

Research Paper

The Cost of Addiction: A Comparative Study of Meaning in Life, Stress, and Quality of Life

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ABSTRACT

Drug abuse is a growing public health and social problem that involves the excessive use of psychoactive substances. Over time, drug abuse has shifted from a legal issue to complex biopsychosocial problem which highlights the need for identifying psychological factors related to drug addiction. **Objective:** This study aims to examine and compare the Quality of life, meaning in life, and stress among drug addicted and non-addicted individuals. **Method:** The study adopted a quantitative research design, collecting self-reported data from 40 drug addicted individuals and 40 non-addicted individuals. The sample was collected from Agroha Medical College and Maharaja Agarsen Civil Hospital, Hisar. Data was statistically analyzed using descriptive indexes and t test on SPSS-26 using PROCESS macro software. **Results:** The results showed significant difference in mean scores of Quality of life ($t = -2.142, p = .035$) and meaning in life ($t = -4.039, p < .001$), whereas no significant difference was found in the mean scores of stress ($t = -1.658, p = .102$) between drug addicted individuals and non-addicted individuals. **Conclusion:** The findings indicate that there exists a significant difference in Quality of life and meaning in life, whereas no significant difference exists in stress among drug addicted individuals and non-addicted individuals.

Keywords: *Quality of life, Drug Addiction, Meaning in Life, Stress*

What often starts out as curiosity, experimentation, or a way to deal with stress can subtly develop into a dependence that changes one's life. The phenomena of addiction have long been present in human society. Addiction is a social problem that poses a threat to one's bodily and mental well-being. Additionally, it has a lasting impact on the social and economic facets of society (Ahmadvand, 1998). Drug addiction is a chronic relapsing illness marked by compulsive drug use despite serious social, psychological, and bodily repercussions. Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5-TR), define substance use disorder as a maladaptive pattern of substance use that results in clinically significant impairment or distress. Drug addiction has become

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more common in a variety of populations in recent decades due to quick social changes, greater access to psychoactive substances, and higher psychosocial stress. Several findings indicate that physical and psychological effects of addiction can result in a decline in life satisfaction and Quality of life (Bizari, 2005; Smith & Larson, 2003).

Quality of life is defined as a person's subjective assessment of their position in relation to culture, values, objectives, expectations, and concerns (Barbot, 2001). Research indicates that Quality of life is found lower among drug addict individuals than non-addict individuals (Ghamari, 2010). A comparative study found that higher level of depression is found in drug addicted individuals than non-addicted individuals and sense of meaning in life played a mediating role between hostility and depression among both groups (Li et al., 2023). According to Victor Frankl (1963) desire for meaning is the basic human urge and that an existential vacuum marked by feelings of tension, despair, and emptiness arises when this need is not met. To momentarily escape psychological discomfort, people who feel meaningless may turn to unhealthy coping strategies like substance abuse. In addition to reducing symptoms, a recent study found that older persons with problematic alcohol use who had a sense of purpose and meaning in life had considerably better recovery results (McInerney et al., 2025)

Drug addiction is a long-term illness that frequently coexists with other mental health conditions. It is shown in research that drug addiction mostly frequent co-occurs with sadness and anxiety (Flavio 2005; Harrell & Karim 2008). A systematic review showed that the intensity of addiction was highly connected with anxiety and depression levels, and those with drug use disorders had greater rates of these conditions than the general population (AlQubali et al., 2025). Substance use disorder is both a maladaptive coping response to stress and a chronic condition that further deteriorates quality of life across multiple domains, thereby perpetuating psychological distress.

Theoretical perspectives suggest that a lack of meaning may increase vulnerability to maladaptive coping such as substance use (Frankl, 1963), while stress appraisal and coping processes influence psychological outcomes and well-being (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Therefore, comparing addicted and non-addicted groups helps determine whether reduced meaning and elevated stress are distinguishing psychological markers of addiction and whether these variables significantly impact overall quality of life.

Objective:

1. To assess the quality of life between drug addicted and non-addicted individuals.
2. To assess the meaning in life between drug addicted and non-addicted individuals.
3. To examine the level of stress between drug addicted and non-addicted individuals.

Hypotheses:

1. There will be significant difference in quality of life between drug addicted and non-addicted individuals.
2. There will be significant difference in meaning in life between drug addicted and non-addicted individuals.
3. There will be significant difference in level of stress between drug addicted and non-addicted individuals.

METHODS

Sample

Data was collected from 50 drug addicted and 47 non-addicted at Agroha medical college and Maharaja Agarsen Civil Hospital, Hisar, using a convenience sampling technique. After excluding questionnaires with missing data, the final sample size for this study was 80 which consists of 40 drug addicted individuals and 40 non-addicted individuals. The effect size for an appropriate sample size in the test was determined using a priori power analysis for independent means with 'G*Power' software. At an effect size of 0.80, with a significant p-value of <0.05 and a one tailed test, the minimum required sample size was determined to be 70. Our sample size of 40 for both drug-addicted and non-addicted individuals (totaling 80) exceeds the calculated value.

Inclusion Criteria

- Voluntary participation
- Ongoing drug addiction treatment

Exclusion Criteria

- Having severe psychological ailment
- Having any other treatment or intervention

Ethical Consideration:

The current study seeks to investigate the stress, meaning in life, and Quality of life among individuals. The following consent form was given to the chosen participants after they were instructed on the purpose of the study before the required information was collected.

If you volunteer to participate, you will be required to fill out a questionnaire that will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. The questionnaire will cover topics related to meaning in life, stress and quality of life. Your responses will be kept private and will not be disclosed to everyone. Your input on this questionnaire will help us to have a great insight on the role of work-life balance in the legal profession.

Assessment:

- **Quality of Life:** The World Health Organization (WHO) Quality of Life (QOL) scale is a tool that assesses a person's perception of their quality of life. The WHOQOL-BREF is a 26-item self-report questionnaire that assesses four domains of QOL: Physical health: Includes items on mobility, daily activities, pain, and sleep; Psychological health: Includes items on negative thoughts, self-image, and self-esteem; Social relationships: Includes items on personal relationships, social support, and sex life, Environment: Includes items on freedom, physical safety, and security. Each domain is rated on a 5-point Likert scale, and raw scores are converted to a score ranging from 0 to 100.
- **Meaning in Life:** The Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ) developed by Michael F. Steger, consists of 10 items divided into two subscales: Presence of Meaning, which measures the level to which individuals feel that their lives have purpose and significance, and Search for Meaning, which measures the extends to which individuals are actively searching meaning. Each domain is rated on a 7 point Likert scale.
- **Perceived Stress Scale:** The Perceived Stress Scale (S. Cohen & G. Williamson, 1988) is a questionnaire that measures how much someone perceives their life as

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stressful. PSS-10: A shortened 10-item version assesses how unpredictable, uncontrollable, and overloaded someone feels their life is. It also includes questions about current levels of stress. A 10-item questionnaire called the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10) assesses an individual's perceived level of stress over the past 30 days. The scale is scored on a 5-point Likert scale, with 0 indicating "never" and 4 indicating "very often". The range of total score is from 0 to 40 and greater perceived stress indicated by higher scores.

Statistical Analysis:

The collected data was statistically examined with the help of (model-4) PROCESS macro software by Hayes (Hayes, 2013; 2017) and SPSS-26 (Statistical Package of Social Sciences) using descriptive analysis and t test.

RESULTS

Demographic Variables:

A total of 80 participants data were analyzed, comprising 40 addicted and 40 non-addicted individuals. Participants ranged in age from 20 to 50 and were also asked to evaluate the reason for taking drugs where 27 participants reported the peer influence, 7 participants reported curiosity, 2 participants reported breakup and 4 participants reported family issue. Fig 1 represents the reasons for starting taking drugs among addicted individuals. Table 1 shows the descriptive analysis for the group, viz., drug-addicted and non-addicted, for the variables of quality of life, meaning in life, and stress.

Fig. 1 represents the reasons for starting taking drugs among addicted individuals.

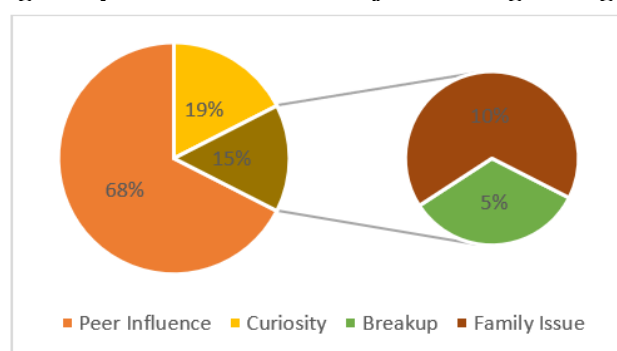


Table 1 Descriptive Statistics for the Variables of Quality of Life, Meaning in Life, and Stress.

Variable	Group	N	Mean	SD	SEM
Quality of Life	Drug Addicted	40	39.95	7.132	1.128
	Non-Addicted	40	42.65	3.563	.563
Meaning in Life	Drug Addicted	40	39.40	5.256	.831
	Non-Addicted	40	47.70	11.887	1.879
Stress	Drug Addicted	40	17.90	5.256	.831
	Non-Addicted	40	19.68	4.269	.675

Note: 'N-Number of participants, SD-Std. Deviation, SEM- standard error mean'

Table 1 demonstrated that the mean value for drug addicted on quality of life is 39.95 (SEM=1.128) with an SD is 7.132. The mean value for non-addicted on quality of life is 42.65 (SEM=.563) with an SD is 3.563. The mean value for drug addicted on meaning in

life is 39.40 (SEM=.831) with an SD is 5.256. The mean value for non-addicted on meaning in life is 47.70 (SEM=1.879) with an SD is 11.887. The mean value for drug addicted on stress is 17.90 (SEM=.831) with an SD is 5.256, and the mean value for non-addicted on stress is 19.68 (SEM=.675) with an SD is 4.269.

Table 2: Independent Samples Test

Variable	Mean Difference	SEM	T	df	Sig.
QoL	-2.700	1.261	-2.142	78	.035*
Meaning In Life	-8.300	2.055	-4.039	78	.000**
Stress	-1.775	1.071	-1.658	78	.101

Note: 'QoL- Quality of Life, SEM- standard error mean'

Table 2 depicts the results of the independent sample t-test on the variables of quality of life, meaning in life, and stress, which is used to assess the mean differences between the drug addicted and non-addicted individuals. The mean difference for the variable of Quality of Life was -2.700 (SEM = 1.261), which was statistically significant ($t(78) = -2.142$, $p=.035$). This showed that individuals who don't have an addiction had much higher quality of life scores than individuals who do. The mean difference for the variable of meaning in life was -8.300 (SEM=2.055), which was statistically significant ($t(78) = -4.039$, $p < .001$), which means that non addicted individuals reported significantly higher levels of meaning in life. The mean difference in stress, -1.775 (SEM = 1.071), did not achieve statistical significance, $t(78) = -1.658$, $p = .101$, indicating no substantial difference in stress levels between the drug addicted and non-addicted individuals.

DISCUSSION

The study aimed to compare the QoL, meaning in life and Stress among drug addicted and non-addicted individuals. The findings revealed a significant difference in QoL, meaning in life, whereas no significant difference was reported in stress between drug addicted and non-addicted individuals. The lower levels of meaning in life in non-addicted individuals may be attributed to Victor Frankl's Logotherapy (Frankl,1963). As when individuals fail to find purpose, they may experience an existential vacuum, which can lead to maladaptive behaviors such as substance abuse. The findings are consistent with previous research; a comparative study by Eryilmaz (2014) found that substance abusers find it more difficult than non-abusers to set meaningful life objectives and give their lives purpose. Armoon et al. (2022) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis, which showed that individuals with substance use disorders report significantly poor QoL than non- substance users. Similarly, Chahua et al. (2015) and Kumar et al. (2018) discovered that drug users had noticeably worse health-related quality of life, especially when co-occurring psychiatric issues were present. Additionally, individuals may use substance to cope with emotional pain or lack of fulfillment.

It has long been known that stress has a significant impact on substance use habits (Sinha et al., 2000; Hyman et al., 2007; Sinha, 2008). However, the present study did not find a significant difference in stress between substance users and non-substance users. The results may be due to that individuals may have started taking drugs as a maladaptive strategy to cope with the stress, which leads to lower QoL. One possible explanation could be that stress is a common experience across general populations, as both groups may have experienced environmental and interpersonal stressors. According to the Self-Medication Hypothesis, people may use psychoactive substances in an effort to control negative affect in

order to cope with psychological anguish or emotional suffering (Khantzian, 1997). A study by Tavoracci et al. (2013) showed that perceived stress was linked to certain health risky behaviors but was not consistently linked to all types of substance use, indicating that there may not always be a significant difference in stress levels between people who use drugs and those who do not.

Conclusion and Implications:

The present findings highlight the importance of psychological interventions in addiction treatment programs. Rehabilitation programs could focus on inclusive programs such as strengthening social support networks and interpersonal relationships. Studies indicate that a biopsychosocial approach should be followed as psychosocial elements like trauma, social settings, and psychological distress have been found to be important determinants influencing addiction risk and relapse (Sinha, 2024; Guo et al., 2024). Further, stress management skills may benefit the broader population. Therefore, the results highlight the importance for community based mental health programs.

Limitations and Future Directions:

The present study finds an important finding; however, it is not short of limitations. Large samples could be used in future researches as large samples would improve the representativeness of results. Further, demographic characteristics such as age and gender could be explored for possible variations. The present study collected data on a self-report basis; mixed methods could be employed to address the methodological concerns. The participants were also drawn from a specific area, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Therefore, future researchers could employ large and diverse samples, longitudinal designs, and multi-method assessments to gain a comprehensive understanding of psychological factors.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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