

Early Life Distress, Contentment in Relationship and Mental Health in Drug Addicts

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Abstract

This research aimed to study early life distress, contentment in relationship and mental health in drug addicts. The correlational study consisted of drug addicts $N=200$ from various government and private rehabilitation centers with age range 18 – above ($M=29.4$, $SD=8.4$) through non probability purposive sampling. The measurement tools Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, physical neglect, and emotional neglect), Relationship Satisfaction Scale, and Mental Health Continuum Scale (emotional wellbeing, social wellbeing, and physical wellbeing) in addition to the demographic information sheet were used. Independent sample t-test analysis showed that drug addicts from joint family experienced more trauma, sexual abuse, and emotional neglect during early life, in comparison with nuclear family system. One way ANOVA revealed birth order had no effect on early life distress, contentment in relationship, and mental health. The results of the current study represented an important extension of prior findings and present empirical research provided grounds to more studies in future.

Keywords: Early life distress, contentment in relationships, mental health, addiction, drug addicts

Introduction

Early life turmoil or distress, such as being abused, neglected, or raised by drug- or alcohol-abusing parents, establishes a major risk for later drug and alcohol abuse. Mental health and relationship contentment are usually interconnected in both gender groups (Parolin et al., 2016). Gender differences can be established in the sources of contentment and dissatisfaction in close relationships, as well as in the connection between mental health and physical problems, early life adversity, and adult relationship contentment. In general, earlier literature revealed that depression, hopelessness, and the number of previous suicide attempts are more strongly connected to substance abuse in males. Others found heroin-using males to be more socially alienated and unpleasant than males using other drugs or non-drug-dependent counterparts (Haslam et al., 2023).

The gender group differences in issues related to well-being are not well understood. While homosexual men and women have revealed higher rates of alcohol and drug abuse relative to their heterosexual counterparts, differences in well-being outcomes usually depend on generational status, education, and previous racial distinctions. In the majority of modern studies characterizing addictive disease, male addicts are generally sampled, and gender-specific knowledge is

derived from mostly male participants. This focus on male addicts may establish preconceived theories or at least constant recurring forms for the explanation of addictive diseases (Scarlett et al., 2023).

Addiction is a lifelong disease characterized by an intense craving for and the consumption of the obsessive substance and the involvement in the behaviors regardless of its hazards or harmful effects (Parolin et al., 2016). As an alternative addiction can also be described as a desire that disrupts and disturbs the person's capacity to work and function effectively in different areas of life (Felman, 2023). Addiction is also characterized as a neurological and behavioral illness. Regardless of the amount of damage the drugs may do, the urge and the need to use them becomes overwhelming when a person is hooked to them or get used to them. A person is most likely to escapes the adverse and serious effects of drug addiction also known as the substance use disorder if he/she gets treatment for it as early as possible. Addiction is also known as the inability to quit, even if it endangers a person's health (Dumain, 2013).

Blair and Menasco (2016) investigated the association between substance abuse and marital status within the adults. This study uses the sample that is representative of country of 14,715 adults. It was found that association between married individuals and drug addiction was low in both genders, whereas divorced individuals developed higher risk of developing drug addiction. Individuals who married again also showed an elevated risk of drug addiction, still lower than the divorced ones. It was also found that depression and stress were higher predictors of drug use found in divorced or separated individuals (Miller et al., 2022).

The theoretical model of hopelessness, it is a state in which individual believe that negative outcomes are certain and cannot be changed. This theory explains that some attributes or characteristics of individual may lead to depression (Anderson et al., 2023). This theory expanded by emphasizing that hopelessness portrays a crucial role in developing depression (Alloy et al., 1988). In life, people may experience ups and downs that make them vulnerable to develop depression, it may last for months, or even years. Individuals may believe that there is no way out, so they use drugs or substance to escape from their situation (Center, 2024).

The relationship of depression and substance use is two ways. It means individual who is suffering from depression is more likely to develop addiction disorders and vice versa. Individual's uses drugs or substance as an escape from their feelings and to elevate their mood (Smith, 2022).

Research Questions and Objectives

The primary objective concerns the construction of a structural model of mental health in addicts that could statistically predict 1) the variance levels of distress, relationship contentment and mental health among drug addicts of joint and nuclear family system, 2) the difference based on age in early life distress, relationship contentment and mental health in drug addicts, as well as 3) the difference based on birth order in early life distress, relationship contentment and mental health in drug addicts.

This conceptually and methodologically defined structural model enables us to provide empirical evidence regarding the implications of the proposed crucial roles integrated into one model in this particular case. The secondary goal of the present study is to identify chronic stress risk variables within the process of mental and relational health impairments in specific categories of drug addicts from the national system of prevention and control of drug addiction. This perspective allows, for the very first time, the subjective recognition of mental health in abusers that would enable early identification and prevention of the three proposed variables. The third and last objective is to offer direct social educational benefits of the expertise of the structural models constructed and verified to the general social health context. Such measures may include the identification of the target promotion group and analysis of the anger treatment efficacy, as well as holistic substance abuse detection. The structural modeling framework might also provide valuable public health addiction data for the capitals from the rest of the country.

Background and Rationale

The high levels of psychological disturbance among drug-dependent individuals are well established. Disturbance occurs in those who present for treatment or who are incarcerated (Ouma et al., 2023). However, the

origins of this disturbance are less clear. Variables identified as commonly linked to mental health issues among those with substance problems include early life distress, for example, physical or emotional abuse within the family of origin, and relationship quality with significant others in adulthood. Studies that examine these types of vulnerability within the same sample are relatively rare.

This study builds an understanding of how function and dysfunction are connected over the lifetime of the individual. Longitudinal studies are not feasible. Asking drug-dependent individuals about early life distress over a number of interviews is not possible. This population may present for treatment at an early stage in their lives. Memories of abuse may be strongly forgotten. Large-scale retrospective questionnaires in clinical samples do exist; however, these fail to ask about a range of significant other relationships over the lifetime. Furthermore, they define family of origin as parents but do not ask about the presence of siblings.

The present report builds on the known literature by identifying the relationship between early onset distress, lifetime relationships, and psychological symptomatology in a large clinical sample seeking treatment for drug-dependent problems. Early onset psychological disturbance is associated with family of origin distress, particularly emotional neglect and abuse. Contentment in relationship with friends and peers is also significant. The study questions whether relationship status ratings are associated with mental health issues. Cost-benefit models for those seeking free drug treatment are key to directing future government policy.

Methodology

Setting

Data was collected from public and private drug rehabilitation centers in Lahore, Pakistan.

Research Design

Correlation research design was used in the study.

Sample and Sampling Strategy

The sample consist of 200 drug addicts (18 years and above). Sample was collected from public and private sectors (rehabilitation centers) in Lahore, Pakistan. Non probability purposive sampling strategy was used to collect data from drug addicts.

Inclusion Criteria

- Participants must be above the age of 18 years.
- Participants must have a history of drug addiction.
- Participants who have experienced upsetting childhood traumatic events during their childhood which includes things like neglect physical and emotional abuse.

Exclusion Criteria

- Participants younger than 18
- Individual's with severe mental disabilities that prevents them from understanding or participating in the study.
- Participants with mental or physical disabilities

Measures

Three assessment measures were used in the current study:

Demographic Variables. It comprised basic information about the participants including age, gender, education, residential status, family system, birth order, marital status, number of children, and employment status.

Childhood Trauma Questionnaire

It was developed by Bernstein and Fink in 1998 to measure the childhood trauma. It is widely used to screen the childhood maltreatment in adults. The main purpose of this scale is to assess the susceptibility and psychometric properties in adults. The CTQ consists of 28 items, with five subscales i.e. sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, physical neglect and emotional neglect. The Cronbach alpha values of CTQ – SF are: Emotional wellbeing (0.84), physical abuse (0.81), emotional neglect (0.84), sexual abuse (0.92) and physical neglect (0.79).

Relationship Satisfaction Scale

It was developed by David Burns in 2005 to measure the how satisfied you feel with your intimate relationships. It was developed to measure the marital satisfaction, but this can also be used to measure satisfaction in other relationships such as friends, lover, colleagues etc. The scale consists of 7 items. The RSAT's Cronbach alpha value is .82 (Røysamb et al., 2014).

Mental Health Continuum Scale – Short form

It was developed by Dr. Corey Keyes to assess the mental health problems. The scale consist of 14 items with 3 subscales i.e. three items assess the emotional wellbeing, six items measures the psychological wellbeing, and five items assess the social wellbeing of individual. The Cronbach alpha of the emotional wellbeing is 0.92, social wellbeing is 0.83, and psychological wellbeing is 0.86. The overall Cronbach alpha value is 0.92 (Luijten et al., 2019).

Ethical Considerations

In order to conduct this research, some ethical considerations were kept in mind. The permission was taken from the respective authors of assessment measures. The permission was taken from institutional authorities for data collection. The consent was taken from the participants and nature of the study was explained to them before administration of the questionnaires. The participants had the rights to withdraw from participation and terminate at any time when they wish. The participants were ensured that the information required from them was held confidential and will not be used for any other purpose other than this research. Rights of individual to privacy and confidentiality was facilitated.

Procedure

Permission was sought for the use of: childhood trauma questionnaire, relationship satisfaction scale and mental health continuum from respected authors. Prior to collecting data, official permission was taken by the concerned authorities of school of professional Psychology and then permission was taken also from institutions from where data was collected. The data was collected from both private and government rehabilitation centers.

Statistical Analysis

Data was dissected by the aid of statistical package for social sciences (SPSS). Descriptive analysis was applied for demographics mean, standard deviation, frequency, percentage, and normality. One way anova was applied to check the hypothesis of the study.

Results

This chapter highlights the results of the study conducted. It will the highlight the socio-demographic characteristics. Independent sample T-test and ANOVA was carried out to find out for difference.

It was hypothesized that there would be a significant difference in the mean levels of mental health, early life distress, contentment in relationship between individuals from joint and nuclear families.

Table I

Mean Differences in Early Life Distress, Contentment in Relationship, and Mental Health, in Nuclear and Joint Family System among Drug Addicts (N=200)

Variable	Nuclear		Joint		t(200)	p	Cohen's d
	(n=99)		(n=101)				
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Early life distress	58.5	15.4	62.1	19.0	-1.4*	.14	-7.2
Contentment in Relationship	27.4	10.7	28.1	11.1	-.43	.66	1.4
Social Wellbeing	12.7	6.0	13.2	7.3	-1.0*	.29	1.9

Note. M=mean, SD= standard deviation, t= t value, *p <.05

Table 1 showed the results of t – test that indicated that drug addicts from joint family experienced more trauma with nuclear family system. Whereas social wellbeing was reported high in joint family as compared to the nuclear family.

Table 2

One Way Analysis of Variance for Age (N=200)

Variable	Age						F(200)	<i>n</i> ²
	Young (n=66)		Middle (n=90)		Old (n=44)			
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Early life distress	59.7	15.7	58.9	18.1	64.1	18.1	1.3	.01
Contentment in Relationship	27.8	10.9	27.1	11.0	28.8	10.7	.33	.00
Social Wellbeing	11.7	5.9	13.8	6.7	14.0	7.6	2.3	.02

Note. M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation. F=F- statistic, η²=Eta Square, *p <.05, ** p <0.01, ***p <0.001

Table 2 revealed that significant difference between age groups. There was no difference of levels of age across early life distress, contentment in relationship and social wellbeing.

Table 3

One Way Analysis of Variance for Birth Order (N=200)

Variable	Birth Order						F(200)	<i>η</i> ²
	First		Middle		Last			
	(n=50)		(n=103)		(n=47)			
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Childhood Trauma	61.5	19.1	59.7	17.6	60.4	15.1	.17	.00
Physical Abuse	8.8	5.0	8.9	5.7	7.9	4.6	.54	.00
Emotional Abuse	10.9	4.2	10.9	4.0	10.6	3.6	.07	.00
Sexual Abuse	8.2	5.1	7.8	4.1	7.3	3.8	.52	.00
Physical Neglect	10.0	3.9	9.4	3.6	9.6	3.4	.36	.00
Emotional Neglect	15.0	8.1	13.9	4.8	15.9	5.0	1.8	.01
Relationship Satisfaction	28.2	9.9	26.4	11.6	30.1	9.9	1.8	.01
Mental Health	43.0	15.9	42.1	16.0	45.5	17.1	.68	.00
Emotional Wellbeing	8.8	4.5	9.3	4.8	10.8	4.6	2.3	.02

Social Wellbeing	13.2	6.5	13.2	6.8	14.1	6.9	.69	.00
Psychological Wellbeing	20.9	8.7	20.0	7.3	20.5	7.7	.20	.00

Note. *M*=Mean, *SD*=Standard Deviation, *F*=F- statistic, η^2 =Eta Square, **p* <.05, ** *p* <0.01, ****p* <0.001

Table 3 revealed that birth order had no significant effect on childhood trauma, relationship satisfaction and mental health.

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to examine the relationship between early life distress, contentment in relationship, and mental health in drug addicts. This chapter concerned with elaborating on the answers to questions, where the main conclusions of the analysis shall be explained, and the ways in which the results of the study may complement, support or contradict conventional knowledge in the field of addiction and mental health.

Drug addicts from joint family experienced more distress, sexual abuse, and emotional neglect during early life, in comparison with nuclear family system. As existing studies also found that family structure is a significant determinant of the experiences of early life distress and emotional health. Some of the research have revealed that adults from the nuclear families are less likely to face early life distress and emotional neglect as compared to adults from the joint families.

A comparative study with the Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry revealed that nuclear adults go through less physical or emotional abuse than the ones in joint families (Singh et al., 2019). For Pakistan, the work by Hassan et al. (2020) in the Journal of Pakistan Psychological Association pointed out that nuclear grown-ups got less involved in early life distress and emotional neglect than the ones in the joint families. Some of theories based on the Emotional Support Theory by Lakey and Cohen (2000) nuclear families offer a broader array of emotional support to the adults and this may mean that the he will be emotionally healthy and has fewer possibilities to experience early life distress.

Nuclear families do not have a negative effect on early life distress and emotional wellbeing, on the contrary, the findings revealed better levels of self-reported emotional health and subjective evaluated life satisfaction among the adults from nuclear families compared to those from joint ones (Singh et al. , 2019; Kumar et al. , 2018; Hassan et al. , 2020).

It has been indicated that as people grow older, their mental health, emotional wellbeing and psychological wellbeing changes with time. It was observed that age factors heavily into people's mental health, emotional well-being, and psychological well-being. Previous research indicates that across the life span, individuals' mental health, emotional health, and psychological health differ. The research also revealed that older people described fewer cases of mental health issues than the younger population (Kessler et al., 2009). More evidence of this kind was revealed by a study conducted among the people of United States and published in the Journal of Happiness Studies; the results showed that senior citizens were happier and satisfied with their lives than the young people were (Diener et al., 2009).

Khavarpour and Ramezani (2018) in their study established that contentment in relationship predicts the values of mental health among the clients with substance use disorders. In fact, these theories and studies are in line with the present study's results, which show that age and contentment in relationship are the major determinants of mental health among drug addicts.

Psychological theories, for example the Life Span Theory by Erikson (1963). As it was well explained, with the stages of development, people change and become more concerned with emotional and psychological wellbeing as opposed to monetary wealth and social class. According to the theory of Emotional Support Cohen et al. (2015) aging appears to have increased number of sources of emotional support to the body hence improving health of the aged. Critically moreover, there were number the researches that examined the effects of age especially in the context of Pakistani population concerning their mental health.

Limitations

This research has several constraints, and these must be addressed in future research.

- Sample size was limited as drug addicts were hard to find and it can't be generalized on all drug addicts.
- Out of 3 tools, only one was indigenous and the rest of the tools were western.
- No proper rehabilitation centers were found for women as it was considered a taboo.
- The study's research design was correlational. It does not clarify the cause. It's just explaining the connection.

Recommendations

Suggestions in the light of these following implications are given for future researches regarding the betterment of the research work.

- For current study, sample that was drawn from a limited geographical area. Future studies should gather data from different areas of different cities to increase its generalizability.
- More indigenous tools need to be developed for cultural relevant data because culture and religion influences the behavior.
- For future studies, they can work on how social support or networks play an important role in the recovery of drug addicts.
- There should be a safe place for women where they can have proper treatment and support to recover from drug addiction.
- A research on how environmental factors such as employment, or peers influence the susceptibility or accessibility of drug addiction should be conducted.

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