

THE INTEGRATIVE HYPOTHESIS OF ADDICTION

All the drugs of abuse act on the reward pathways of the brain

The reward pathways are activated by the activities that are necessary for living

- food, water, sex, touch, being smiled at, music, etc
- They are a mechanism by which the organism calculates that it has obtained all it requires to continue living
- There is a certain interchangeability between reward pathway activators

The reward pathways are hyperresponsive in addicts, implying that they are chronically hypostimulated.

Therefore,

People use drugs because they have not obtained what they require for adequate living. Drugs replace what is missing.

In this way, drug use becomes a preferred way of coping with the problems of living.

In summary,

Addiction is a complex neurobiological response to resource deprivation

Notes

Addiction is a psychiatric disorder, not a lifestyle choice

Addiction is associated with mortality and morbidity (death and illness) and is caused by external factors, so it is a medical disorder

It is a disorder of behaviour, feeling and mood, and so it is a psychiatric disorder.

The dependence syndrome, with the presence of physical changes in the brain of the subject, is a long-term adaptation to the presence of the drug. It does not encompass the whole of addiction.

It is distinct from other psychiatric disorders (ie., it is not a 'variant' of schizophrenia or depression or obsessive-compulsive disorder or any other psychiatric syndrome)

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