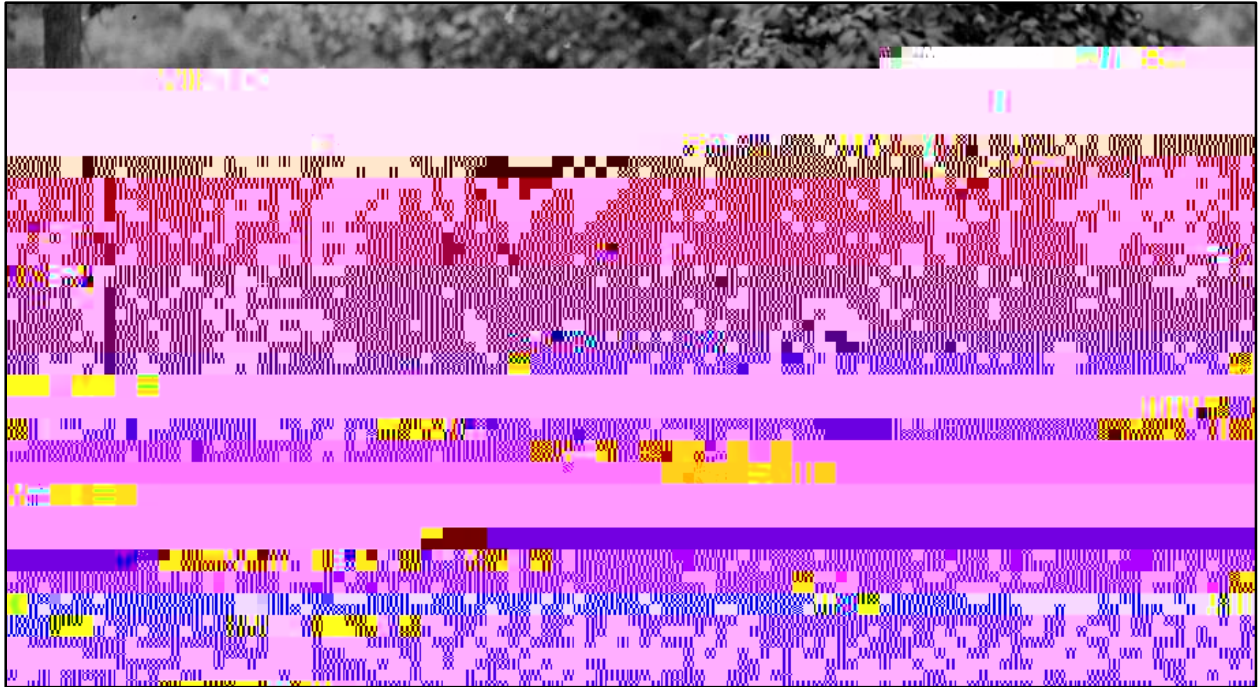




Does War Cause Addiction?



Debates over this question by historians, healthcare workers, and new power, to substances, and stress they start stopping social decay, and disintegrated. But drug problems were the people present there is a long history of such claims, suggesting there are political reasons for exaggerating the “war and drugs”

The idea that war causes drug addiction blossomed in the early 1900s in the United States. After the passing of a national drug law, some politicians claimed the Civil War was responsible for the increase in opium use in America and that action was needed to address this.

Historians of the day picked up on the idea and began using the term “soldiers disease” to describe the problem. They claimed had been rampant morphine addiction after the US Civil War. They explained that the opium derivative, morphine, were widely used to ease the suffering of thousands of traumatized soldiers on both sides of the conflict, many of whom required surgery or amputation in the field. In this sense, they argued, that in the years following the Civil War, traumatized soldiers struggled with a dependence on opium or morphine.

The only problem was the lack of evidence. Besides tales from former soldiers, there was no mention of morphine addiction among veterans in the Civil War period. Some historians have argued that the lack of evidence is understandable given that it wasn't until decades after the Civil War that “addiction” was recognized as a medical disease requiring treatment (as opposed to a moral weakness). This was the mainstream way of understanding drug use problems. For this reason, drug addiction did not become a hospital and prison records after war.



But other historians wonder if there's a simpler reason. Is it possible that drug addiction was not in fact a significant social worry among soldiers, now safe in their home environment, away from the battlefield and daily threat of death? And if battle trauma caused addiction, why was it that women never participated in battle—struggled with opium dependency more than men?

Or, is it possible that various factors were involved? A historian, for instance, suggests widespread chronic disease (e.g., malaria and dysentery) and despair among Southerners over the destruction of their way of life after the Civil War contributed to opium use. With respect to the latter motive, an opium dealer in 1877 commented: "men once wealthy, but impoverished by the rebellion, have taken to eating and drinking opium to drown their sorrows" , 10 July 1877 cited in Courtwright, 1983)

By the 1970s, opiobased drugs such as heroin were widely believed to be highly and immediately addictive, and it was considered next to impossible to quit using heroin for very long, even after intensive treatment on "narcotics farms." So, news of widespread heroin use among soldiers in the Vietnam War sent a new wave of fear over North America. US President Nixon officially declared a "war on drugs," in line with other initiatives to stamp out what he called permissive attitudes and behaviours that had been steadily eroding America values and pride throughout the 1960s. The Nixon administration also blamed the troops' poor performance on the battlefield (and, ultimately, for losing the war itself). The President braced his nation for the return of thousands of drugaddicted soldiers by stepping up drug enforcement initiatives and setting up addiction treatment programs, vowing to clean up America.

But, according to a study conducted in the early 1970s, the droves of "drugged" soldiers never materialized. When they returned to the United States, nearly all of the soldiers who had used heroin in Vietnam quit on their own and without treatment. Moreover, one argument contends the notion of an "an addicted army" and the antidrug measures initiated by the Nixon administration were intended to help divert attention away from the many factors that contributed to the failure of the war in Vietnam and the unpopularity of the war at home in America. Likewise, the drug laws of the early 20th century may have had more to do with addressing social fears about various minorities than about drug addicted veterans.

