Relapse prevention: A critique and proposed reconceptualisation

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Abstract: Relapse prevention (RP) plays a significant role in current treatments and posttreatment approaches to substance abuse problems. It is also widely used in a number of other problem areas, including other addictive behaviours and sexual offending. The widespread use of RP in various fields is due to both its clearly articulated theoretical basis, which has significant face validity, and its transferability into clinical practice. Also, there is a growing (though arguably still modest) body of empirical evidence that demonstrates its efficacy in a range of therapeutic contexts. However, arguably, in terms of both the theoretical underpinnings and the practical application of RP there is room for improvement. This article hypothesises that one of the key weaknesses of RP is that it takes a generally unconstructive approach to the therapeutic process through the use of negative concepts and avoidance goals. It is suggested that a 'good lives' framework of psychological wellbeing can provide a means of remedying these weaknesses of the traditional RP model. It is argued that a good lives framework can lead to a more optimistic approach to the prevention of relapse among individuals with substance use problems.

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