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### Attitudinal and Psychological Characteristics of Substance Abusers

Monsi Edward \* & Fathima, M. A\*\*

\*Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, Prajyoti Niketan College, Pudukad.

\*\*MSc Student, Department of Psychology, Prajyoti Niketan College, Pudukad.

#### Abstract

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#### Keywords:

Substance abuse, Attitudes,  
Psychological Characteristics.

The present study investigates the relationship of attitudinal and psychological characteristics of substance abusers among a sample of 180 subjects. Personal Data Sheet and Attitudinal & Psychological Characteristic Scale were used to collect data. Comparison of mean scores was done using 't' test. Results revealed that significant difference exist between attitudinal and psychological characteristics of normal's, alcoholic group and poly drug users.

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Mans tendency to intoxicate himself is perhaps as old as history. Early records of human history have shown that ancient civilizations like Sumerians, Babylonians, Egyptians, Greeks and Romans were users of various types of drugs. In India the use of drugs dates back to the Vedic age as mentioned in Rig-Veda (an ancient religious textbook

W.H.O (1964) defined substance abuse as "A physical or psychic state resulting from interaction of a person and drug characterized by behavioral and other responses that always include a compulsive desire or need to use the drug on the continuous basis in order to experience its effect and/or avoid discomfort of its absence". According to Johnson et.al, (1981) drug abuse is of use as a mind-altering substance in a way that differs from generally approved medical or social practices.

Drug use and abuse are universal phenomena. However, the recent and most disturbing feature of the drug abuse is the greater proportion involvement of teenagers and young adults. Realization of the problem at national level has made the Governmental agencies come forward with measures to prevent the availability of the drugs. However the drug intake behavior is on the increase. Efforts were made to estimate the extent of the habit since 1940.

In the recent years substance use and its etiological factors got much more importance in psychiatry. When we are taking the psychiatric disorders as a whole, substance abuse now stand in the second, on the basis of number of studies. The studies can be classified into 5 groups such as trait studies, psychoanalytic studies, heredity and neuropsychological studies, socio-cultural studies and interactional study. The trait investigations establish that one or more personality 'traits' or psychiatric symptoms distinguish the substance abuser

Attitude is a mental and neural state of readiness to respond, organized through experience, exerting a directive and dynamic influence on behavior (Allport, 1935) in his discussion about attitude and attitude change, McGuire (1969) found four types of functions performed by attitude, the utilitarian (adaptive function); the economy (knowledge function); the expressive (self realizing function); and the ego defensive function. Recent literatures suggest that substance abusers are having a different attitude towards abused substance and this attitude is final pathway to substance abuse (Ong, 1988). Psychological correlates of



substance abuse include disturbed relationship, poor self concept and self esteem, dishonesty low level of aspiration, high risk taking etc.

Present study, is a comparative study which includes 3 groups- poly drug abusers, alcoholics and normal group. The investigators aims to analyze attitudinal and psychological characteristics of substance abusers. The psychological variables included in the present study are attitude towards drug abuse/ alcohol abuse, Interpersonal relationships, Self-Concept, Personal values, Risk Taking tendency, Motivation, Rebelliousness and Pleasure seeking. This study may help us evolve a common treatment strategy for all substance abusers or individualized package for every person and contribute to the current research on substance abuse and its therapy.

### **Objective**

1. To find out the significant difference between alcoholic, poly -drug abusers and control group on selected psychological variable

### **Hypothesis**

1. Poly drug abusers, alcoholics and normal subjects differ in their attitudinal and psychological characteristics

### **Method**

#### **Participants**

This study constitutes of 180 participants divided into three groups- 60 normal subjects, 60 alcoholics and 60 poly-drug abusers. Inclusion Criteria for normal group was males with an age between 15-30 years and absence of alcohol or substance abuse. An inclusion criterion for alcoholics-poly drug abuser group was males with an age between 15-30 years and diagnosed as alcohol or poly-drug abusers. Exclusion Criteria was presence of any other functional psychiatric disorder and presence of organic mental disorder.

#### **Instruments**

1. Attitude and Psychological Characteristics Scale: This scale consists of 8 subscales with total 95 items. The original version (English) was developed by Ong (1988). For the investigation purpose the researcher adapted the scale in Malayalam. The original author claims high face validity and content validity and reliability ranging from 0.83 to 0.98. In adaptation procedure, all the items were translated into Malayalam. The items were randomly arranged for preliminary form. From the pilot study with 60 normal subjects, all the items were found to have good discriminative power. The split half reliability was found to be 0.86. The cross validity (English version and Malayalam version on the same population) was found to be 0.96. The 8 subscales are 1) Attribution towards Taking Drug, 2) Interpersonal relationships, 3) Self-Concept, 4) Personal values, 5) Risk Taking tendency, 6) Motivation, 7) Rebelliousness, and 8) Pleasure seeking.
2. Personal Data Sheet: This includes all the social and personal data of the subject. The personal data sheet is filled by the investigator himself at the time of the personal interview with each and every subject. In the experimental group the data obtained from the subjects are rechecked with the informant, and found reliable.

### **Result and Discussion**

The present study assesses 8 psychological properties under attitudinal and psychological characteristics among the three groups. These variables are attitude towards drug taking, interpersonal relationships, self concept, and personal values, risk taking tendency, motivation, rebelliousness and pleasure seeking. The comparison of the selected population, (Normal, Alcoholics and poly drug abusers) shows very interesting results. The average score of normal controls for attitude towards drug taking found to be 22.08, with standard deviation of 5.43 (Table 1). The average score of alcoholic for same variable found to be 31.31 with S.D of



6.32. The comparison of these score shows significant difference between these values or groups,  $t=7.42$  ( $p<.01$ ).

The average score of normal for interpersonal relationship found to be 45.31, with standard deviation of 4.09 (Table 1). The average score of alcoholic for same variable found to be 41.37 with S.D of 6.40. The comparison of these score shows significant difference between these values or groups,  $t=3.47$  ( $p<.01$ ).

The average score of normal for self concept was found to be 39.46, with standard deviation of 6.80 (Table 1). The average score of alcoholic for same variable found to be 32.31 with S.D of 5.24. The comparison of these score shows significant difference between these values or groups,  $t=6.02$  ( $p<.01$ ).

The average score of normal for Personal values was found to be 46.04, with standard deviation of 4.31 (Table 1). The average score of alcoholic for same variable found to be 48.55 with S.D of 4.86. The comparison of these score shows significant difference between these values or groups,  $t=2.59$  ( $p<.01$ ).

The average score of normal for Risk taking tendency was found to be 36.02, with standard deviation of 5.82 (Table 1). The average score of alcoholic for same variable found to be 39.06 with S.D of 6.55. The comparison of these score shows significant difference between these values or groups,  $t=2.33$  ( $p<.05$ ).

The average score of normal for motivation was found to be 41.37, with standard deviation of 4.55 (Table 1). The average score of alcoholic for same variable found to be 36.04 with S.D of 4.39. The comparison of these score shows significant difference between these values or groups,  $t=5.27$  ( $p<.01$ ).

The average score of normal for rebelliousness was found to be 30.24, with standard deviation of 4.28 (Table 1). The average score of alcoholic for same variable found to be 28.40 with S.D of 4.35. The comparison of these score shows significant difference between these values or groups,  $t=2.03$  ( $p<.05$ ).

The average score of normal for Pleasure seeking was found to be 31.80, with standard deviation of 5.65 (Table 1). The average score of alcoholic for same variable found to be 37.93 with S.D of 4.97. The comparison of these score shows significant difference between these values or groups,  $t=5.46$  ( $p<.01$ ).

Table 1

Mean, S.D and 't' values of attitudinal and psychological characteristics of alcoholics and normal's (N=120)

Variables	Alcoholics		Normal's		't'
	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D	
Attitude towards drug taking	31.31	6.32	22.08	5.43	7.42**
Interpersonal Relationship	41.37	6.40	45.31	4.09	3.47**
Self Concept	32.31	5.24	39.46	6.80	6.02**
Personal Value	42.55	4.86	46.04	4.31	2.59**
Risk taking tendency	39.06	6.55	36.02	5.82	2.33*
Motivation	36.04	4.39	41.37	4.55	5.27**
Rebelliousness	28.40	4.35	30.24	4.28	2.03*
Pleasure seeking	37.93	4.97	31.80	5.65	5.46**

\* $p<.05$ , \*\* $p<.01$



Above results heighten the fact that when comparing the normal population and alcoholic group, subjects were found to be significantly different on their attitudinal and psychological properties. Results indicate that among the 8 variables alcoholics are found to be high in their attitude towards drug taking, risk taking tendency and pleasure seeking. Alcoholics were found to be significantly low in their interpersonal relationships, self concept and motivation compared to normal controls.

Table 2

Mean, S.D and 't' values of attitudinal and psychological characteristics of poly drug abusers and normal population (N=120)

Variables	Poly drug abusers		Normal		't'
	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D	
Attitude towards drug taking	27.33	8.64	22.08	5.43	3.45**
Interpersonal Relationship	43.62	5.99	45.31	4.09	1.56
Self Concept	36.22	6.84	39.46	6.80	2.39*
Personal Value	48.35	4.11	46.04	4.31	2.60**
Risk taking tendency	38.22	7.64	36.02	5.82	1.54
Motivation	40.66	4.58	41.37	4.55	0.74
Rebelliousness	29.40	5.85	30.24	4.28	0.78
Pleasure seeking	36.80	7.36	31.80	5.65	3.61**

\*p< .05, \*\*p< .01

When we compare normal population with poly drug abusers on the above 8 variable significant differences have been seen (Table 2). Poly drug abusers tend to be high on their attitude towards substance abuse mean with mean 27.33 with S.D of 8.64 and 't' value found to be 3.45 (p< .01). Like this they tend to be high in their pleasure seeking tendency mean 36.80, S.D 7.36 and 't' value 3.61 (p< .01). At the same time they tend to be very low in their self-concept with mean 36.22, S.D 6.84 and 't' value 2.39 (p< .01).

The difference between two substance abuse group alcoholics and poly drug abusers is also analyzed (Table 3). From this comparison it is found that these two groups are significantly different in their attitude towards substance use, self concept and motivation. Compared to poly drug abusers alcoholics tend to be high in their attitude towards substance abuse ('t'= 3.04, p< .01) and motivation ('t'= 4.51, p< .01).



Table 3

Mean, S.D and 't' values of attitudinal and psychological characteristics of poly drug abusers and alcohol abusers (N=120)

Variables	Poly drug abusers		alcohol abusers		't'
	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D	
Attitude towards drug taking	27.33	8.64	31.31	6.32	2.49*
Interpersonal Relationship	43.62	5.99	41.37	6.40	1.72
Self Concept	36.22	6.84	32.31	5.24	3.04**
Personal Value	48.35	4.11	42.55	4.86	0.21
Risk taking tendency	38.22	7.64	39.06	6.55	0.56
Motivation	40.66	4.58	36.04	4.39	4.51**
Rebelliousness	29.40	5.85	28.40	4.35	0.92
Pleasure seeking	36.80	7.36	37.93	4.97	0.86

\*p< .05, \*\*p< .01

From the above results it is clear that both groups- poly drug abusers and alcoholics tend to show more favorable attitude towards using unlawful drugs, their legalization and their effect. Many of the previous study also show the same result (eg. Ong, 1988; McAulijee, 1989). Based on the four type of functions, the utilitarian (adaptive function); the economy (knowledge function); the expressive (self realizing function); and the ego defensive function, this attitude contributes to the favorable attitude towards abuse. According to Cox (1988) there are two ways in which abuse can bring about effective change, and here are two corresponding types of effect that people expect to achieve by drinking. The first way is through direct chemical effects of alcohol on emotion. Illicit drugs have mood altering effects that are distributed as either 'tension reducing' or 'mood enhancing'. However people's expectations about the mood altering effects of substances are often a more potent source of actual change in mood than is the pharmacological action of substance itself. The second way in which drinking brings about affective changes is indirect. The imbibing substance might either facilitate or interfere with a person's reaching non-chemical positive or negative goals, thereby indirectly bringing about affective changes.

The analysis of interpersonal relationships, the 2nd variable of attitudinal and psychological characteristics of poly drug abusers, shows significant difference when compared to normal and alcoholic groups. Previous research on alcohol abuse and alcohol personality reported the same. Graham (1987) reported that alcoholics tend to show high level of discomfort in their social interaction. Even though they show sociability, the relation tend to be shallow and superficial (Green, 1980). Schwartz (1979) reported that alcohol addicts always expresses hostile interpersonal stance. Buss and Plomin (1975) concluded that alcohol abusers tend to show pathological sociability. After long years of research on alcoholic's interpersonal relationship, Tones (1968) concluded that alcoholics are inconsiderate of others and unaware of the impressions created on others. He also points out the superficial interpersonal relationships on which insight and empathy are lacking. Present study also says that compared to normal population alcoholics lack their interpersonal relation ability or they are shallower or superficial in their relationships.

On self concept, both alcoholics and drug addicts show poor or low self concept than normal control group. Between alcoholic and drug addicts the difference is very evident, alcoholics have very low self concept than drug addicts. This data shows that substance abusers have poor perceptions about their own abilities. They experience more failures in life and lead



more unhappy life. Benson and Wilsnack (1983) concluded that substance abusers have poor self concept compared to non abused group. They tend to be very low in their self esteem; this leads to depression and becomes a cause of addictive behavior. Cox (1985) commented that poor self esteem or self concept create lots of internal conflict in the person and one way or another, the substance will help to resolve the conflicts. Based on present study and previous study, lack of self concept found to be an important variable among substance abusers. This fact can help in the treatment, as well as the therapist for better evaluation.

Very surprisingly on variable 4 both drug addicts and alcoholics show high personal value than normal control group. Previous studies say that substance abusers are low in their personal values present study reveals that many of them, at a verbal level, are honest, dedicated to society and has positive perception towards life.

In their risk taking tendency, alcoholics end to have high score. They are more likely to take risks. According to Schwartz (1979), alcoholics tend to be high in their risk taking tendency; present study also reveals the same result.

Graham (1987) and Headlind (1977) concluded that substance abusers are under-achievers; they are very low in their motivation. Other scientists highlighted substance abuse as amotivational syndrome (Cohen, 1989). In this they suggested that frequently adolescents manifest symptoms in sober interval or loss of energy- withdrawal from the family and usual friends, loss of drive state, lack of interest in school or other activities that they were previously interested in and loss of motivation. Present data shows that compared to normal population alcoholics and drug addicts tend to have low motivation and lack of interest.

On rebelliousness, both alcoholics and drug addicts differ from normal control group. This shows that they tend to be rebellious against rules and regulations, social institutions and authorities. Previous studies also show findings similar to the present results. Graham (1987) and Headlund (1977) say that substance abusers are high in rebellious nature towards authority figures, they are hostile and irritable. They frequently get into trouble with authority (Greehe, 1980).

On variable pleasure seeking, the 8<sup>th</sup> variable under attitudinal and psychological characteristics, substance abusers, both alcoholics and drug addicts differ from normal control group. They tend to be more oriented towards pleasure and sensuality. MacAndrew (1981) concluded that substance abusers are more in their pleasure seeking. They try on abuse for seeking pleasure or reducing their discomfort. The present study also is in the same line.

Based on the above discussion it is clear that substance abusers differ on their attitudinal and psychological characteristics. The severity or magnitude of the difference is different among alcoholics and drug addicts. According to Knop (1985) the youngsters having already established a socially less confirming style of adjustment, is more likely than his peers to drink excessively or to use drugs despite negative social sanctions. In addition, the deviant behavioral pattern is associated with a broad range of other socially non-normative behaviors, including criminality, irresponsibility to family, poor work motivation, proximity and so forth.

## Conclusion

The present study is aimed at examining the attitudinal and psychological characteristics among normal controls, alcoholics and poly drug abusers. Answering the hypothesis, comparison of psychological properties under investigation, on attitudinal and psychological characteristics among the 3 groups, show significant difference. Among the 8 variables, alcoholics show significant difference with high scores on attitude towards abuse, risk taking tendency and pleasure seeking. They tend to have low scores in interpersonal relationships, self concept and motivation compared to normal control group

On the same variable, poly drug abusers in comparison to normal control subjects, have high score in the attitude towards abuse and pleasure seeking tendency. While compared to



alcoholics poly drug abusers tend to be high in self concept and motivation and low in attitude towards abuse.

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