

ORIGINAL ARTICLE:

Exploring the Relationship between Meaning in Life and Psychological Distress in Male Patients with Substance Use Disorder in Pakistan

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Submitted: 2 August 2023

Accepted: 31 December 2025

ABSTRACT

OBJECTIVE

To examine the relationship between psychological discomfort and life's purpose in Pakistani men with drug use disorders.

STUDY DESIGN

Correlational Study.

PLACE & DURATION OF STUDY

The study was conducted at Bacha Khan Medical Complex/Gajju Khan Medical College Swabi in a duration of 5 months from March 2023 to July 2023.

METHOD

Male participants with a diagnosis of a drug use problem who were at least 18 years old were sought out for the research from local clinics and treatment facilities for drug misuse. The Purpose in Life Test (PIL) and the Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI) were used to assess psychological discomfort and meaning in life, respectively.

RESULTS

100 male patients with drug use disorders were included. The participants' average age was 35.4 years (SD: 8.6), and average duration of drug abuse was 9.2 years (SD: 4.3). The mean psychological distress among individuals was modest (M=2.3, SD=0.7). The average PIL score was 42.1 (SD=9.6), which indicates a moderate degree of life meaning.

CONCLUSION

The results showed a significant inverse relationship between psychological discomfort and perceived meaning in life, showing that those who reported greater levels of perceived meaning in life tended to suffer lower levels of psychological distress.

KEYWORDS

Substance abuse, Drug addiction, Meaning in life, Psychological distress, Mental discomfort, Purpose in life.

INTRODUCTION

A critical public health issue that affects millions of individuals worldwide is substance use disorder (SUD). According to research, people with SUD often feel psychological discomfort, which may include signs like poor self-esteem, anxiety, and sadness. Additionally, studies have shown that having a sense of purpose in life may significantly contribute to lowering psychological discomfort in those with SUD. Numerous studies have examined the connection between men with SUD¹ and their sense of purpose in life. These studies show that persons who report a stronger feeling of purpose in life frequently suffer from lower levels of psychological pain, whereas people who report a lower sense of purpose in life generally experience higher levels of psychological distress².

This connection may be attributed to the reality that individuals with SUD often feel desperation and hopelessness, which may lead to a feeling of meaninglessness. On the other side, having an awareness of direction and purpose in life may provide someone a sense of meaning, which may fend off the detrimental consequences of psychological distress³. Additionally, studies have shown that people with SUD may have a higher sense of significance in life when they participate in activities that are congruent with their beliefs and aspirations. For instance, taking part in drug misuse treatment programs, developing strong social ties, and engaging in meaningful employment or hobbies may all help one feel more purposeful in life⁴.

Overall, the link between psychological distress and wisdom of determination in life in male SUD patients emphasizes the need to address existential issues in drug addiction treatment⁵. Clinicians may be able to lessen psychological suffering and enhance treatment results in this demographic by assisting people in finding significance and determination in their lives. A sense of purpose in life may be difficult to discover for those with SUD who have gone through trauma or other negative life experiences. Trauma and negative life experiences may interfere with a person's feeling of security, stability, and coherence in the world, making it challenging to learn the logic of sense and purpose⁶. In order to assist patients regain sense and purpose in their lives, physicians must address trauma and negative life experiences as part of drug misuse therapy. Reducing psychological suffering in people with SUD⁷ has shown potential effects from interventions that seek to provide purpose in life. For instance, it has been shown that therapies like existential psychotherapy (EP) and meaning-centered therapy (MCT) help people with SUD find more purpose in their lives and lessen their psychological pain. These treatments support people in exploring their values, objectives, and beliefs as well as in finding coherence and meaning in their lives⁸.

Additionally, studies have demonstrated that spirituality and religion may significantly improve meaning in life and lessen psychological discomfort in those with SUD. For some people, religion and spirituality provide a framework for understanding their experiences, determining their purpose and direction, and forming relationships with others. Therefore, to aid patients in discovering a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives, therapists may think about including spiritual and religious components into drug misuse therapy. The current study aims at finding the relationship between psychological discomfort and life's purpose in Pakistani men with drug use disorders.

METHODS

Participants

Male participants with a diagnosis of a drug use problem who were at least 18 years old were sought out for the research. The local area's clinics and treatment facilities for drug misuse served as the source of participants. Each subject gave their informed consent.

Instruments

Standardised tests were employed in the research to gauge individuals' degrees of psychological discomfort and sense of purpose. The Purpose in Life Test (PIL) and the Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI) were used to assess psychological discomfort and meaning in life, respectively.

Procedure

After institutional ethical approval, participants were invited to fulfill the BSI and PIL during their typical therapy sessions. Participants were allowed as much time as required to do the questionnaires, which were distributed in a private space. Participants were told that their participation was optional and that their answers would be kept confidential. All participants gave informed consent, voluntary involvement and the confidentiality of their answers were guaranteed. Statistical software was used to analyze the data. To describe the sample, descriptive statistics were computed for psychological distress and purpose in life. The relationship between the variables was analyzed through correlations and Multiple regression analysis after controlling for age and drug use severity.

RESULTS

100 male patients with drug use disorders were included. The participants' average age was 35.4 years (SD: 8.6), and average duration of substance abuse was 9.2 years (SD: 4.3).

The mean psychological distress among individuals was modest ($M=2.3$, $SD=0.7$). The average PIL score was 42.1 ($SD=9.6$), which indicated a moderate degree of life meaning.

A Pearson correlation analysis revealed a moderate negative link between psychological distress and purpose in life ($r=-0.53$). This showed that people who reported greater sense of meaning in their daily lives exhibited lesser psychological discomfort.

When adjusting for age and the intensity of drug use, multiple regression analysis was used to determine if meaning in life predicted psychological discomfort. Even after adjusting for age and the intensity of drug use, the findings revealed that meaning in life was a significant predictor of psychological discomfort ($=-0.46$).

Table 1
Correlation between Meaning of Life & Psychological Distress

Measure	1	2
Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI)	-	-0.53**
Purpose in Life Test (PIL)	-0.53**	-

Table 2
Multiple Regression Analysis for Predicting Psychological Distress

Predictor	B	SE(B)	β
Constant	4.28	0.26	-
Age	0.05	0.02	0.19
Substance Use Severity	0.06	0.03	0.23
Meaning in Life	-0.04	0.01	-0.46**

DISCUSSION

The current research looked at the relationship between psychological distress and purpose in life in male patients with drug use disorders. Our research showed an inverse relationship between psychological discomfort and sense of purpose in life, suggesting that people who felt more purpose in life tended to have less psychological anguish. Furthermore, even after adjusting for age and the intensity of drug use, psychological discomfort was significantly predicted by the sense of purpose in life⁹.

These findings are consistent with prior research demonstrating a beneficial association between a life's mission and enhanced mental wellness^{1,3}. Our findings specifically imply that those with a stronger sense of purpose and direction in life may be better able to handle the difficulties and pressures related to drug use disorder. Contrarily, persons who are devoid of purpose in life may be more susceptible to psychological discomfort and associated issues, such as drug addiction, despair, and anxiety¹⁰.

The results of the current research have significant effects on how drug use disorders are treated. The findings imply that treatments for drug use disorders in men may reduce psychological suffering through improving meaning in life¹¹. For instance, to assist patients in discovering a sense of direction and purpose in their life, physicians may think about introducing existential psychotherapy or meaning-centered therapy into drug misuse treatment. In order to help patients build a stronger sense of meaning and purpose in their life, such treatments may include counseling them in identifying their values, objectives, and priorities¹².

It is crucial to remember that the current research has certain shortcomings. Firstly, there were only male participants in the research, the results may not apply to individuals with drug use disorders who are female¹³. Secondly, the research relied on self-report measures of psychological discomfort and purpose in life, which are prone to biases and errors. More objective measurements of these constructs, including physiological or behavioral signs, might be used in future study. Finally, since the research was cross-sectional in design, the causal link between psychological discomfort and meaning in life cannot be established. Future longitudinal studies might investigate the long-term impact of therapies intended to improve life meaning on psychological discomfort and associated outcomes.

CONCLUSION

The results showed a substantial inverse relationship between psychological discomfort and perceived meaning in life, showing that those who reported greater levels of perceived meaning had lower levels of psychological distress. These findings have significant effects on how drug use disorder is treated. Male patients with drug use disorders may benefit from interventions that provide purpose in life in terms of lessening their psychological discomfort. To further investigate the connection between meaning in life and psychological distress, future research could make use of more accurate measures of both, look at the long-term effects of interventions designed to improve meaning in life, and include female patients.

Overall, the present study adds to the growing body of evidence demonstrating the significance of meaningful in existence for both mental health and wellness. In the context of drug use disorder, the study highlights the need of treating existential issues and providing patients with an understanding of meaning and purpose in their lives. Such treatments might enhance patients' overall quality of life by assisting them in overcoming the difficulties and tensions brought on by drug use disorders.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None

FUNDING

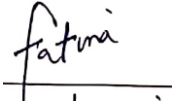
None

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JOURNAL OF PAKISTAN PSYCHIATRIC SOCIETY
(Reviewed Manuscript - Version of Record to Follow)

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