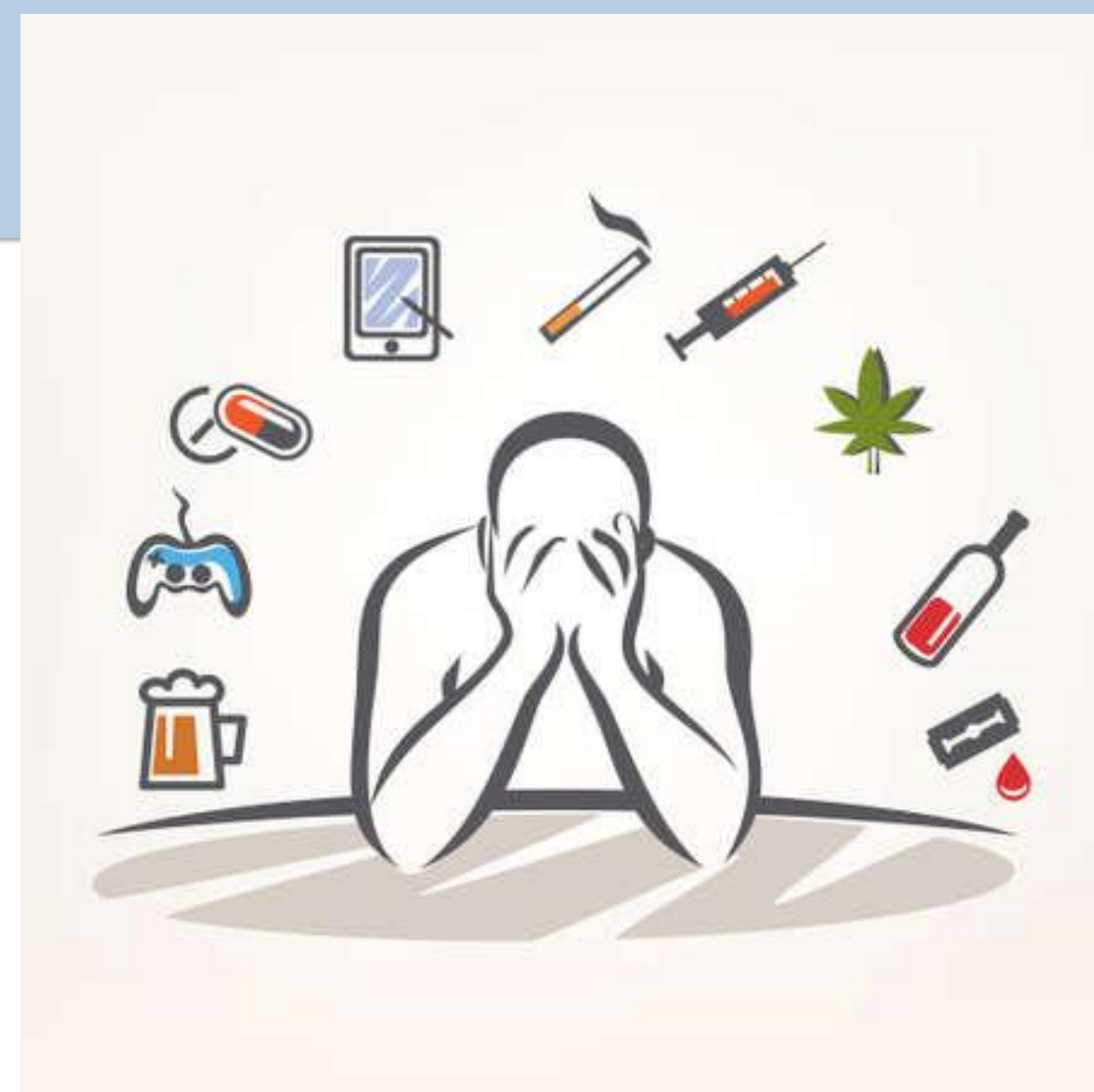


No Rest for the “Wicked?”

Stigma and Barriers for Substance Abuse Sufferers Seeking Help in Japan

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Abstract

Substance Abuse Disorder, known colloquially as “addiction”, is a disorder characterized by compulsive use or seeking of a substance despite negative consequences. In Japan, people suffering addiction face severe ostracism, stemming from a culture that shuns the use of drugs and has severe consequences for those who are caught with illicit drug. A link between the negative views and stigma around addiction, and the availability of rehabilitation centers and upward mobility of former sufferers was investigated.

Hopefully, this will highlight how this approach harms the sufferer and cause a push for drug usage laws reform and a change in society views. Prior studies were collected, with trends in usage and availability of rehabilitation centers analyzed. These centers were also judged on effectiveness, as well as ability to reintegrate the sufferer into society. It was found that, due to the negative stigma, sufferers were unable to gain access to rehabilitation centers, unable to properly reintegrate into Japanese society and obtain a positive social standing, and unlikely to seek help.

While drug usage was low overall in Japan, those suffering from addiction were offered little help once addicted, and this problem should have policies implemented to help sufferers, not shunned and ostracized.

Introduction

The Japanese view on drug usage is extremely negative, with some instances of minor possession resulting in five years in jail and association with drug use can result in extreme social ostracization. This extreme societal view has many ties to a group called the Yakuza, which contributed heavily to many of the illicit drug use epidemics Japan has faced. Even prescribed drugs are regulated and controlled to a higher level than elsewhere, with many commonly prescribed drugs being illegal to possess, even with a valid prescription from another country. Consequently, those who suffer from Substance Abuse Disorder may be less likely to seek treatment or receive help.

Research Methods

Multiple prior studies were collected and analyzed for trends in drug usage throughout time in Japan, as well as studies documenting stigmas and views on those suffering from Substance Abuse. Government PSAs and newspaper articles detailing Japan’s view on drug usage were noted as well. Accessibility to rehabilitation centers were then analyzed.



Analysis

Due to the extreme restrictions for drug usage, it seems that Japan has a small population of drug users. However, it has been found that many users are able to be undocumented by taking drugs that don’t have visible effects, allowing them to avoid arrest or association. This also allows for the true scope of the current drug epidemic in Japan to go almost undocumented.

Along with the restrictive legislation resulting in more covert drug usage, the broader social implications have dire consequences for the health of those who suffer from Substance Abuse Disorder. Due to commonly seen as being “subhuman”, “dirty”, and “dangerous” they avoid treatment. The Japanese National Institute of Mental Health has issued statements addressing this current problem.

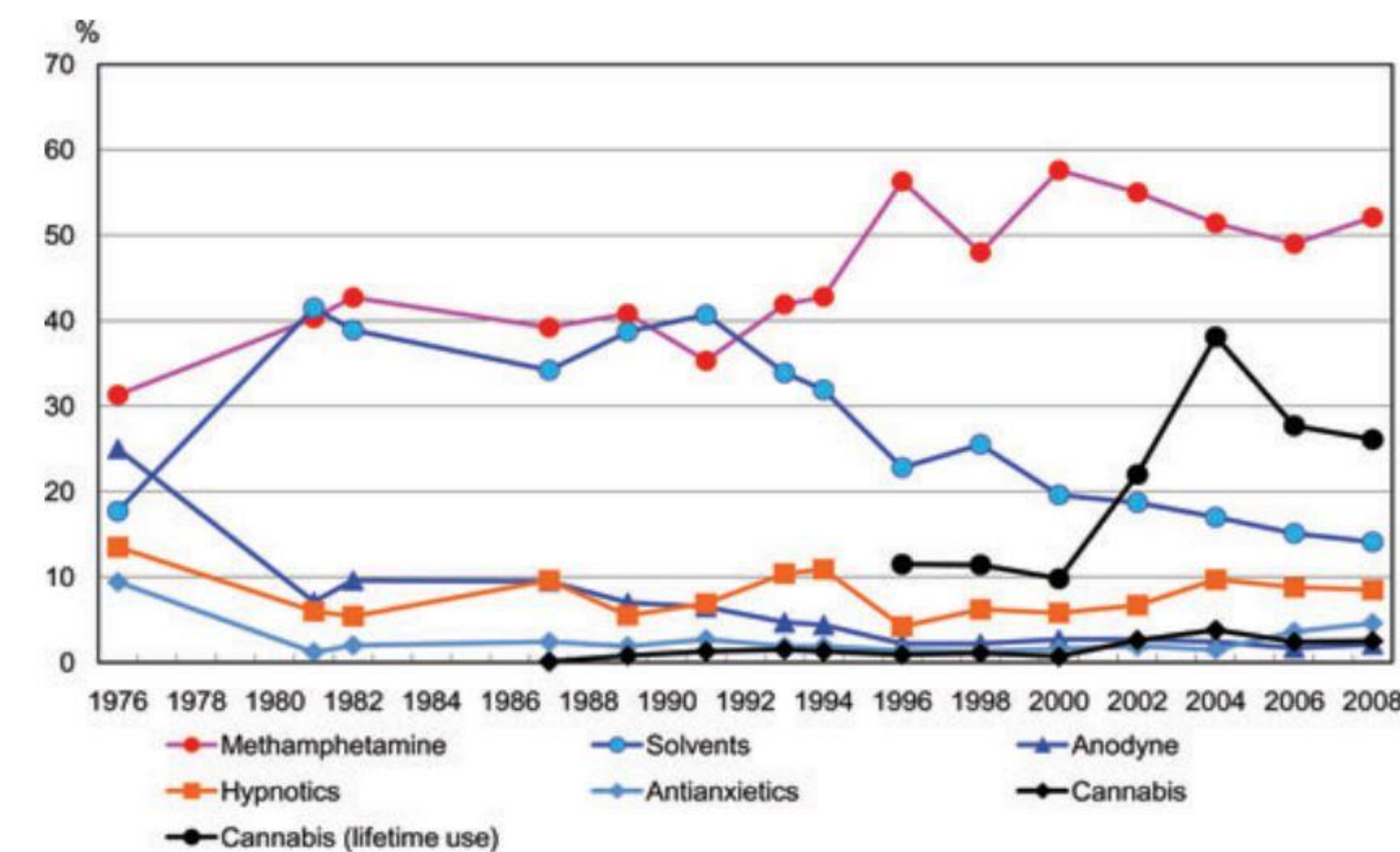
Rehabilitation centers are also not as effective, or accessible as they are in other countries. Due to the centers focusing more on the criminality of the drug use, rather than addressing Many of those suffering from Substance Abuse Disorder do not receive adequate support when trying to recover, leading to relapse. This is due to the rehabilitation centers focusing more on the criminality of their actions, but not focusing on how to assist them with reintegration into society and establishing a solid recovery network and plan.

Table 1. Estimated number of lifetime users of illicit drugs (aged 15 and over)¹

| | Solvents | | | Cannabis | | | Methamphetamine | | |
|------|--------------------------|-------------|-------------|--------------------------|-------------|-------------|--------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| | Number of lifetime users | Lower limit | Upper limit | Number of lifetime users | Lower limit | Upper limit | Number of lifetime users | Lower limit | Upper limit |
| 2003 | 1,764,691 | 1,260,296 | 2,269,087 | 550,303 | 271,190 | 829,416 | 498,948 | 233,751 | 764,145 |
| 2005 | 1,560,170 | 1,047,149 | 2,073,191 | 1,416,593 | 892,019 | 1,941,167 | 315,282 | 20,842 | 609,722 |
| 2007 | 2,444,351 | 1,822,901 | 3,065,802 | 1,014,207 | 590,083 | 1,438,330 | 527,409 | 206,178 | 848,640 |

| | MDMA | | | Any drugs | | | Any drugs except for solvents | | |
|------|--------------------------|-------------|-------------|--------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| | Number of lifetime users | Lower limit | Upper limit | Number of lifetime users | Lower limit | Upper limit | Number of lifetime users | Lower limit | Upper limit |
| 2003 | * | * | * | 2,373,965 | 1,769,084 | 2,978,845 | 957,607 | 540,964 | 1,374,249 |
| 2005 | * | * | * | 2,663,656 | 1,929,692 | 3,397,619 | 1,699,592 | 1,104,595 | 2,294,590 |
| 2007 | 232,984 | 24,111 | 441,857 | 3,086,607 | 2,400,434 | 3,772,780 | 1,462,326 | 953,452 | 1,971,199 |

Note: Data of cocaine and heroin were low precision.
*: Low precision.



The ratio of “drugs as a main inducing factor” for outpatients and inpatients in mental hospitals.¹⁵

Conclusion:

The negative view and stigma that Japan holds on drug use and Substance Abuse not only doesn’t stop drug usage, but also causes the sufferer to not seek help. A push for legislation and culture reform can help mitigate this and allow sufferers to seek assistance.

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