A COMPARISON OF THE EXTENT OF SELF-ESTEEM AND ATTRIBUTION STYLES BETWEEN TWO GROUPS OF ADDICTED AND NON-ADDICTED ADOLESCENTS

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ABSTRACT

This study compares the self-esteem, attributive styles and the different dimensions of its interrelationships between two groups of adolescents; the first are those who are addicted to drugs and the second are the non-drug addict group. This study employs a causal-comparative method. A total of 50 adolescents from each group aged 15-18 years were selected. One consisted of adolescents from special centers who were selected with a phased clustered method and the second, which consisted of non-addicted adolescents who were consistent with the first group in some aspects. The data was collected and analyzed using t-tests and Pearson correlation coefficient. Findings indicated that the non-addicted have internal, stable, and more general attributions. The non-addicted have higher self-esteem. There are also relationships among different dimensions of the attributive style (internal-external, stable-unstable, specific-general) in desirable and undesirable events.

ABSTRAK


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INTRODUCTION

Self-esteem, also known as respect to the self is the value that one claims for himself. Although the word “esteem” implies a high value, the compound noun “self-esteem” is concerned with all the dimensions and the extent of respect to self (whether it is high or low). According to Pervin (1987), “self-esteem is the individual judgment of competence which is a general trait of the personality not a momentary or special insight for special situations”. Every individual regardless of their age, gender, cultural background, insights and their careers are in need of self-esteem.

Self-esteem actually influences all dimensions of life. In fact, various psychological investigations ascertain that if the need of self-esteem is not fulfilled, more widespread needs such as creation, progress or appreciation of potential talent will remain restricted”. (Clemes, et al, 1975). On the other hand, attribution is defined as: “the process people employ to relate events (behaviors) to their underlying conditions” (Heider, 1958; cited in Karimi, 1972). “In social psychology that is tendency to perceive motivations, characteristics intentions and capabilities of other people based on the observation of their behaviors. In other words, it is a more or less automatic inclination to explain the actions of others” (Bruno 1973, P.323). “Attributions are under the influence of three dimensions:

(i) **Internal-external dimension.** Suppose an individual encounters an insoluble situation and his/her reaction comes to no result. Being aware of the uselessness of
reactions can have two different implications for the individual. The first implication is the problem is solvable but he/she is unable to solve it. The second one is the problem is insolvable and there is nothing wrong with his/her abilities. The explanation of the first type which is used to justify the failure in reaction is called internal dimension (individual inability) and the explanation of the second type is called external dimension (in solubility of the problem).

(ii) **Stable-unstable dimension.** To judge about the possibility of failure, whether one consider the reason to be of internal or external reason, the individual will also investigate the stability of the factors in play. In this case, the person wonders whether the factor which caused the failure was stable and permanent or unstable and temporary. Stupidity and inability (internal and stable) and complexity of the problem (stable and external) are examples of stable factors. In contrast, for example, one may consider a mathematics test (unstable and external factor) or the lack of endeavor in mathematics to be the cause of his/her failure (unstable and internal factor).

(iii) **Specific-general dimension.** In the third dimension, the individual wonders whether the cause of failure is a factor resulting only from special situations or it influences a wide range of situations and can result in failure in those situations as well. In other words, the question the individual has in his/her mind is whether the cause of failure can influence other dimensions of his/her life or not) (Kadivar, 1974: 79-81).

There are numerous theories on attribution. The earliest ones are “simple psychology” (Heider, 1958), “Adaptive Inference Theory” (Jones & Douis, 1965) “Concordant Change” (Kelly, 1971), and “Composition Theory” (Shaver, 1975). Self-esteem and the style of attribution in adolescence, determine an adolescent’s behavior in traumatic situations. One of these traumas is addiction which is one of the most critical difficulties in the adolescent community since the age of suffering from it has fallen in today’s society.
Addiction is defined as “any severe mental or physiological dependence on any psychoactive substance or drugs”. Addiction is specified by the syndrome of abstinence and deprivation which emerges when the drug is not used. It seems that the existence of the addictive substance in the addict is necessary for the natural operation of cells and abandoning its use will disrupt physiological processes and consequently lead to symptoms of deprivation. In other words, an addict is an individual who has physical and mental dependency on a drug and can’t help using continuous doses of it.

In 1964, the World Health Organization came to the conclusion that the term “addiction” is not a scientific term and suggested the term “Drug dependence” instead.” (Pouraskari, 1973). Addictive drugs have one of the following four effects on an individual: sedation, tranquilization, stimulation, creating delirium. Numerous investigations are concerned with the relationship between self-esteem and the style of attribution and various aspects like mental disorders such as depression, addiction.

Joiner and Wagner (1995) in a meta-analytic study titled “Attribution and depression in children and adolescents” stated that a total of 27 studies involving more than 4,000 children and adolescents show that definitely the style of attribution has a relationship to clinical depression in special stages and these individuals have a more negative style of attribution compared to other mental disorders.

Haga, Ahrens, Schulman, Seligman at al. (1995) in a research on style of attribution and symptoms of depression stated that the investigation of people who think considerably about the causes of events has shown that there is a high correlation between the style of attribution and symptoms of depression.

Fitts and Hammer (1999) indicated that the feelings of being lazy, bad, sad and stupid are stronger in the criminals than non-criminals; criminals see themselves as undesirable people, they don’t like themselves, don’t claim any value and respect, and in general they have a low self-esteem. Moreover, they are confused
and unsure as to the relationship to themselves, and have changing states” (cited in Mussen et al., 1968, p. 631). In a longitudinal for a period of 2 years on adolescents,

Kaplan et al. (1982) concluded that self-esteem has a direct influence on the relationships between addicted and non-addicted adolescents and an indirect effect on the tentative use of drugs.” (Quoted in Taremian 1978, p. 45).
A young person who use drugs have an external source of control and less self-confidence in comparison to the non-addict. Impulsiveness, depressed states, inability in self-assertion, high anxiety and severe need to social confirmation are related to drug abuse (Forman & Linney, quoted in Donohue, 1991).

Based on these foundations provided by these studies, it is therefore the aim of this study to investigate the following hypotheses:

(i) There are meaningful differences among the styles of attribution (internal-external, stable-unstable, specific-general) in desirable and undesirable events between two groups of adolescents, those addicted and non-addicted to drugs;

(ii) There are meaningful differences between the degree of self-esteem (General) between the two groups of addict and non-addict adolescents; and

(iii) There are meaningful relations between different dimensions of the style of attribution in desirable and undesirable events in two groups of addicts and non-addicts.

Methodology

Because the subjects of this study are drug users and the fact that the addiction has already occurred, the research uses a causal-comparative method. In causal-comparative research design, the purpose is to find possible causes of a behavioral pattern. To this ends subjects with the behavior under study are compared to those who don’t show the studied behavior this method is often
called post-event research, because it refers to cases in which the cause has already occurred and its investigation is possible through the influence it has on another variable called effect” (Delavar, 1976).

Population

The population of this study is adolescent drug addict aged between 15-18 years of age who have been referred to reformatory, well-being centers, drug withdrawal clinics and therapeutic centers of Tehran.

For the non-drug addict population, they are adolescents aged between 15-18 years of age who are matched to the group of addict adolescents in terms of such characteristics as age, education, social and economic class (the occupation of the father and mother, monthly income, the size of the accommodation).

Sampling

A total of 50 individuals from the addict community and 50 from non-addict community with the same mentioned characteristics as the addicts have been selected using the sampling method “phased clustered method”

The data collection process involved several sessions. Respondents were given specific instructions for answering the questionnaires at the beginning of each session. Prior to answering the questionnaires, the subjects filled a form consisting their biography. This is the base in which the non-addict samples are matched.

Instrumentation

Pope Five Scale Test of Self-esteem (Pope, 1988) was used to measure the self-esteem of the respondents. The questionnaire consisted of 60 questions. Each question involved three choices of “always”, “sometimes” and “never”. This test has five sub-scales which are General, Educational, Physical, Family and Social.
The instrument used to measure attributive style is the Peterson, Seligman, Semmel, Bayer, Abramson, Sky’s Attributive Style Questionnaire (ASQ) (1984) which is a self-report questionnaire. This instrument gives scores to individual differences in people’s inclination to attribute desirable and undesirable events to internal (vs. external), stable (vs. unstable) and general (vs. specific) factors. The questionnaire can be administered to individual subjects or to groups. The subjects are asked to read each situation and imagine that it has actually occurred to them and then write the major cause of such situation. After that, they should circle the number of one of the three questions related to the situation to mark the cause of the event on a seven-point scale.

Validity and reliability

Self-esteem questionnaire: Research by Ourzaman (1971) found the correlation between scores of the mentioned test and Coopersmith Self-esteem list is reported to be 0.67 and 0.37 for male and female subjects. In another study, Ghafari and Ramezani (1973) standardized Ali’s pop test for high school students of Tehran. The validity coefficient was found to be 0.86. In a study by Pourmoghyn Dasian on the high school students of second, correlation between Ali’s pop scale and Coopersmith Self-esteem list for boys and girls was reported to be 0.73 and 0.71 respectively, (Moghadasian 1973). For external validity, Abdollahnejad has investigated the correlation between the above test and Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and found it to be 0.82. In another study by Valibeigy (1978), the reliability of each sub-scale of the test is reported to be as follows: general 0.71; educational 0.71; physical 0.62; family 0.78; and social 0.15 (Valibeigy, 1978)

Attribution Style Questionnaire: In a research carried out in Pennsylvania University on 66 subjects, reliabilities computed with Cronbach alpha were satisfactory and for internal, stable and general dimensions of the Attribution Style Questionnaire, and they were reported to be 0.93, 0.89 and 0.90 respectively (Arab, 1973). Internal consistency of the questionnaire regarding the three dimensions was between 0.44 and 0.69 in a sample of 100 university students. Tennen & Herzberger (1985) have reported an average internal consistency for questionnaire scales as well. Cronbach
alpha coefficient is as follows - 0.56 for stability dimension, 0.66 for acquisition dimension and 0.21 for introspection dimension. The findings of Tennen & Herzberger (1985) found that on average, the internal consistency are consistent with several other findings (Seligman et al, 1979; Golin, Sweeney & Shaeffer, 1981; Gutrona, Russell & Jones, 1984). On the test–retest reliability of questionnaire, Tennen & Herzberyer (1985) state that all the existing sources show relatively stable scores of the questionnaire in ordinary samples. The studies of Golin, Sweeney & Shaeffer (1981) and Peterson et al. (1982) indicate that in the samples consisting of university students, attributive style is a stable aspect of personality functions within four or five weeks (a reliability of 0.70 - 0.75). Shahrbabaky (1969) studied a scale that is equivalent to the original reported Cronbach coefficient for ordinary people as follows: internal undesirable event 0.75; internal desirable event 0.74; stable undesirable event 0.43; stable desirable event 0.56; general undesirable event 0.73; and general desirable event 0.76 (Bigdeli, 1972). In another study, Arab has computed the total alpha coefficient of the test of attributive style to be 0.71 and reported high internal correlation between dimensions of attributive style (Arab, 1973).

Data analysis

Descriptive statistics are used for computing frequencies and mean and inferential statistics are used to investigate differences and relations in different variables or investigating the differences between two groups.

Findings

The first hypothesis: There is significant difference between attributive style (internal–external) of desirable events of two groups of addicts and non-addicts, The hypothesis confirmed and using t-student Test, a significant difference is found at $\alpha=0.0001$. The non-addict have a more internal attributive style ($\alpha=0.0001$, df = 98, $t=11.05$).

The second hypothesis: There is a significant difference between attributive style (stable–unstable) of desirable events in two groups of addicts and non-addicts. The research hypothesis is confirmed
and using student’s t-test, there is a significant difference between the two groups at (α=0/0001 df=98 t=13.82).

The third hypothesis: There is a significant difference between attributive style (specific-general) of desirable events in two groups of non-addict and addict. The research hypothesis is confirmed and using a student t-test, a significant difference is found between two or groups at α=0/0001. Non-addicts have a more general attributive style. (α=0/0001 df=48 t=13.14).

The fourth hypothesis: There is a significant difference between attributive style (internal-external) of undesirable events in two groups of non-addicts and addicts. The research hypothesis is confirmed and using a Student’s t-test, a significant difference is found between the two groups at α=0/0001. The non-addict has a more internal attributive style. (α=0/0001 DF=98 tab=4.78).

The sixth hypothesis: There is a significant difference between the attribution style (specific-general) of undesirable events in two groups of non-addicts and addicts. The research hypothesis is confirmed and using a Student’s t-test, a significant difference is found between the two groups at α=0/0001. The non-addict has a more general attributive style. (α=0/0001 df=98, t=7.12).

The seventh hypothesis: There is a significant difference between self-esteem (general) of two groups of non-addicts and addicts. The research hypothesis is confirmed and using a Student’s t-test and a significant difference is found between the two groups at α=0/0001. The non-addict have a higher self-esteem. (α=0/0001 df=98 t=6.05)

The eighth hypothesis: There is a meaningful relationship between the attributive style (internal-external) of desirable and undesirable events in two groups of non-addicts and addicts. The research hypothesis is confirmed and using Pearson correlation coefficient, a meaningful relationship is found at α=0/0001. (r=0.738).

The ninth hypothesis: There is a meaningful relationship between the attributive style (stable-unstable) of desirable and undesirable events in two groups of non-addicts and addicts. The research
The tenth hypothesis: There is a meaningful relationship between the attributive style (specific-general) of desirable and undesirable events in two groups of non-addicts and addicts. The research hypothesis is confirmed and using a Pearson correlation coefficient, a meaningful relationship between self-esteem (general) and dimensions of attributive style in the two groups.

Discussion

There is a significant difference between different dimensions of attributive style (internal-external, stable-unstable, specific-general) in two groups of non-addicts and addicts. The difference holds true in both desirable and undesirable events. Therefore, the non-addict has more internal, stable and general attributions compared to the addict.

The scores on A.S.Q in the non-addict group are considerably above the scores of the addict in every kind of event. This fact implies that the non-addict attribute the causes of events more to themselves, that is, they see themselves as having a potential, based on their endeavor to achieve a goal (whether in affiliation situations or promotion) or when encountering a failure (whether in affiliation situation or promotion). In desirable cases, the internal attributions denote a kind of competency feeling in the individual.

This is a characteristic of normal people, especially because they don’t attribute this achievement feeling to only one specific situation. Rather, they believe that it will always exist (stable) and influence other aspects of life (general). Internal attribution in undesirable cases in the group is justifiable with a realistic insight. They most probably consider as causes of failure those internal factors which they can change and control, which is, such factors as lack of endeavor. Anzenwu (1995) showed that the group with endeavor attributions and better functioning had higher internal than the other group.
In contrast, there is a kind of tendency to external, unstable and more specific attribution among the addicts. In desirable cases, if an achievement is gained, they attribute it to factors such as chance and luck. That is, they consider it the result of a kind of environmental determinism, and in the cases of failure they don’t see their endeavor (internal factor) influential in changing the situation and if in the same cases they have internal attribution, they relate it more to their ability than their endeavor, especially because these attributions together with the two other dimensions are evaluated in an unstable and specific way.

Many researchers ascertain that there is a correlation between criminality and addiction. Alcoholism, mental disorders like depression and external, unstable and specific attributive style. Therefore, the present research is in line with the findings of many researches, (Brant, 1972; Joiner & Wagner, 1995; Haga, Ahrens, Schulman, Seligman et-al, 1995; Chubb, Jones, Hillier, Moyle, et al, 1999).

The attribution process in the addict group is very close to the concept of Seligman’s acquired frustration. The acquired frustration in which an individual has a feeling of lack of control on environmental conditions and even attributes his/her success to others. There is a significant difference between self-esteem (general) in two groups of non-addicts and addicts: the first group has a higher self-esteem. The computed frequencies show that non-addicts are satisfied with what they are and feel successful in what they do. Their characteristics are the same as the characteristics proved in the previous researches to be specific to those of high self-esteem. Having more confidence, a true conception of one’s abilities, the feeling of being capable and valued, self-confidence, desire to be healthier, to enjoy interaction with others, positive prediction of subsequent advances, positive judgments of one’s own perceived characteristics.

In contrast, the addict are not satisfied with what they are and have a feeling of failure in what they do. Although drawing inference to claim a cause-effect relationship between self-esteem and addiction should be treated with great caution and requires completely controlled researches in different populations and samples, due
to the research evidence, the existence of a relationship is almost undeniable. The existence of unfulfilled desires in the group of addicted adolescents (I wish I were another person, I wish I got teacher better, I wish I could make friends more easily, I wish I had friends who sincerely liked me, I wish I were a better student) denotes an evident difference between the real I and the ideal I, and this distance somehow lets them justify the bad feelings of committing sins and lack of competency.

There are meaningful relationships between different dimensions of attributive style (internal-external, stable-unstable, specific-general in desirable and undesirable events in the two groups. That is, if an individual (whether addict or non-addict) has an internal, stable and general attribution in a desirable case, he/she will also have an internal, stable and general attribution in an undesirable case. These relationships have existed not only in the case of equal dimensions (such as between internal-external and stable-unstable) on the other hand, although in the present research no meaningful relationships were found between self-esteem and attributive styles (in different dimensions), the existence of higher self-esteem and internal, stable and more general attributive styles in non-addicts and lower self-esteem and external, unstable and more specific attributive styles in addicts cannot negate the existence of any relationship. Other researches in this field are also considerable (Fitach, 1970; Epstein & Komorita, 1971; Sterbin & Ranow, 1996; Demello & Alis, 1999). To maintain self-esteem and stable pictures of themselves in the desirable events, individuals use internal, stable and general attributions and in undesirable events use external, unstable and specific attributions to justify themselves. Carl Rogers in “self-consistency and congruence” believes that “organism seeks to keep self-concept and its reaction to the state of inconsistency that is threats resulted from anti-self experiences, is defense. If an experience is completely inconsistent with the structure of the self, organism tries to deny awareness of the experience by a severe defensive reaction. Two defensive processes are presented here. Tampering with the meaning of experience and denying the existence of experience (Rogers, 1956: 205) (Cited in Pervin, 1989). To maintain a valued picture of the self in all fields, self-concept that contains various aspects and different dimensions of the self, normal individuals can’t help attributing their success to
their abilities and endeavors (internal factors). They maintain this feeling of being valued in a permanent way and generalize it to all aspects of their lives.

In contrast, abnormal individuals, function to maintain the less valued pictures they have of themselves in various fields. Attribute their achievements to factors such as luck, chance and difficulty of the tasks (external factors) and see that achievement as an unstable and specific one which will never recur nor occur in similar situations. In failure events, normal individuals attribute the reasons of their failure to internal factors such as lack of endeavor and believe that if they don’t endeavor, the failure will recur and occur in similar situations in the future. Conversely, abnormal individuals attribute the reasons of their failure to factors such as chance, luck and difficulty of tasks (in some cases where they attribute their failure to internal factors, mainly they see themselves as unable and don’t consider lack of endeavor to be the main reason of their failure). That is why the kind of attribution of normal individuals in the cases of failure (lack of endeavor) increases their activities in subsequent situations, but in the case of abnormal individuals, there is less motivation to change failure to success in the future situations. Consider that mostly people believe: endeavor is controlled by personal volition, while volition has less control on ability.

Recommendations

Addicts who themselves refer to centers or volunteers who are interested in research issues should be preferably used in the investigation of addiction. This matter will result in limitations related to external validity of the research. Because generalizing the results of the sample of volunteers to the whole population of addicts should be treated with extreme caution.

In conducting such studies in the prisons, clinical interviews will be more useful. If questionnaires are used, they should be preferably used individually or by small groups of two to three individuals before thinking of a method for data collection, forming a positive emotional relationship, especially with the group of criminals, is necessary.
The addicts used should be clearly addicted. That is, those who abused drugs for several years. The results acquired from subjects who use drugs temporarily or fancifully are not generalized to the population of addicts.

The fact that two or more factors are related to each other does not necessarily imply a causal relationship. These variables may correlate with other variable which are known but not observable. Therefore, the inference of a causal relationship between self-esteem and attributive style and addiction should be treated with extreme caution.

Finally, “whether in family or school, those who feel unable in controlling environmental conditions and see their reactions to the environment influential should be led to suitable experiences which result in success. Experiences that gradually becomes more difficult with the first experiences ensuring success. The first stage to come to suitable attributive styles is acceptance of the “self”. If the environment supports the individuals in this regard, instead of surrendering themselves to the situations and questionable acceptance of precepts of the environment (able and unable or successful and unsuccessful), they reevaluate themselves and consider the desired level of expectation of the selves (Kadivar, 1974).


