

# Personality Traits, Stressful Life Events & Psychological well being among Substance Abusers - A Pilot Survey



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## Abstract

It is evidenced that frequent exposure to stressful life events and certain typical personality traits make a person more vulnerable to substance abuse. Evidence on the mechanism by which these factors contribute to substance abuse is incomplete. This study aims to assess psychological well being of substance abusers and impact of specific personality traits on stressful life events in substance abusers. A descriptive correlational survey was carried out. A sample of 45 substance abusers filled Eysenk personality questionnaire (EPQ) and Presumptive Stressful Life Events (PSLES) along with General Health Questionnaire (GHQ). Appropriate descriptive and inferential statistics were applied to generate results. Study findings revealed that majority (88.9%) subjects were in severe psychological distress and had psychoticism (93%) personality traits. Relationship between variables showed that dominant psychoticism and neuroticism traits had statistically significant negative impact on psychological well being ( $p < .05$ ) in substance abusers. Legal and courtship-co-habitation stressful events had statistically significant negative impacts ( $p < .05$ ) on psychological well being of substance abusers. Results indicate that personality dimensions and stressful life events contribute to substance abuse. The contribution of personality and stressful life events may have important implications for the design of promotional programs aimed to curb substance abuse among Indian population.

**Key Words:** Personality traits, stress events, Psychological well being, substance abusers

## Background

Drug addiction is biggest social intimidation in adolescents in present scenario. It is a state in which an individual consume drug habitually, for reasons other than medical in any amount, strength, frequency of determinants and variables of drug addiction. There are number of determinants and factors for drug addiction and stress, and type of personality are few of them.

Stress has been recited most common and frequent precipitating factor for most of the physical and psychological disorders. A bunch of literature traced the relationship between stress and different types of disorders. Stressful life events enable the individual being to mould and adjust in varied types of environments. A normal level of stress is good for survival and change. On the other hand continues and

long term stressful life events may be harmful and have long lasting impacts on different systems and on a human as whole.

Chronic nature of stress may have direct and indirect impact on human body. Literature reported that long standing nature of stress leads to many health problems and predisposes to move for opting negative coping strategies i.e. drinking alcohol, cigarette smoking, road rage events, consumption of many harmful substances including opium, marijuana<sup>1</sup> and sometimes suicide as a lethal outcome to overcome from the stress.

Need of the Study & Literature Review:

Personality also predicts occurrence of stressful life events. In the recent five years a five personality traits (aggressiveness, impulsivity, emotional stability, openness and extraversion) came up as predictors of

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number of important health outcomes. It is evidenced that high level of neuroticism is much more related to earlier mortality among adult and older people. However, a small number of studies also said that not only does personality level predict the key health outcomes but so does personality change. Also, research focused upon personality health relationship has been well documented for a long time. It is revealed that people with type A personality have more physical problems like heart diseases, coronary artery diseases, high level of aggression and colon cancer etc. Personality predicts the occurrence of dependent stressful life events. Each personality trait is directly or indirectly responsible for onset of a new health problem. It indicates that personality driven stress had direct influence on different dimensions of health in an individual.

Addressing personality interventions may reduce the occurrence of stressful life events, in turn can decrease the health risk.

### Objectives

To assess psychological well being of the substance abusers.

To determine personality traits among substance abusers.

To find out relationship of personality traits with psychological well being and stressful life events.

### Assumptions

#### Study assumes that:

There may be variations in psychological well being level among substance abusers

Substance abusers may have different personality traits

Different personality traits may have relation to psychological well being in substance abusers

### Research Methodology

**Research design-** A descriptive correlational survey was initiated to assess psychological well being,

personality traits and stressful life events among substance abusers.

**Research setting:** The study was conducted at in-patient psychiatric department of Shree Guru Ram Das Institute of Medical Sciences and Research Center (SGRDIMS & R), Amritsar Punjab.

**Population:** The study population comprised of 45 substance abusers diagnosed by the psychiatrist as per ICD-10

**Sample & sample size:** 45 substance abusers were selected through purposive sampling technique over a period of about 5 months (July 2015 to Nov. 2015).

**Inclusion & Exclusion Criteria:** As the treatment center population comprises almost exclusively of males, only men were recruited for the study. The inclusion criteria were; patients in between 18-65 years age group, patient meeting the criteria of ICD-10 for substance dependence and diagnosed by psychiatrist for substance abuse.

Patients having any co-morbid physical, psychological, and psychiatric disorders were excluded from study.

#### Tools:

**The Eysenk Personality Questionnaire (EPQ)-** It consists of 90 items which are further classified under 4 broad domains namely; 1) psychoticism (25 items), 2) Neuroticism (21 items), 3) Extroversion (21 items) and 4) Lie (24 items). The respondent had to answer the items in the form of yes or no. Each domain score has its own fixed score, getting higher score in that particular score indicate that particular types of personality traits in defined samples. The permission was sought to use the tool. The tool was translated to Hindi language for the interest of population.

**Presumptive Stressful Life Events (PSLE)-** It consists 51 items that are further classified under 9 broad domains namely; (1) Family and spouse (1-17), (2) Work (18-25), (3) Financial (26-29), (4) Marital & sexual(30-36), (5) Health(37-40), (6) Bereavement (41-44), (7) Education (45-47), (8) Legal (48-49) and (9) Courtship and cohabitation(50-51). PSLES examined stressful life

events for life time and for last one year. In this study, subjects were examined for stressful events experienced in the last one year. The permission was sought to use the tool. The tool was translated to Hindi language for the interest of population.

**General Health Questionnaire (GHQ)-** Psychological well being was assessed by using General Health Questionnaire (GHQ), consists of 12 items, each one assessing the severity of a mental problem over the past few weeks using a 4-point Likert-type scale (from 0 to 3). The score was used to generate a total score ranging from 0 to 36. The positive items were corrected from 0 (*Always*) to 3 (*Never*) and the negative ones from 3 (*Always*) to 0 (*Never*). High scores indicate worse health. The GHQ has acceptable validity and reliability.

**Data Collection Procedure:** A written permission was obtained from concerned authority of hospital to collect the data from substance abusers. After explaining the study objectives, a written informed consent was also sought from the substance abusers. While interview, it was assured that subjects were free from all types of distractions to furnish the necessary details. It took only 20-25 minutes to furnish the asked details in complete manner.

**Ethical Consideration:** The study was approved by the Ethical Committee (EC) of the Sri Guru Ram Dass Institute of Medical Sciences and Research Center (SGRDISM), Vallah, Amritsar (Punjab). Written informed consent was also collected from subjects before proceeding to data collection by explaining the study objectives, their involvement, duration, and possible use of findings in future. Researcher also kept in mind that data collection process will not bring any sort of interferes in usual treatment process of patients.

## Findings

A small part of the study is already published regarding demographic and clinical profile of substance abusers admitted at hospital for de-addiction.

### Section I: Psychological well being of Substance Abusers

**Table 1: Level of Psychological well being among substance Abusers (N=45)**

Health status	f	%
Typical	03	6.7%
Evidence of distress	02	4.4%
Severe psychological problems	40	88.9%

Table 1 depicts the level of psychological well being among substance abusers. It has evident that a majority of substance abusers (88.9%) had severe psychological distress. It could be considered a strong precipitating factor for substance abuse and relapse in substance abusers.

### Section II: Assessment of Personality Traits of Substance Abusers

**Table 2: Frequency, percentage, Mean, SD and Mean percentage of Personality traits in substance abusers N=45**

Traits	f(%)*	Mean±SD	Mean%
Psychoticism (0.72-7.18)	42(93.3)	12.31±3.12	49.24
Extroversion (8.17-18.07)	01(2.2)	12.29±2.82	61.38
Neuroticism (4.59-11.46)	29(64.4)	12.80±2.78	60.95
Lie (2.98-11.46)	21(46.7)	11.82±3.12	51.39

#### \* multiple frequency application

Table 2 reflects an overview of types of personality traits among substance abusers. It has evidenced that majority of substance abusers (93.3%) had psychoticism traits followed by 64.4% neuroticism and 46.7% lie traits in their personality. It could be strong evidence that abnormal personality traits might predispose them to substance abuse or might have developed after indulging in severe substance abuse. Further, findings show that extroversion (61.38%) traits of personality are more dominant against neuroticism and lie (51.39%) traits in substance abusers as compared to psychoticism (49.24%).

**Section III: Relationship between personality traits and stressful life events**

**Table 3: Impacts of stressful life events on personality traits and psychological well being in substance abusers**

Stressful Events	Personality traits			Lie	GHQ
	Psychoticism	Extroversion	Neuroticism		
Family & Spouse	-.211	.153	.513**	.383**	-.089
Work	.413**	.412**	.152	-.107	.094
Financial	.045	.011	.524**	.179	.421**
Marital & Sexual	.160	.532**	.483**	.491**	-.025
Health	.160	.075	.471**	.160	.522**
Bereavement	.612**	.207	.129	.269	-.210
Education	.133	.561**	.591**	.482**	-.122
Legal	.591**	.512**	.621**	.430**	-.421**
Court	.582**	.345*	.612**	.891**	-.431**
GHQ	-.791**	.841**	-.712**	.062	1

**\*\*significant<.05, \*-significant @p<.01, GHQ-General health questionnaire**

Table 3 describes the inter-correlation among stressful life events, personality traits and psychological well being of substance abusers. Findings show that work related stress had direct impact on psychoticism, and neuroticism personality traits development in substance abusers or might have developed before abusing substance due to long standing and chronic nature of stress and stressful life events. However, marital and sexual life stressful events lead to development of traits related to extroversion, neuroticism and lie personality in substance abusers. Similarly, litigation and court and cohabitation related stressful events also equally predispose all four types of personality traits and had negative impacts on psychological well being of substance abusers. Equally, it has been also noticed that health status and financial worries had gloomy

impacts on psychological well - being of substance abusers.

**Discussion**

**Psychological well being & Personality Traits of Substance Abusers:**

The present study was undertaken to develop an insight upon stressful life events and personality traits and its consequences on psychological well being in substance abusers. The observation shows that majority substance abusers have mix traits of personality (psychoticism, neuroticism and lie) and a handful of them had been found with the traits of extroversion personality. The level of psychological well being alarming that majority of samples were in severe psychological distress and that could be apprehension to health care professional to get the things comprehended and correlate with higher substance abuse and relapse rate in adolescents. Similar closely related findings reported in a study conducted by Matto SK et al (2009), which reported that substance abusers admitted under relapse phenomena had more stress and stressful life situations as compared to those who gave up substance abuse. It is also confirmed in a previous study that relapse group had high risk of previous exposure to stressful life situations<sup>15</sup>. These observations are in line with previous study (Shaffer HJet al, 2004) which reported that long standing stressful life events play important role in birth of certain psychiatric disorder and maladaptive changes in personality of a healthy individual.

Likewise, stressful life events also revealed that financial worries and legal problem putting more trigger in the form of stress on the mind of substance abusers and could be potential to make them go for substance abuse. Parallel findings reported in the study conducted by Marwaha S (2014)<sup>1</sup>, which reported that undesirable life events are more in drug addicts as compared to healthy one. The result are also supported by the studies conducted by Rangaswami (1983), Gunthly & Jain (1998), Lodhi and Thakur (1993) O'Dorothy (1991)and Dubey (1987) which revealed that alcoholics and addicts experience more stressful life events as compared to healthy

individual.

### **Co relationship between personality traits and stressful life events:**

Impact of stressful life events and personality traits on psychological well being was computed by applying correlation coefficient. Findings revealed that marital problem, unsatisfactory work related issues, and legal problems had direct impact for change in personality traits in substance abusers. It was also evident that financial worries, poor health status and legal problem worsen the psychological well being of substance abusers. Similarly, poor health outcome were also related to psychoticism and extroversion traits in personality in sample. Similar findings reported in previous study (Turiano NA et al (2012), which reported that change in agreeableness, conscientiousness and extraversion predicted self rated health and blood pressure.

Likewise, a link of personality traits to negative health behaviour (i.e. smoking, alcoholism, poor diet and lack of exercise etc) was also reflected in existing literature (**Freidman HS et al 1993**). Study findings suggest that extroversion personality traits related to better psychological well being as compared to psychoticism, neuroticism and lie traits. Similarity, it is been reported in literature that higher level of extroversion predicted better self-rated health and fewer health-related work reduction<sup>15</sup>. Neuroticism found connected with poor health outcomes in the study. Several studies have documented that higher neuroticism is related to alcohol abuse and dependence and greater negative consequences from drinking (**McCann SJH 2005; Weiss A et al 2005**).

### **Conclusion**

The study concludes that certain specific personality traits and long standing stress could be possible cause of substance abuse in observed population. However, the study should be seen under many limitations and should be considered preliminaries in this field. The most important limitation of the present study was its cross sectional nature, which precludes casual interpretations.

We cannot conclude whether personality traits and stressful life events are the cause or the outcome measured in the samples. One more important limitation of this study is that most of general health outcomes were measured by using self-reported assessment, and hence the result obtained may be prone to bias, and narrows the scope of generalization.

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