

Personality Characteristics and Substance Abuse: A Study among Substance Abusers and Non- Abusers

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Abstract

Substance abuse has been a very serious problem faced by the society and over the years it has drastically increased. It in itself is a problem for the individual, family and society and is also associated with several other problems. Several factors have been reported to be associated with substance abuse and personality is one amongst them. The present study was conducted with the aim of examining the variations in personality characteristics of substance abusers and non-abusers. A sample of 100 (50 substance abusers and 50 non- substance abusers) was selected on the basis of purposive sampling. All the participants were administered Hindi version of Maudsley Personality Inventory. Data were analyzed with the help of Means, SD and t test. Results revealed significant difference in neuroticism dimension of personality of substance abusers and non-substance abusers. The substance abusers scored significantly higher than the non- abusers. Both the groups scored almost equally on extraversion dimension.

Key words: Neuroticism, Extraversion, Non-substance abusers, Substance abusers

Drug use is related to adverse health and social outcomes. The use of the psychoactive substances, most of them illicit drugs, is also associated with massive social cost beyond the damage to the individual users, affecting health care, law enforcement, and legal systems. The high individual and social costs of drug use highlight the need to study factors related to such behaviors. Even if personality differences between drug users and nonusers are generally small, these effects can have important clinical implications due to the large number of people involved. Research on the correlates of drug addiction provides insights for understanding etiology and informs prevention policies and cessation programs. For example, from a psychiatric perspective, a number of studies have documented the high comorbidity of drug use with other mental disorders, which indicate that mood, anxiety, and personality disorders need to be considered by drug treatment specialists to achieve successful intervention.

Drug abuse and Psychopathology

In recent years substantial research has focused on the link between alcohol or drug abuse disorders and other psychopathological syndromes such as antisocial personality, depression and schizophrenia (Harford & Parker, 1994). Some researchers have suggested a distinctive character- organization in terms of 'alcoholic personality', characterized by emotional immaturity, over expectations from others, requiring inordinate amount of praise and appreciation, low frustration tolerance, impulsiveness and aggression (Sahasi *et al.*, 1990) and inability to delay gratification (Meyer & Mirin, 1979). Personal maladjustment appears to be most common background among all drug abusers though all maladjusted people do not become addicts. Despite reported close association between these psychopathologies and drugs addiction it cannot be inferred that all individuals having above reported psychopathological syndromes become drug abusers/addicts. For whatever reason these co-occur, the presence of other mental disorders in alcohol/drug abuse patients is very important consideration when it comes to the treatment part. Messina, Wish, & Nemes (1999) in fact found that very troubled people showed virtually no improvement in any de-

addiction treatment. On the basis of available empirical evidence there has been a strong tendency among researchers to link

the whole phenomena of drug abuse to either genetic predisposition or personality structure or personality disorders or to attribute it to social/cultural factors. But this has been an oversimplification of the issue. Moreover one of the most serious problems in search for causal factors responsible for drug abuse is how to determine if the behavior and personality factors being investigated are an antecedent to the substance abuse or caused by substance abuse itself. Considering all the above the present study was planned to examine the variations in personality characteristics of substance abusers and non-abusers. Significant difference on the extraversion and neuroticism dimensions of personality was hypothesized.

Sample

For the present study consist of 100 adults (50 abusers and 50 non-abusers) between the age group 25-40 yrs.

The purposive random sampling was used i.e the patients sample comprised of cases seen in De-Addiction and Rehabilitation centers from Nainital district.

Tools

Maudsley Personality Inventory

Hindi version of Maudsley Personality developed by S. Jalota and S.D. Kapoor was administered for measuring the personality dimension of extraversion and neuroticism. It is a 48 item measure and takes around 15 -20 minutes time for administration. It is a standard and popular measure of personality dimensions.

Results and Discussion

The data were analyzed with the help of descriptive as well as inferential statistical techniques and the results are given in Table 1 below:

Table 1- Mean Scores, S.D, t-value

Personality dimensions	Substance abusers N=50		Non substance abusers N=50		t- ratio
	MEAN	S.D	MEAN	S.D	
Neuroticism	47.16	13.53	25.92	19.39	4.51*

Extraversion	54.48	8.21	54.92	9.24	0.17 ^{NS}
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ns = Non significant

*=Significant at .05 level

A perusal of results (Table1) indicate that there is significant difference between the substance abusers and non- substance abusers on neuroticism dimension of personality. The substance abusers group scored 47.16(SD= 13.53) whereas the non- substance abusers group scored lower (Mean = 25.92, SD=19.39). the t value is 4.51 and is significant at .05 level of significance. There was no difference in the extraversion scores of the substance abusers and non-substance abusers (Table 1). Thus it is clear that the substance abusers score high on neuroticism which has also been implicated as a strong causal factor for substance abuse. The findings of the study are very clear and therefore need to be attended to by the family members as well as the health professionals and counselors working in the de addiction and rehabilitation centers for the treatment and rehabilitation of the substance abusers. The findings of the study need to be generalized with caution owing to its small sample selected from few de addiction centers only on the basis of convenience based sampling.

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