more than others? The variation in success among campaigns raises intriguing questions that warrant further investigation.

Our research highlights the pressing need for inclusive, tailored, and readily available support structures. While platforms like crowdfunding can offer immediate relief by providing financial assistance and fostering community support, they ultimately fall short as sustainable solutions for the multifaceted challenges linked to addiction. The complexities of addiction extend far beyond financial aid, encompassing factors such as access to treatment, mental health support, and long-term recovery resources. Relying solely on crowdfunding overlooks the systemic barriers and disparities that hinder individuals' ability to overcome addiction. Structural changes are imperative to establish robust support systems that address the root causes of addiction and provide holistic care. These changes may involve policy reforms to expand access to affordable healthcare, integrated treatment programs that address both mental health and addiction, and community-based initiatives that offer ongoing assistance and resources. By prioritizing systemic improvements, society can ensure that individuals struggling with addiction receive the comprehensive support they need to achieve lasting recovery and well-being.

References

- Alexander, M. (2011). *The New Jim Crow*. New York: New Press.
- Ahern, J., Galea, S., Hubbard, A., Midanik, L., & Syme, S. L. (2008). "Culture of drinking" and individual problems with alcohol use. *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 167(9), 1041-1049.
- Amaro, H. (1999). An expensive policy: The impact of inadequate funding for substance abuse treatment. *American Journal of Public Health*, 89(5), 657-659.
- American Addiction Center. (2024, March 1). Alcohol and Drug Abuse Statistics (Facts About Addiction). <https://americanaddictioncenters.org/addiction-statistics>
- Ashford, R. D., Brown, A., Brown, T., Callis, J., Cleveland, H. H., Eisenhart, E., ... & Whitney, J. (2019). Defining and operationalizing the phenomena of recovery: A working definition from the recovery science research collaborative. *Addiction Research & Theory*, 27(3), 179-188.
- Aynural, Ö. M. (2017). Driving under the influence of alcohol and drugs. *Journal of Penal Law and Criminology*, 4(1), 11-24.
- Bellaert, L., Van Steenberghe, T., De Maeyer, J., Vander Laenen, F., & Vanderplasschen, W. (2022). Turning points toward drug addiction recovery: Contextualizing underlying dynamics of change. *Addiction Research & Theory*, 30(4), 294-303.
- Bliuc, A. M., Best, D., & Moustafa, A. A. (2020). Accessing addiction recovery capital via online and offline channels: The role of peer-support and shared experiences of addiction. In A. M. Moustafa (Ed.) *Cognitive, Clinical, and Neural Aspects of Drug Addiction* (pp. 251-265). Cambridge, MA: Academic Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (2018). The forms of capital. In M. Granovetter (Ed.) *The Sociology of Economic Life* (pp. 78-92). New York: Routledge.
- Brady, K. T., McCauley, J. L., & Back, S. E. (2016). Prescription opioid misuse, abuse, and treatment in the United States: An update. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 173(1), 18-26.
- Brownell, G. (2023). Drug and alcohol use among blacks: Mental health implications. In L. Hendricks & D. Smith (Eds.) *Changing the Stigma of Mental Health Among African Americans: Moving From Denial to Acceptance* (pp. 252-282). Hershey, PA: IGI Global.
- Calcaterra, S. L., Bach, P., Chadi, A., Chadi, N., Kimmel, S. D., Morford, K. L., ... & Samet, J. H. (2019). Methadone matters: What the United States can learn from the global effort to treat opioid addiction. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, 34, 1039-1042.
- Chen, G. (2018). Building recovery capital: The role of "hitting bottom" in desistance and recovery from substance abuse and crime. *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, 50(5), 420-429.
- Coleman, J. S. (1988). Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital. *American Journal of Sociology*, 94, S95-S120.
- Coleman, J. S. (1987). The Relations between School and Social Structure. In M. T. Hallinan (Ed.) *The social organization of schools: New conceptualizations of the learning process* (pp. 177-204). Boston, MA: Springer.
- Davidson, L., White, W., Sells, D., Schmutte, T., O'Connell, M., Bellamy, C., & Rowe, M. (2010). Enabling or engaging? The role of recovery support services in addiction recovery. *Alcoholism Treatment Quarterly*, 28(4), 391-416.
- Evans, C. B., Stalker, K. C., & Brown, M. E. (2021). A systematic review of crime/violence and substance use prevention programs. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 56, 101513.
- Henkel, D. (2011). Unemployment and substance use: a review of the literature (1990-2010). *Current Drug Abuse Reviews*, 4(1), 4-27.
- Jason, L. A., Salomon-Amend, M., Guerrero, M., Bobak, T., O'Brien, J., & Soto-Nevarez, A. (2021). The emergence, role, and impact of recovery support services. *Alcohol Research: Current Reviews*, 41(1), 1-9.
- Kim, J. W., Morgan, E., & Nyhan, B. (2020). Treatment versus punishment: understanding racial inequalities in drug policy. *Journal of Health Politics, Policy and Law*, 45(2), 177-209.
- Matthews, S. (2019). Self-stigma and addiction. In J. D. Avery & J. J. Avery (Eds.) *The stigma of addiction: An essential guide* (pp. 5-32). Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.
- Morris, J. (2022). Before 'Rock Bottom?': Problem framing effects on stigma and change among harmful drinkers. In N. Heather, M. Field, A. Moss, & S. Satel (Eds.) *Evaluating the Brain Disease Model of Addiction* (pp. 187-195). London: Routledge.
- Newcomb, M. D., & Locke, T. (2005). Health, social, and psychological consequences of drug use and abuse. In Z. Sloboda (Ed.) *Epidemiology of Drug Abuse* (pp. 45-59). Boston, MA: Springer US.
- Patton, D., Best, D., & Brown, L. (2022). Overcoming the pains of recovery: the management of negative recovery capital during addiction recovery pathways. *Addiction Research & Theory*, 30(5), 340-350.
- Patel, V. B., & Preedy, V. R. (Eds.). (2022). *Handbook of substance misuse and addictions: From biology to public health*. Switzerland: Springer Nature.

- Pullen, E., & Oser, C. (2014). Barriers to substance abuse treatment in rural and urban communities: counselor perspectives. *Substance Use & Misuse, 49*(7), 891-901.
- Radu, M. B., & McManus, L. (2018). A qualitative analysis of requests for financial help via GoFundMe by victims of intimate partner violence. *Sociological Spectrum, 38*(5), 312-325.
- Radu, M. B., & McManus, L. (2019). Bridging social capital through the techno-subsystem: A qualitative analysis of GoFundMe requests for hurricane relief. *Journal of Family Strengths, 19*(1), 9.
- Ray, L. A., Bujarski, S., Grodin, E., Hartwell, E., Green, R., Venegas, A., ... & Miotto, K. (2019). State-of-the-art behavioral and pharmacological treatments for alcohol use disorder. *The American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse, 45*(2), 124-140.
- Reif, S., Braude, L., Lyman, D. R., Dougherty, R. H., Daniels, A. S., Ghose, S. S., ... & Delphin-Rittmon, M. E. (2014). Peer recovery support for individuals with substance use disorders: Assessing the evidence. *Psychiatric Services, 65*(7), 853-861.
- Richert, T., Anderberg, M., & Dahlberg, M. (2020). Mental health problems among young people in substance abuse treatment in Sweden. *Substance Abuse Treatment, Prevention, and Policy, 15*, 1-10.
- Room, R. (2005). Stigma, social inequality and alcohol and drug use. *Drug and Alcohol Review, 24*(2), 143-155.
- Rundle, S. M., Cunningham, J. A., & Hendershot, C. S. (2021). Implications of addiction diagnosis and addiction beliefs for public stigma: A cross-national experimental study. *Drug and Alcohol Review, 40*(5), 842-846.
- Saladino, V., Mosca, O., Petruccielli, F., Hoelzlhammer, L., Lauriola, M., Verrastro, V., & Cabras, C. (2021). The vicious cycle: problematic family relations, substance abuse, and crime in adolescence: a narrative review. *Frontiers in Psychology, 12*, 673954.
- Schroeder, S. A. (2005). An agenda to combat substance abuse. *Health Affairs, 24*(4), 1005-1013.
- Shamsalinea, A., Ghaffari, F., Khayeri, F., & Masoudi, R. (2018). Helplessness and the need to withdraw from drugs: The beginning of the path to recovery. *Addictive Disorders & Their Treatment, 17*(2), 76-85.
- Sofin, Y., Danker-Hopfe, H., Gooren, T., & Neu, P. (2017). Predicting inpatient detoxification outcome of alcohol and drug dependent patients: the influence of sociodemographic environment, motivation, impulsivity, and medical comorbidities. *Journal of Addiction, 1*-11.
- Strang, J., Volkow, N. D., Degenhardt, L., Hickman, M., Johnson, K., Koob, G. F., ... & Walsh, S. L. (2020). Opioid use disorder. *Nature Reviews Disease Primers, 6*(1), 3.
- Townsend, L., Flisher, A. J., & King, G. (2007). A systematic review of the relationship between high school dropout and substance use. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review, 10*, 295-317.
- Vadivelu, N., Kai, A. M., Kodumudi, V., Sramcik, J., & Kaye, A. D. (2018). The opioid crisis: A comprehensive overview. *Current Pain and Headache Reports, 22*, 1-6.
- Wakeman, S. E., & Rich, J. D. (2018). Barriers to medications for addiction treatment: How stigma kills. *Substance Use & Misuse, 53*(2), 330-333.
- Watson, R. R. (Ed.). (2012). *Drug and Alcohol Abuse Prevention* (Vol. 1). Springer Science & Business Media.
- Wnuk, M. (2017). Hope as an important factor for mental health in alcohol-dependent subjects attending Alcoholics Anonymous. *Journal of Substance Use, 22*(2), 182-186.