

# THE PSYCHOLOGY OF ADDICTION IN JAPAN



## Bio

As the Founder of the Grace Center for Healing, Dr. Angelica Wagner has been a pioneer and global leader in creating profound life transformations of traumatic brain injury patients since 2009, when she almost lost her own vision due to a traumatic brain injury. Dr. Wagner incorporates cutting edge non drug brain techniques utilizing hertz frequencies of light, sound, orthomolecular nutrition, and essential oils to regenerate the brain. She holds a Diplomate Award in Addictionology, as a Doctor of Integrative Medicine, Bodytalk Pa Rama Practitioner, Eastern Medicine Practitioner and Access Consciousness Facilitator. Dr. Wagner has been awarded the top global neuroscientist in the world and is a top 100 Global Doctor. Angelica is the author of five books, including the best selling series “Are You Ready for a Miracle ?” (™) and “Secrets of the Millionaire Mind” (™). Dr. Wagner has transformed lives in environments of schools, with veterans, with athletes, with the handicapped, in corporations, and in populations of incarcerated institutions. She has dedicated her life to healing, teaching and speaking on international stages to inspire, empower and educate

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for the highest potential of a society struggling with the invisible wounds of mental health.

## Research Objectives

The study aims to educate and raise awareness about the prevalence of various addictions in Japan, drug abuse, evolution and trends. In addition, there is an aim to understand the cultural and social stigma around addiction, designer drugs and their emergence, in addition to the impact on Japan’s youth.

## Keywords:

Addiction, Substance abuse, Mental health, Japan, Intervention

## Abstract

This study examines trends in addiction, focusing on the escalating rates of substance abuse and behavioural addictions, particularly in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic. Pre-pandemic data highlights a concerning prevalence of antidepressant usage among the world’s children. Post-pandemic projections suggest a significant rise in mental health issues and addiction-related challenges, especially among children. In a specific case study of Japan, the research sheds light on the pervasive addiction issues present, including drug, alcohol, and technology addictions. The study delves into the changing landscape of drug abuse, with a shift from traditional substances to unregulated designer drugs like “dappou herb” and the concerning rise in technology addictions among the youth. The research underscores the need for effective intervention and treatment

strategies to address these evolving addiction patterns.

The study aims to educate and raise awareness about the prevalence of various addictions in Japan, drug abuse, evolution and trends. In addition, there is an aim to understand the cultural and social stigma around addiction, designer drugs and their emergence, in addition to the impact on Japan’s youth. In conclusion, the study underscores the urgent need for comprehensive public health initiatives and clinical trials to address addiction’s multifaceted challenges, offering potential solutions to alleviate the burden of addiction in societies worldwide, particularly in countries like Japan facing unique cultural and societal pressures.

## Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has left an indelible mark on the global populace, impacting not just physical health but also mental well-being. As the world grapples with the immediate and direct consequences of the virus, another crisis looms on the horizon: a surge in mental health issues post-pandemic. The multifaceted repercussions of the pandemic are expected to have lasting effects on mental health, necessitating an urgent and proactive response from healthcare systems and society at large.

The prolonged period of uncertainty and fear during the pandemic has heightened stress and anxiety levels for millions of individuals (Pfefferbaum & North, 2020). Factors such as the loss of loved ones, economic strain, social isolation due to lockdowns, and

the constant barrage of pandemic-related information have significantly impacted mental health. Even those without pre-existing mental health conditions have reported feelings of depression, anxiety, and stress (Pierce et al., 2020).

The aftermath of the pandemic is anticipated to bring a surge in mental health issues, including but not limited to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety disorders, and complicated grief (Holmes et al., 2020). This is influenced by several factors, including the lingering effects of the trauma experienced during the pandemic, the loss of livelihoods, financial instability, and the grieving process due to loss of family and friends.

The mental health impact of the pandemic is not limited to adults; children and adolescents are also susceptible. Disruption in education, social isolation, and the overall upheaval in daily routines have taken a toll on their mental well-being (Fegert et al., 2020). The repercussions on this demographic can be long-term, affecting their development, academic performance, and social integration.

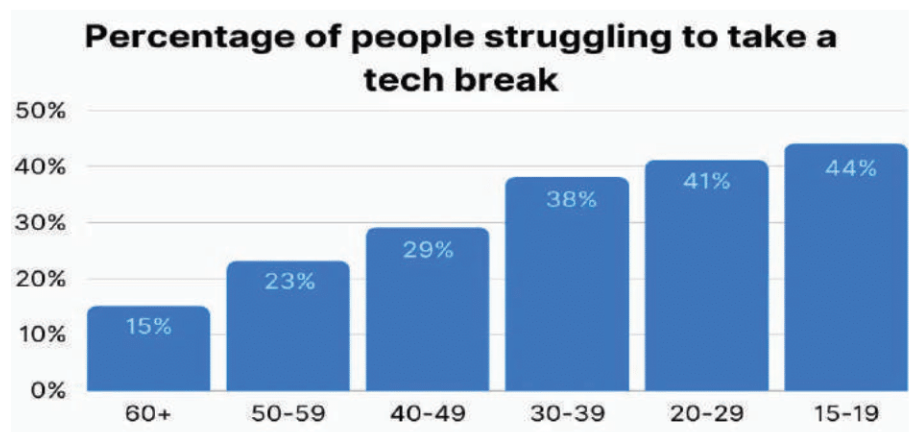
### Addiction Trends in Japan

Japan, a country renowned for its technological advancements and cultural heritage, is not immune to the global challenge of addiction. Over the years, addiction trends in Japan have evolved, presenting unique societal and public health concerns. Understanding these trends is crucial to implement targeted interventions and policies to address the issue effectively.

One significant addiction concern in Japan is related to substances. Historically, Japan has grappled with drug abuse, with methamphetamine being a prominent issue (Yoshida et al., 2009). The country experienced three waves of methamphetamine abuse, leaving a trail of destruction. In recent times, emerging trends include the use of "dappou herb," a

dangerous concoction of herbs mixed with synthetic cannabinoids, often considered a new recreational drug (Suzuki et al., 2019). This unregulated substance poses significant health risks, especially among the youth.

Technology addiction, particularly gaming and internet addiction, is another escalating problem in Japan. The country, known for its technological advancements, faces a paradox wherein its population is increasingly becoming addicted to the very technology it has pioneered (Tateno et al., 2019). The pervasive nature of technology and its easy accessibility have contributed to this rising addiction, especially among the younger demographic. Figure 1 highlights the percentage of people struggling to take a break from technology.



▲ Fig 1. (Susic, 2023)

Furthermore, alcohol remains a concerning addiction in Japan. The cultural acceptance of alcohol consumption, especially in work-related settings, has led to prevalent binge drinking and subsequent addiction (Yoshimoto et al., 2018). The stress-inducing work culture prevalent in Japan may contribute to the high rates of alcohol abuse observed.

A unique aspect of addiction in Japan is the strong stigma associated with it. Cultural norms often discourage individuals from acknowledging addiction due to the fear of shame and social ostracization (Saito et al., 2018). This stigma poses a barrier to seeking help and

appropriate treatment, perpetuating the cycle of addiction.

### Historical Context of Addiction in Japan

The issue of addiction is not a modern phenomenon in Japan; it has deep historical roots that have evolved over time, shaping the cultural, social, and medical understanding of addiction within the country. Understanding this historical context is crucial for developing effective strategies to combat addiction in Japan.

Historically, Japan had limited exposure to addictive substances. The Edo period (1603-1868) saw the prohibition of certain substances, such as tobacco and opium, although

their use was not entirely eradicated (Berridge, 1999). It wasn't until the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with increased contact with the West, that the use of addictive substances like opium and cocaine gained popularity (Berridge, 1999). This marked the beginning of a shift in attitudes towards addiction.

Post-World War II, Japan faced significant challenges, including the devastation of war and its aftermath. During the reconstruction period, the availability and misuse of methamphetamine, known as "shabu," surged dramatically (Makimoto & Iwane, 1998). This marked the onset of Japan's struggle with substance abuse, a struggle that

has persisted and evolved over the years.

In the late 20th century and early 21st century, Japan witnessed a rise in behavioral addictions, notably internet and gaming addiction (Tateno et al., 2019). The advancement of technology, particularly in gaming and internet access, has contributed to the prevalence of these addictions, especially among the youth.

Throughout this historical timeline, Japan has grappled with addressing addiction from both a legal and societal perspective. Laws and regulations have been established to control the use and distribution of addictive substances, yet societal attitudes, cultural norms, and stigma have presented significant barriers to acknowledging and addressing addiction openly (Tateno et al., 2019).

### ***Aims of the Study***

The study aims to educate and raise awareness about the prevalence of various addictions in Japan, drug abuse, evolution and trends. In addition, there is an aim to understand the cultural and social stigma around addiction, designer drugs and their emergence.

## **Methods and Materials**

This study employs a comprehensive approach to investigate the complex landscape of addiction in Japan, drawing upon insights gathered from a thorough literature review of existing research. The methodological foundation of this study relies on a review of published studies, articles, government reports, and academic papers pertaining to addiction in Japan. The utilisation of the literature review method allows for the integration of current research findings into a cohesive narrative that contributes to the comprehensive understanding of addiction in Japan. Furthermore, this approach facilitates the identification of gaps in existing literature, paving the way for future research directions and targeted

interventions in addressing addiction within the Japanese population.

## **Results and Discussion**

### ***Prevalence of Various Addictions in Japan***

Japan, a country known for its rich culture and technological advancements, is not immune to the global issue of addiction. Various forms of addiction present significant challenges to the society and public health of Japan. Understanding the prevalence of these addictions is crucial for developing effective strategies to combat their impact.

One prevalent form of addiction in Japan is alcoholism. The cultural acceptance of alcohol consumption and its integral role in social and business settings contribute to its widespread use. Drinking parties, known as “nomikai,” are common in the workplace, and excessive alcohol consumption is often seen as a way to cope with stress and to build social bonds. Consequently, alcohol addiction is a major concern in Japan, affecting both the individual and society at large (Yoshimoto et al., 2018).

Another growing concern is internet and gaming addiction. Japan, being a hub of technological innovation, has a population deeply engaged with the internet and video games. The immersive gaming culture, combined with the prevalence of smartphones and easy access to the internet, has led to a significant rise in internet addiction, particularly among the youth (Tateno et al., 2019). The compulsive use of the internet and excessive gaming can have detrimental effects on mental health and overall well-being.

Furthermore, Japan faces challenges related to substance abuse. Although drug abuse rates are relatively low compared to some other countries, methamphetamine, also known as “shabu,” has been a persistent issue. Synthetic cannabinoids, often referred to as

“dappou herb,” have also gained popularity, presenting a concerning trend due to their potential health hazards (Suzuki et al., 2019).

Tobacco addiction remains another significant public health concern. Despite efforts to curb smoking through anti-smoking campaigns and regulations, tobacco addiction continues to be a prevalent issue, with a notable portion of the population addicted to nicotine.

### ***Drug Abuse in Japan***

Drug abuse in Japan has emerged as a significant concern, posing challenges to public health, social stability, and law enforcement efforts. Despite Japan’s relatively low rates of drug abuse compared to other nations, it is not immune to this global issue. Understanding the patterns, factors, and consequences of drug abuse in Japan is essential to develop effective strategies for prevention and intervention. Historically, Japan faced waves of drug abuse epidemics. After World War II, methamphetamine abuse surged, followed by a period of solvent abuse, leading to brain damage in many cases (Makimoto & Iwane, 1998). Over the years, drug abuse patterns have shifted, witnessing an increase in the consumption of designer drugs like “spice” and the emergence of the “dappou herb” (Suzuki et al., 2019). The dappou herb, a blend of herbs with synthetic cannabinoids, has gained popularity among Japanese youth, highlighting the adaptability and evolving nature of drug abuse in the country.

One of the major challenges in combating drug abuse in Japan is the deeply ingrained cultural stigma associated with addiction. Admitting to drug use carries significant shame and social repercussions, which often discourages individuals from seeking help (Suzuki et al., 2019). This stigma is deeply rooted in historical and societal norms, making it imperative to address not only the addiction itself but also the cultural attitudes surrounding it.

Japan has implemented strict laws and regulations to curb drug abuse. The country prohibits the use and possession of stimulant drugs, cannabis, and other controlled substances (Suzuki et al., 2019). However, these legal measures alone are not sufficient to address the complex issue of drug abuse. For example it is estimated that cannabis will reach sales as high as JPY103 billion by 2027 as stated in figure 2.

primarily due to pharmaceutical companies' aggressive marketing and misinformation regarding their addictive potential (Cicero et al., 2014). The opioid crisis that ensued revealed the detrimental consequences of overprescribing and the subsequent illicit production and distribution of these drugs.

In recent years, a concerning trend has been the rise of synthetic and

crucial to effectively address drug abuse in contemporary society.

### ***Cultural and Social Stigma around Addiction***

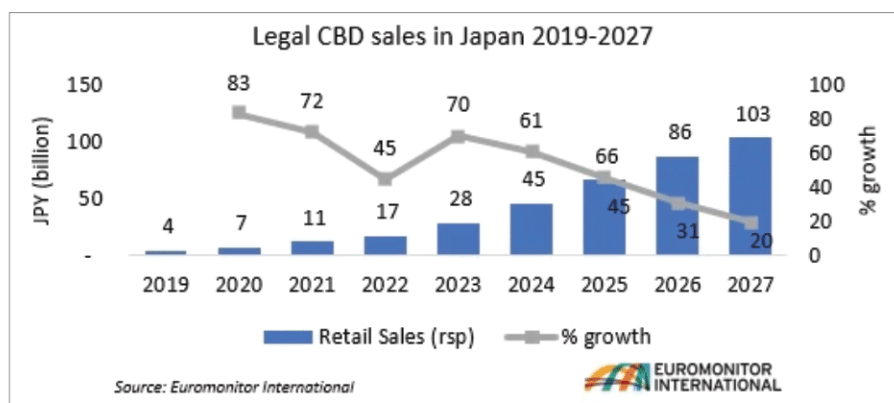
Addiction is a complex and pervasive issue that affects individuals, families, and communities globally. One significant barrier to effectively addressing addiction is the cultural and social stigma associated with it. Stigma, deeply ingrained in societies, adds an extra layer of challenge for individuals seeking help and support.

In many cultures, addiction is often viewed through a moral lens rather than a medical one. The perception that addiction is a result of personal weakness or a lack of willpower perpetuates stigma (Corrigan, 2004). This misconception exacerbates the shame and guilt felt by individuals struggling with addiction and hinders their willingness to seek help. In cultures where family honour and reputation hold great importance, the stigma of addiction can be particularly intense. Socially, individuals with addiction often face discrimination and marginalisation. They may encounter challenges in finding employment, maintaining relationships, or accessing healthcare services (Livingston & Boyd, 2010). This marginalization further isolates them, making it even more challenging to break free from the cycle of addiction.

The media also plays a significant role in perpetuating stereotypes and stigmatising those with addiction. Portrayals of individuals with substance use disorders often emphasise their struggles rather than highlighting the potential for recovery and resilience. These negative portrayals contribute to societal misconceptions and deepen the stigma associated with addiction (Barry et al., 2014).

### ***Designer Drugs and their Emergence***

Designer drugs, also known as synthetic drugs or novel psychoactive



### ***Evolution of Drug Abuse Trends***

The landscape of drug abuse has continually evolved, influenced by various factors such as societal changes, advances in technology, economic shifts, and the emergence of new substances. Understanding the evolution of drug abuse trends is crucial for developing effective strategies to address this persistent global issue. In the mid-20th century, drug abuse primarily revolved around traditional substances like alcohol, tobacco, and certain prescription drugs. However, the counterculture movements of the 1960s and 1970s brought about a significant shift, popularising hallucinogens, marijuana, and later, cocaine and heroin (Hart & Ksir, 2015). This era marked a turning point in drug use patterns, highlighting the impact of social movements and cultural shifts on drug preferences.

The late 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the advent of crack cocaine and a surge in its abuse, particularly within impoverished urban areas. The 1980s and 1990s also saw a rapid rise in the abuse of prescription opioids,

designer drugs. These substances, designed to mimic the effects of traditional drugs, pose unique challenges to law enforcement and health authorities due to their constantly changing compositions (Vardakou et al., 2010). Additionally, the emergence of e-cigarettes and vaping has given rise to concerns about youth using nicotine and other substances through these devices (Chadi et al., 2019).

The internet and advancements in technology have significantly impacted drug abuse trends. Online platforms provide easy access to information, enabling individuals to learn about, purchase, and misuse various substances. The dark web and cryptocurrencies further facilitate illegal drug transactions, making it challenging for law enforcement to track and regulate drug distribution (Barratt et al., 2016).

Drug abuse trends have evolved over the decades, shaped by changes in societal attitudes, cultural movements, advancements in technology, and the availability of new substances. Adapting prevention and intervention strategies to stay ahead of these evolving trends is

substances (NPS), represent a continually evolving class of substances created to mimic the effects of controlled drugs (EMCDDA, 2019). These compounds are designed by modifying the chemical structure of existing drugs or creating entirely new substances to achieve similar psychoactive effects. The emergence of designer drugs is a result of the interplay between advances in chemistry, attempts to circumvent legal restrictions, and changing consumer preferences.

The origins of designer drugs can be traced back to the mid-20th century, with the development of compounds initially intended for medicinal purposes. However, as regulations around controlled substances tightened, clandestine chemists began modifying these compounds to produce analogues that were not yet classified as illegal (EMCDDA, 2019). The rise of the internet further facilitated the dissemination of recipes and methodologies for producing these substances, contributing to their proliferation.

The appeal of designer drugs lies in their ability to evade legal scrutiny temporarily. By altering the molecular structure, manufacturers create substances that may not be explicitly classified as controlled substances, allowing for their sale and distribution until legislation catches up. The unregulated nature of designer drugs poses significant risks to users, as their potency, purity, and potential side effects remain unknown and can lead to adverse health outcomes (EMCDDA, 2019).

Addressing the challenges posed by designer drugs necessitates a comprehensive approach involving international cooperation, stringent legislation, public education, and proactive detection methods. Law enforcement and healthcare professionals need to stay updated on emerging substances and their effects to effectively respond to this constantly evolving issue.

The emergence of designer drugs is a consequence of advancements in

chemistry, legislative measures, and consumer demand (EMCDDA, 2019). Their unregulated nature underscores the need for prompt and adaptive responses from authorities to mitigate potential harm to individuals and communities.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the landscape of addiction in Japan is profoundly influenced by socio-cultural factors. The stringent cultural expectations and societal pressures, deeply ingrained in the fabric of Japanese society, significantly contribute to the prevalence of addiction (Smith, 2017). The emphasis on perfection, academic excellence, and conforming to societal norms places immense stress on individuals, often pushing them towards various forms of escapism, including substance abuse and excessive gaming (Tanaka, 2019). The stigma associated with addiction further exacerbates the issue, hindering individuals from seeking help openly (Yamamoto et al., 2020). To comprehensively address addiction in Japan, it is imperative to recognise and understand the intricate interplay of cultural expectations and societal dynamics in fuelling addiction.

## Addressing Addiction through Comprehensive Interventions

Addressing addiction in Japan necessitates a multifaceted approach that encompasses not only the treatment of addictive behaviours but also the prevention and education surrounding the issue. Comprehensive interventions should focus on providing accessible and stigma-free mental health services (Kawakami et al., 2018), promoting awareness campaigns to educate the public about the risks of addiction (Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare, 2021), and integrating addiction education into school curricula (Sakurai et al., 2019). Additionally, tailored interventions that account for the unique socio-cultural landscape of Japan are vital.

These should include counselling and therapy programs that address the societal pressures and stressors specific to the Japanese population, providing coping mechanisms and healthier alternatives to substance abuse.

## Urgent Need for Public Awareness and Clinical Trials

There is an urgent need to enhance public awareness of addiction and its implications in Japan. Public health campaigns should aim to dispel myths and reduce the stigma associated with addiction, encouraging open dialogue and seeking help (National Center of Neurology and Psychiatry, 2020). Furthermore, conducting extensive clinical trials focusing on addiction in Japan is crucial. These trials can help understand the efficacy of different treatments and interventions within the Japanese context (Ogai et al., 2017). By fostering collaboration between researchers, healthcare professionals, and the community, Japan can pave the way for evidence-based interventions that effectively prevent, treat, and manage addiction.

In summary, the battle against addiction in Japan requires a holistic approach that takes into account the intricate socio-cultural factors, implements comprehensive interventions, and emphasises the importance of public awareness and clinical trials. By addressing addiction in this multifaceted manner, Japan can aspire to create a society where individuals are empowered to overcome addiction and lead healthier, more fulfilling lives.

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