First study based on relational methodology

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In 1984 the first research using relational methodology was carried out. The aim was that of studying what could explain the persistence of addiction in heroin drug-addicts. This short paper describes the steps of this research and the main results obtained.

1. Methodology

The research uses correlation techniques based on dichotomic variables. This choice has allowed to devise a questionnaire with items which could be subject to distorted answers because of social masks.

The questionnaire was divided into:

- ➢ *Key items*, in this case items relative to situations which express the persistence in the state of drug addiction.
- ➢ *Explicative items*, relative to the hypothesis which were tested in this study.
- ➢ Structure items: sex, age, instruction.

The aim of the research is to study which explicative items are linked to the key items.

1.1 Key items

Key items describe the different aspects of the problem, and are therefore non-homogeneous. The study was specifically oriented towards heroin-addicts. The key items which were formulated are:

1. I think I will continue to use drugs for ever.
2. I think that my addiction to heroin is irreversible.
3. Using drugs is a key element of my life.
4. I believe there are ways to come out from my drug addiction.
5. I don't believe there is any alternative to drugs.
6. I have tried several times to come out from drugs.
7. I am trying to quit heroin.
8. I need to continue using heroin.
9. I want to quit heroin.
10. It is difficult to live without heroin.

1.2 Explicative items

Explicative items have been suggested by experts from different sectors:

- ➢ Psychoanalysis:
    - o Regression to the principle of pleasure
    - o Relation with the mother
    - o Attachment to objects
    - o Omnipotence
    - o Persecutory feelings
    - o Guilt complex
    - o Reality principle
- ➢ Relational:
    - o Normal family
    - o Disinterested family
    - o Pathological

- ➢ Theory of needs:
  - o Love need
  - o Value needs

Other items were added to the questionnaire:

- ➢ Items which were considered important even if they were not suggested by a theory.
- ➢ Structure items.
- ➢ Open items.

Basically the study compared 4 theories:

- ➢ The first one, psychoanalysis, which links drug addiction to personalities which have remained fixed to primitive modalities of functioning, refusing independence, and looking for ways to re-establish dependency relations;
- ➢ The second one, from family and relational psychology, which considers a pathological family a factor of risk of drug addiction;
- ➢ The third one, need for love and drug-addiction, which links addiction to the effects similar to love which satisfy the need of love;
- ➢ The fourth one, need of value and drug-addiction, which says that heroin can become the reason for life of the drug-addict, satisfying in this way the need of value.

2. Sample

The questionnaire was distributed in a centre which distributes methadone (S.A.T. RM 5 – Rome, Italy) between the 2nd and the 13th of July 1984. More than 60 questionnaires were returned, but only 58 were completed in all their parts and used in the analysis. The sample is made up of 48 men and 10 women, the average age is 25, and the average period of addiction is 6 years. Only 17 persons had a high-school degree, 23 had a 8th grade degree, 17 a 5th grade degree and 1 had no degree; 26 were employed or working,

32 were unemployed.

3. Data analysis

The analysis was carried out using 2 statistical indexes: Chi Square and r Phi:

- ➢ Chi Square was used to calculate the statistical significance of relations, and only relations with at least 1% of significance (1 possibility of out of 100 to be wrong when stating the existence of the relation) were considered.
- ➢ R-Phi gives the strength of the relation, and the sign.

The correlations among each key item and all the other items of the questionnaire were calculated.

As an example we list the items with which the first key item obtained the highest correlations.

"I think I will continue for ever to use drugs"

Correlates with:

1. Heroin provides me with feelings of heat.
2. Heroin provides me with feelings of love.
3. I did not have stable friendships.
4. Heroin is the reason of my life.
5. Years of drug addiction (higher)

This key item obtains the highest correlations with items suggested by the "*need of love and drug-addiction*" hypothesis; these correlations emerge also with other key variables. The correlation with "Heroin provides me with feelings of heat" is the highest observed in the study, among key items and explicative items.

The fourth correlation "Heroin is the reason of my life" suggests that being addicted can provide a goal, a meaning, and satisfy in this way the need of value. It is interesting to note that this item correlates with many key items.

The 5th correlation was obtained with the number of years the person has used heroin; the greater is the number of years, the greater is the perception that there is no way out of addiction.

7. Discussion

In the following table items are ordered according to the number of significant correlations obtain with the key items.

Number of significant correlations obtained with the key items	
5	Heroin is the reason of my life
4	If I have a dose of heroin with me I feel calmer
3	I feel in love with heroin
3	Heroin provides me with feelings of heat
3	I like the moment when I am preparing the dose
2	Heroin provides me with feelings of love
2	I am always right
2	It is important to share heroin with the one you love
2	I feel very guilty for the problems that my drug addiction is giving to my family
2	My father was often kept out of what was happening in the family

The number of significant correlations obtained can be a useful tool to select the most relevant items. It can be observed that the highest number of correlations obtain is relatively low, 5 out of 10. This tells us that the key variables are dissimilar and show low correlations.

The item "Heroin is the reason of my life" obtains the highest number of correlations. This gives strength to the hypothesis that drugs can satisfy the need of value: when the substance become the reason of one's life it satisfies the need of value and therefore becomes necessary (developing in this way addiction). Without heroin the person is missing a reason, a purposes, and feels the lack of a meaning.

The same considerations emerge analyzing other correlations. For example correlations were between working and believing in the possibility of coming out of heroin. These correlations suggests the importance that work can have in the treatment of drug addicts.

Correlations obtained with the items "I feel in love with heroin", "Heroin provides me with feelings of heat", "Heroin provides me with feelings of love" and "It is important to share heroin with the one you love" can be linked to the need of love. Heroin provides feeling similar to love, satisfying in this way the need of love. These correlations show that heroin obtains its power because it answers the need of love.