Somatic symptom disorders are those in which psychological problems are manifested in physical disorders (or complaints of physical disorders) that often mimic medical physical conditions, but for which there can be found no evidence of corresponding organic pathology.

The dissociative disorders are a group of conditions involving disruptions in a person’s normally integrated functions of Consciousness, Memory, Identity, and Perception.

In dissociative identity disorder, the person manifests at least two or more distinct identities or personality states that alternate in some way in taking control of behavior. Alter identities may differ in many ways from the host identity.

Now let’s turn our attention to substance-related disorders.

Many problems of alcohol or drug use involve difficulties that stem solely from the psychoactive effects of the substances. In other words, individuals use drugs because they feel better after their use than they did before. Dependence is psychological and occurs when an individual develops a preference for a drug based solely on its effects. The individual think they need, or believes they need, the drug for its effect. Addiction is a physiological condition that comes with the development of tolerance for the substance and exhibits withdrawal symptoms when the substance is not available. The individual MUST have the drug to satisfy the physiological cravings of neuronal receptors for the drug.

A number of factors are considered important in the etiology of substance abuse disorders.

Some substances, such as alcohol or opium, stimulate brain centers that produce euphoria—which then becomes a desired goal. The so-called “pleasure pathway”— the mesolimbic pathway (MCLP)—has come under a great deal of study in recent years as the possible potential anatomic site underlying dependency and addictions.

It is widely believed that genetic factors may play some role in causing susceptibility through such biological avenues as metabolic rates and sensitivity to alcohol.

Psychological factors—such as psychological vulnerability, stress, and the desire for tension reduction—and disturbed marital relationships are also seen as important etiologic elements in substance-use disorders.

Although the existence of an “alcoholic personality type” has been disavowed by most theorists, a variety of personality factors apparently play an important role in the development and expression of addictive disorders.

Finally, sociocultural factors, such as different attitudes toward alcohol seen in different cultures, may predispose individuals to alcoholism. Possible causal factors in drug abuse include the influence of peer groups, the existence of a so-called drug culture, and the availability of drugs as tension reducers or as pain relievers.
Several approaches to the treatment of chronic alcohol or drug abuse have been developed—for example, medication to deal with withdrawal symptoms and withdrawal delirium, or dietary evaluation and treatment for malnutrition.

Psychological therapies, such as group therapy and behavioral interventions, may be effective with some alcohol or drug-abusing individuals.

Another source of help for alcohol abusers is Alcoholics Anonymous; however, the extent of successful outcomes with this program has not been sufficiently studied. Most treatment programs require abstinence; however, over the past twenty years, research has suggested that some alcohol abusers can learn to control their drinking while continuing to drink socially.