MATERIALISM, AFFLUENZA AND FRUSTRATION AMONG DRUG ABUSERS IN PAKISTAN

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Abstract
The present study aimed to examine the relationship between materialism, affluenza, and frustration among drug abusers in Pakistan. The study adopted a cross-sectional correlational research design and employed a purposive sampling technique to collect data from drug abusers admitted to public and private rehabilitation centres in Pakistan. Data were collected using three standardized questionnaires, namely the Material Values Scale, the Affluenza Scale, and the Frustration Discomfort Scale. Correlational analysis revealed significant relationships among the study variables, including materialism, affluenza, and frustration. Independent samples t-test results indicated no significant gender differences with respect to the study variables. The findings are discussed in the light of previous literature, and recommendations as well as implications for future research and practice are provided.
Keywords: Materialism, Affluenza, Frustration, Drug Abusers.

Introduction

The concerning prevalence of substance use disorders is highlighted by 2017 statistics indicating that approximately 19.7 million individuals aged 12 years and older were affected. Among these, 74% experienced drug use disorders, and nearly 38% of adults struggled with illicit drug addiction. Each day, approximately 685 people die from drug-related causes, while around 8.5 million individuals experience co-occurring mental health challenges alongside substance use disorders (Addiction Statistics, 2018; Shahid et al., 2025). In Pakistan, approximately 27 million people suffer from problematic drug use, leading to an estimated 187,100 drug-related deaths annually. The economic impact is substantial, as reflected by the destruction of narcotics valued in the billions during 2014 and 2015 (Vitiello, 2020).

Materialism is defined as the prioritization of wealth, possessions, and social status over spiritual values (Kasser, 2006) and is often viewed as a value orientation that emphasizes acquisition as a pathway to achieving life goals (Nowak, 1994). Among youth, materialism frequently manifests as a desire for possessions and the financial means to obtain them (Goldberg et al., 2003; Flurry et al., 2021). While materialism may provide a temporary sense of fulfillment, excessive pursuits can lead to affluenza, characterized by persistent dissatisfaction and an unfulfilled longing for greater wealth and privilege. This condition can impair judgment and reduce awareness of the consequences of one's actions (Cooperate Finance Institute Team, 2020; O'Neill, 1997).

Affluenza is frequently associated with frustration, as individuals driven by materialistic goals often struggle to cope with setbacks (James, 2008). Frustration is an emotional response to stress, whereas frustration tolerance refers to the ability to cope effectively with disappointment and adversity (Brennan, 2020; Bouman, 2011). High frustration tolerance is essential for psychological well-being, enabling individuals to persist in pursuing their goals despite obstacles (Huyghebaert et al., 2023). In contrast, low frustration tolerance can hinder performance and strain interpersonal relationships, particularly among individuals with substance use disorders, who often exhibit heightened vulnerability in relation to the severity of their addiction (Ramirez-Castillo et al., 2019).

To effectively address substance use disorders and develop appropriate interventions, it is essential to understand the complex relationships among materialism, affluenza, and frustration. This study is grounded in the self-esteem theory of drug abuse proposed by Steffenhagen (1980) and informed by Adler's Individual Psychology (Watts et al., 1997). This theoretical framework elucidates the interaction between personal aspirations and societal constraints, suggesting that socioeconomic factors significantly influence the gap between individual expectations and lived realities. For instance, youth from disadvantaged backgrounds often hold more modest ambitions than their wealthier counterparts. Furthermore, intrapsychic factors arising from early family socialization play a crucial role in shaping an individual's sense of mastery and competence, with high self-esteem being associated with a perception of sufficiency in goal attainment. Kaplan (1985) expanded this theoretical perspective by identifying common precursors to various deviant behaviors and emphasizing the motivations underlying specific behavioral patterns, although this approach may occasionally overlook diverse perceptions of deviance across demographic groups.

Recent qualitative research has identified significant links between materialism and drug addiction. Fraser et al. (2018) explored these associations through interviews with health professionals. Rana and Malik (2023) further examined these relationships, revealing that materialism often serves as a coping mechanism for depression and anxiety and is notably correlated with risky drinking motives. Unanue et al. (2017) confirmed that materialism is associated with negative outcomes such as frustration, a trend also observed in a parallel study conducted in Paraguay. Additionally, research analyzing data from 1,841 Chilean adults

demonstrated that materialism is linked to decreased life satisfaction and increased frustration, although positive factors such as gratitude can mitigate these adverse effects.

The impact of materialism extends beyond individual experiences, influencing broader social dynamics. Parker (2023) investigated young adults aged 18 to 30 years and found a strong association between materialism and frustration, which negatively affects goal orientation across various Asian contexts. Zheng et al. (2020) studied young adults in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macao, identifying elevated levels of frustration and materialism in Taiwan and Hong Kong, where increased social inequality was evident. These findings were further supported by Shan (2022) and studies conducted in Pakistan, indicating the pervasive influence of materialistic values.

Flurry et al. (2021) found that materialistic adolescents exhibited higher levels of affluenza, greater life satisfaction, and reduced depressive moods, with affluenza showing positive relationships with these outcomes. Additionally, Opree and Kühne (2022) identified significant associations among materialism, affluenza, and narcissism in adolescents. Given the alarming statistics reported by the International Survey on Drug Use and Health (2017) regarding substance use disorders, particularly in Pakistan (Siddiqui et al., 2024), the present study aims to explore the interrelationships among materialism, affluenza, and frustration among individuals with substance use disorders to address gaps in the existing literature and provide meaningful implications.

Hypotheses

H1: There will be a significant positive relationship among materialism, affluenza, and frustration among individuals with substance use disorders.

H2: Significant gender differences are expected in materialism, affluenza, and frustration among individuals with substance use disorders.

Method

Research Design

A correlational research design was used to explore the relationships among materialism, affluenza, and frustration in drug abusers.

Sampling Strategy

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to collect the data.

Sample

The sample (N = 150) consisted of individuals with substance use disorders recruited from both public and private rehabilitation centers in Pakistan.

Inclusion Criteria

Participants included drug abuse patients aged between 18 and 55 years, drug abusers recruited from different rehabilitation centers, and educated drug abusers.

Assessment Measures

Material Values Scale

The Material Values Scale was developed by Richins (2004) to measure the intensity of materialism in individuals. The scale consists of 15 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The reliability of the scale in the current study was .78 to 0.82.

Affluenza Scale

The Affluenza Scale was developed by Tyagi and Shyam (2019). It consists of 21 items rated on a 3-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (*always*) to 2 (*never*). The Cronbach's alpha of the scale in the current study was .86.

Frustration Discomfort Scale

The Frustration Discomfort Scale consists of 28 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1–5) and measures frustration tolerance. The reliability of the scale in the current study ranged from .84 to .94, with higher scores indicating greater frustration (Harrington, 2005).

Ethical Considerations

All ethical considerations were taken into account prior to conducting the research. Permission was obtained from the respective authorities before data collection. Participants were informed about the objectives and nature of the research, as well as their right to withdraw at any time. Informed consent was obtained, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity. No physical or psychological harm was caused to the participants during the research.

Procedure

Initially, permission to use the assessment scales was obtained from the original authors. Institutional approval was then secured to interact with drug abuse patients at rehabilitation centers. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw at any stage. After obtaining their consent, participants were asked to complete the questionnaires according to their responses. Finally, data were collected from 150 drug abusers and analyzed using SPSS version 26.0.

Result

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of the Participants (N=150)

Demographics	*M*	*(SD)*	*F*	*(%)*
Age	29.82	7.35		
Gender				
Men			72	48
Women			78	52
Marital Status				
Single			77	51.3
Engaged			5	3.3
Married			68	45.3
Nature of Rehabilitation Centre				
Private			149	99.3
Public			1	.7

Note. M= Mean, SD= Standard deviation, f= frequency, %= percentage

The demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1. The mean age of the participants was 29.82 years (*SD* = 7.35). The sample consisted of 72 men (48%) and 78 women (52%). With respect to marital status, 77 participants (51.3%) were single, 5 (3.3%) were engaged, and

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68 (45.3%) were married. Regarding the nature of the rehabilitation centres, the vast majority of participants were enrolled in private rehabilitation centres (n = 149, 99.3%), whereas only one participant (0.7%) was recruited from a public rehabilitation centre.

Table 2
Correlation among Study Variables (N=150)

Variables	1	2	3
1.Materialism	-	.22**	.90**
2.Affluenza		-	.26**
3.Frustration			-

*Note. **p< .001, *p< .05*

Pearson product–moment correlation analysis revealed significant positive relationships among the study variables. As shown in Table 2, materialism was positively associated with affluenza ($r = .22$, $p < .001$), indicating that higher materialistic tendencies were related to greater levels of affluenza. Materialism also exhibited a strong positive correlation with frustration ($r = .90$, $p < .001$), suggesting that individuals high in materialism experienced substantially higher frustration. Furthermore, affluenza was significantly and positively related to frustration ($r = .26$, $p < .001$), indicating that increased affluenza was associated with elevated frustration levels. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that materialism and affluenza are meaningfully linked to frustration within the sample.

Table 3
Mean differences of Gender in Materialism, Affluenza, and Frustration (N=150)

	Gender						
	Men (n=72)		Women (n=78)				
Variables	M	SD	M	SD	*t*	*P*	Cohen's d
Materialism	38.86	6.93	39.23	8.35	-.29	.77	0.04
Affluenza	4.48	3.76	5.43	4.49	-1.40	.16	0.22
Frustration	78.93	10.97	80.61	12.56	-.87	.38	0.14

Note. M= mean; SD= standard deviation.

An independent samples *t*-test was conducted to examine gender differences in materialism, affluenza, and frustration. As shown in Table 2, no statistically significant gender differences were observed for any of the study variables. Specifically, there was no significant difference between men ($M = 38.86$, $SD = 6.93$) and women ($M = 39.23$, $SD = 8.35$) on materialism, $t(148) = −0.29$, $p = .77$, with a negligible effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.04$). Similarly, the difference in affluenza scores between men ($M = 4.48$, $SD = 3.76$) and women ($M = 5.43$, $SD = 4.49$) was not statistically significant, $t(148) = −1.40$, $p = .16$, indicating a small effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.22$). In terms of frustration, men ($M = 78.93$, $SD = 10.97$) and women ($M = 80.61$, $SD = 12.56$) did not differ significantly, $t(148) = −0.87$, $p = .38$, with a small effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.14$). Although women demonstrated slightly higher mean scores on

affluenza and frustration, and men showed marginally lower scores across variables, these differences were not statistically meaningful.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal a significant positive correlation among materialism, affluenza, and frustration in drug abusers. Specifically, increased materialism corresponds with heightened affluenza and diminished frustration. As individuals prioritize materialistic aspirations—such as wealth, fame, and status—they often experience a persistent sense of incompleteness, detracting from their intrinsic satisfaction (Unanue et al., 2017; Reyes et al., 2022). This pervasive lack of gratitude may diminish perceptions of competence, relatedness, and autonomy. Furthermore, materialism serves to exacerbate affluenza, as the allure of material possessions intensifies the desire for more. Verma et al. (2022) contend that affluenza embodies an extreme manifestation of this materialistic desire. These findings can be justified through Self-Determination Theory, which posits that excessive focus on extrinsic goals undermines basic psychological needs. Among individuals with substance use disorders, unmet needs may intensify frustration and affluenza, reinforcing maladaptive coping strategies and heightening vulnerability to continued substance use.

Gender differences were observed in the present study; however, these differences were not statistically significant. Women scored higher on all study variables, including materialism, affluenza, and frustration, compared to men. Although these mean differences did not reach statistical significance, the pattern suggests a tendency for women to report relatively higher levels of the examined constructs. Similar trends have been reported in cross-cultural research, where women demonstrated higher materialism, particularly on the centrality dimension, highlighting the influence of sociocultural factors on consumption behaviors (Workman & Lee, 2011). Other studies have documented gender-related variations in affluenza and frustration, emphasizing the role of cultural context in shaping materialistic values and emotional responses (Verma & Yadav, 2022).

Limitations and Suggestions

Several limitations were identified in this study. The sample comprised only 150 drug abusers, which may not accurately represent the entire population, affecting the generalizability of the findings. Therefore, future studies should include a larger sample size. The study used a cross-sectional correlational design; a longitudinal approach could better examine changes in variables among drug abusers over time. Additionally, there was an imbalance in group sizes, such as marital status (single: 77, married: 68, engaged: 5) and type of institution (public: 149, private: 1), which prevented the use of ANOVA and independent samples t-tests. Future research should ensure balanced categories. The study also did not assess the duration of drug addiction, so measuring this aspect is recommended. Lastly, future research should explore this phenomenon more deeply, considering factors like the types of drugs involved to enhance understanding.

Implications

This study is pivotal in informing effective intervention strategies for drug abusers, highlighting the underlying motives that contribute to high frustration in this population, which can be redirected constructively. Workshops should raise awareness about avoiding drug use and implementing addiction intervention strategies, as well as promoting relaxation techniques such as yoga, meditation, and cognitive behavioral therapy to manage frustration levels. The government must enforce strict regulations and policies to reduce drug abuse while educating

the public about the adverse effects of affluenza and materialism related to addiction. Additionally, parental awareness is crucial; parents should spend quality time with their children to prevent negative behaviors. The uniqueness of this study and its findings could significantly address these issues, particularly in Asian countries like Pakistan, China, India, Singapore, Korea, and Thailand, where drug use prevalence is on the rise.

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