

Relationship between the Sense of Life Meaning and the Relapse Tendency of Drug Addicts

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Abstract

To understand the current situation and characteristics of the sense of life meaning and the relapse tendency among drug addicts in Shaoguan Compulsory Isolation Drug Rehabilitation Center, as well as the relationship between them, 143 drug addicts were investigated by using the "Relapse Tendency Questionnaire" and the "Purpose in Life Test Scale" (PIL). The results showed that the overall relapse tendency of drug addicts was relatively low, but there were individual high-risk individuals; the sense of life meaning was at a moderately above-average level, but there were large differences among individuals; factors such as educational background and marital status were not the main influencing factors for the sense of life meaning and the relapse tendency of drug addicts, and the sense of life meaning of migrant workers was the lowest; there was a significant negative correlation between the sense of life meaning and the relapse tendency, and the sense of life meaning could predict the relapse tendency. The results of this study provide important theoretical basis and practical guidance for drug rehabilitation work.

Keywords

Drug Addicts; Sense of Life Meaning; Relapse Tendency.

1. Introduction

Relapse refers to the process in which drug addicts, after successful drug rehabilitation treatment, are unable to maintain a drug-free state for a long period of time and resume using the drugs they were dependent on before detoxification due to various reasons (Liu Jinpeng, 2003). Existing investigations have shown that the early detoxification rate in China's drug rehabilitation work has already reached 100%, but the relapse rate remains as high as 90%. This indicates that drug addicts in China still cannot break away from the vicious cycle of "drug use - drug rehabilitation - drug use again" after the long process of compulsory drug rehabilitation. Therefore, reducing the relapse rate of drug addicts has always been the key and difficult point in drug rehabilitation and anti-drug work.

Currently, the high relapse rate in society has seriously restricted the effective progress of drug rehabilitation work in China. Since 2008, compulsory isolation drug rehabilitation has become the main measure in China's drug rehabilitation system. During this period, drug addicts are required to achieve complete physical detoxification and basically recover both physically and mentally. However, according to the literature (Zhao Na, 2019), the effect of compulsory drug rehabilitation is not significant. Within 90 days after detoxification treatment, the relapse rate is as high as 86.7%. Meanwhile, in recent years, there have been continuous news exposures about the relapse of celebrities and public figures, which reflects the spreading trend of the drug problem. Although China has established a strict anti-drug system, it still fails to completely eradicate the drug problem. This phenomenon has triggered profound thinking: Why is the phenomenon of drug relapse so common?

The relapse behavior of drug addicts is affected by multiple factors. Existing studies have pointed out that the sense of life meaning has a significant impact on the relapse behavior of drug addicts. Among the many challenges in drug rehabilitation work, the issue of relapse has always been one of the core topics. The purpose of this study is to analyze and explore the impact of the sense of life meaning on the relapse behavior of drug addicts, with the expectation of helping drug addicts have a profound understanding of life, accept themselves, strengthen their determination to quit drugs, thereby effectively preventing relapse and promoting their reintegration into society.

The sense of life meaning refers to the extent to which an individual comprehends the meaning of their own life and perceives the purpose, mission, and primary goals of their own life (Steger, M. F., Kashdan, T. B., Sullivan, B. A., et al, 2010). Frankl (1946) formally proposed the concept of life meaning for the first time. The sense of life meaning refers to the process in which people perceive the value of their own life existence based on their experiences and pursue their sense of life value and sense of achievement.

Searching for the meaning of life is the primary motivation of human beings, and substance addiction is the direct consequence caused by the sense of meaninglessness in one's life. Research has confirmed that whether the psychological function is positive is closely related to the sense of life meaning; the causes of certain mental illnesses may also be due to the lack of the sense of life meaning. For example, diseases such as chronic alcoholism, low self-esteem, depression, and self-identity crisis are manifestations of the sense of meaninglessness in life. When an individual is emotionally positive, has a sense of well-being, and is satisfied with life, the sense of life meaning will be significantly higher. Compared with those who have no suicidal thoughts, those who have suicidal thoughts often cannot find the meaning of their "existence". In short, the lack of the sense of life meaning is likely to bring about various psychological problems. It is believed that people will fill this emptiness through drugs, and substance addiction is the direct consequence caused by the sense of meaninglessness in one's life.

It can be seen that simply forcing drug addicts to undergo compulsory drug rehabilitation in compulsory drug rehabilitation centers cannot fully rehabilitate them. While helping drug addicts to get rid of drugs physiologically, helping them find the direction of their future lives and the meaning of their existence is the real value of drug rehabilitation treatment, and it is also the key to making the curative effect last and preventing relapse.

In recent years, the number of studies on the sense of life meaning has been on the rise. However, most of the existing studies have focused on the group of college students on campus, while the research on the sense of life meaning of drug addicts seems relatively scarce. Therefore, by exploring the relationship between the relapse tendency of drug addicts and the sense of life meaning, this study aims to seek a deeper understanding of the relapse problem of drug addicts.

2. Methods

2.1. Research Subjects

Drug addicts in Shaoguan Drug Rehabilitation Center were surveyed in the form of questionnaires, and all questionnaires obtained the written consent of the subjects with their signatures.

2.2. Research Tools

For the sense of life meaning, the "Purpose in Life Test Scale" (PIL) revised by Song Qirong (1992) (Mao Jiru, 2003) was used. The total score of the "Purpose in Life Test Scale" ranges from 20 to 140. A score above 112 means having clear life goals and meaning; a score between 112 and 92 means being uncertain about life meaning and goals, and those with a score below

92 lack life meaning. The higher the score, the more explicit the goals are, that is, the higher the sense of life meaning. This scale consists of 20 items and adopts a seven-point scoring system, with a reliability coefficient of 0.847 (Zhuang Yanjia, 2015).

In the second part, the relapse tendency of drug addicts was measured by the Drug Rehabilitation Willingness Subscale of the "Relapse Tendency Questionnaire" compiled by Geng Wenxiu (Wang Rui, 2001). The total score of the "Relapse Tendency Questionnaire" ranges from 0 to 55. The lower the total score, the lower the relapse tendency, and the higher the total score, the higher the relapse tendency. This part consists of 11 items and adopts a seven-point scoring system, with an α coefficient of 0.86 (Zhang Zhenyu, 2004).

2.3. Research Process

The research adopted cluster sampling. The drug addicts in Shaoguan Drug Rehabilitation Center were selected as the research subjects. After being organized by the staff of the drug rehabilitation center, the integrated questionnaire composed of the "Purpose in Life Test" (PIL) and the "Relapse Tendency Questionnaire" was distributed with consent, and the questionnaires were collected on the spot. A total of 150 questionnaires were received, among which 143 were valid, with a validity rate of 95%. There were 19 drug addicts aged 20 - 29, 67 drug addicts aged 30 - 39, 41 drug addicts aged 40 - 49, and 16 drug addicts aged 50 - 60, totaling 143.

2.4. Data Processing

The SPSS 24.0 software was used to conduct statistical analysis on the data.

3. Results

3.1. Analysis of Demographic Variables of Drug Addicts

All of the 143 drug addicts are male. Age distribution: There are 19 people aged between 20 - 29, accounting for 13.3%; 67 people aged 30 - 39, accounting for 46.8%; 41 people aged 40 - 49, accounting for 28.7%; and 16 people aged 50 and above, accounting for 11.2%. Educational level: There are 39 people with primary school education or below, accounting for 27.3%; 81 people with junior high school education, accounting for 56.6%; 21 people with technical secondary school or high school education, accounting for 14.7%; and 2 people with junior college or undergraduate degree or above, accounting for 1.4%. Previous occupations: There are 29 unemployed people, accounting for 20.3%; 43 self-employed or business people, accounting for 30.1%; 26 farmers, accounting for 18.2%; 32 migrant workers, accounting for 22.4%; 6 workers, accounting for 4.2%; 3 staff members of state organs, accounting for 2.1%; and 4 people in other occupations, accounting for 2.8%. Marital status: There are 55 unmarried people, accounting for 38.5%; 52 married people, accounting for 36.4%; 35 divorced people, accounting for 24.5%; and 1 widowed person, accounting for 0.7%. Drug-taking methods: There are 131 people who take drugs by inhalation, accounting for 91.6%; 3 people who take drugs orally, accounting for 2.1%; and 9 people who take drugs by injection, accounting for 6.3%.

It can be seen that drug addicts are mainly concentrated in the age group of 30 - 39 years old; their educational levels are generally not high, mainly at the junior high school level; their occupational backgrounds are diverse, mainly being self-employed or engaged in business; the proportions of unmarried and married individuals are similar; and most of them take drugs by inhalation. According to the frequency analysis results of each variable, it can be seen that the distribution basically meets the requirements of the sampling survey.

3.2. Descriptive Statistical Analysis of Relapse Tendency and Sense of Life Meaning

The total score of the "Relapse Tendency Questionnaire" ranges from 0 to 55, with a median value of 27.5. The lower the total score, the lower the relapse tendency, and the higher the total score, the higher the relapse tendency. As can be seen from Table 1, most of the respondents scored less than the median value on the relapse tendency scale, which proves that the overall relapse tendency of drug addicts in Shaoguan Compulsory Isolation Drug Rehabilitation Center is relatively low; however, the highest score reached 47, indicating that there are also individual cases with serious relapse tendencies.

The total score of the "Purpose in Life Test Scale" (PIL) ranges from 20 to 140. A score above 112 means having clear life goals and meaning; a score between 112 and 92 means being uncertain about life meaning and goals, and those with a score below 92 lack life meaning. The higher the score, the stronger the sense of life meaning. In this test, the minimum score of the sense of life meaning is 20, the maximum score is 121, and the mean value is 74.99 ± 19.29 . In terms of the score of the sense of life meaning, the mean value of 75 indicates that the sense of life meaning of the respondents is generally at a moderately above-average level; the minimum value of 20 and the maximum value of 121 indicate that the range of the sense of life meaning scores is relatively wide, and there are large differences in the sense of life meaning among drug addicts.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Relapse Tendency and Sense of Life Meaning

Variables	<i>n</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Relapse Tendency	143	2	47	10.55	6.04
Sense of Life Meaning	143	20	121	74.99	19.29

3.3. Analysis of the Differences in the Sense of Life Meaning and Relapse Tendency among Drug Addicts with Different Educational Backgrounds

It can be seen from Table 2 that there are no significant differences in the sense of life meaning and relapse tendency among drug addicts with different educational backgrounds. That is to say, educational background is not a factor that affects the sense of life meaning and relapse tendency of drug addicts.

Table 2. Analysis of the Differences in the Sense of Life Meaning and Relapse Tendency of Drug Addicts at Different Educational Levels

Variables	Dimension	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>LSD</i>
Tendency of Drug Addicts	Primary school or below	39	10.92	5.84	0.213	0.887	/
	Junior high school	81	10.27	6.56			
	Technical secondary school or high school	21	11	4.11			
	Junior college or above	2	12.5	3.54			
Sense of Life Meaning	Primary school or below	39	75.87	18.86	0.245	0.864	/
	Junior high school	81	73.95	20.46			
	Technical secondary school or high school	21	76.71	16.13			
	Junior college or above	2	82	19.80			

3.4. Analysis of the Differences in the Sense of Life Meaning and Relapse Tendency among Drug Addicts of Different Occupations

It can be seen from Table 3 that there are no significant differences in the relapse tendency among drug addicts of different occupations. However, there are significant differences in the sense of life meaning among drug addicts of different occupations. Through multiple comparisons, it is found that this difference is mainly manifested in that the sense of life meaning of migrant workers is lower than that of all other occupational groups.

Table 3. Analysis of the Differences in the Sense of Life Meaning and Relapse Tendency of Drug Addicts by Occupation

Variables	Dimension	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>LSD</i>
Tendency of Drug Addicts	Unemployed	29	12.34	8.39	1.499	0.183	/
	Self-employed, in business	43	9.47	4.99			
	Farmer	26	10.31	6.56			
	Migrant worker	32	11.72	4.52			
	Worker	6	8.17	2.86			
	Staff member of state organs	3	11.33	3.22			
	Others	4	5.75	1.71			
Sense of Life Meaning	Unemployed	29	76	16.15	2.283*	0.039	1>4,2>4,3>4,5>4,6>4,7>4
	Self-employed, in business	43	77.91	16.13			
	Farmer	26	75.88	20.24			
	Migrant worker	32	65.5	23.79			
	Worker	6	82	16.44			
	Staff member of state organs	3	80.33	14.29			
	Others	4	92	8.91			

Note: 1. Unemployed; 2. Self-employed, in business; 3. Farmer; 4. Migrant worker; 5. Worker; 6. Staff member of state organs; 7. Others.

p* < 0.05, *p* < 0.01.

3.5. Analysis of the Differences in the Sense of Life Meaning and Relapse Tendency among Drug Addicts with Different Marital Statuses

Table 4. Analysis of the Differences in the Sense of Life Meaning and Relapse Tendency of Drug Addicts by Marital Status

Variables	Dimension	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>LSD</i>
Tendency of Drug Addicts	Unmarried	55	11.4	7.19	0.836	0.476	/
	Married	52	9.79	5.72			
	Divorced	35	10.63	4.07			
	Widowed	1	6	.			
Sense of Life Meaning	Unmarried	55	76.4	21.19	0.226	0.878	/
	Married	52	73.96	17.31			
	Divorced	35	74.09	19.62			
	Widowed	1	83	.			

It can be seen from Table 3 that there are no significant differences in the sense of life meaning and relapse tendency among drug addicts with different marital statuses. That is to say, marital status is not a factor that affects the sense of life meaning and relapse tendency of drug addicts.

3.6. Correlation and Regression Analysis of the Sense of Life Meaning and Relapse Tendency among Drug

Addicts It can be seen from Table 5, according to the results of the correlation analysis, that there is a significant negative correlation between the sense of life meaning and the relapse tendency, indicating that the stronger the perception of life meaning by drug addicts, the lower the possibility of their relapse.

Table 5. Correlation Analysis (r) of the Sense of Life Meaning and Relapse Tendency among Drug Addicts

Variables	Relapse Tendency	Sense of Life Meaning
Relapse Tendency	1	
Sense of Life Meaning	-0.248**	1

To further examine the strength of the relationship between the sense of life meaning and the relapse tendency, a univariate regression analysis was conducted to clarify whether the sense of life meaning can play a predictive role in the relapse tendency. The results are shown in the following table:

Table 6. Regression Analysis of the Sense of Life Meaning on the Relapse Tendency among Drug Addicts

Dependent Variable	Predictor Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>Standard B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	<i>F</i>
Relapse Tendency	Sense of Life Meaning	0.076	0.035	-2.155*	-0.248	0.062	18.012***

The regression analysis shows that the sense of life meaning of drug addicts can negatively predict their relapse tendency. Drug addicts with a stronger sense of life meaning have a lower relapse tendency.

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1. Demographic Characteristics of Drug Addicts

This study has revealed the characteristics of drug addicts in terms of age, educational level, occupational background, and marital status. These findings are in line with some trends in the existing literature, but there are also some differences that are worthy of further exploration.

The study shows that individuals in the 30 - 39 age group are the main component of drug addicts. This result is consistent with previous studies, indicating that young and middle-aged groups are more vulnerable to the influence of drugs when facing life pressures (Li, M. D., & Vitiello, B., 2009). People in this age group are usually at a crucial stage of their career and may also be shouldering family responsibilities simultaneously, which increases the possibility of their seeking to escape from reality or relieve stress. However, there are also studies suggesting that with the changes in socioeconomic conditions, the proportion of drug use among the younger generation (under 20 years old) and the elderly group (over 40 years old) is also on the rise, reminding us that we need to pay attention to the specific challenges faced by people of different age groups.

It was found that most drug addicts have a relatively low educational level, mainly with a junior high school education. This is consistent with the results of other studies, indicating that a lower

educational level may be a factor that makes individuals more likely to get involved in drug use (Kandel, D. B., & Logan, J. A., 1984). A lower level of education restricts an individual's problem-solving ability and social adaptability, making them more inclined to adopt irrational means to cope with difficulties in life.

The results show that the occupational backgrounds of drug addicts are diverse, but mainly self-employed individuals and businessmen. This conclusion supports the previous research findings on the association between unstable working environments, higher-risk occupations and drug use (Bryant, K. J., Bone, L. D., & Corbett, C., 2007). Such occupations are often accompanied by greater economic volatility and complexity of social circles, thus providing more opportunities for exposure to drugs.

Studies have shown that the proportion of unmarried and married individuals is similar. This phenomenon reflects that regardless of whether people have stable family relationships or not, they are all facing different degrees of mental health risks. Previous studies have also pointed out a similar situation, that is, the role of marital status in preventing drug abuse is limited (Moos, R. H., Finney, J. W., & Ouimette, P. C., 1999). This means that in addition to strengthening family support, it is also necessary to attach importance to individual-level psychological intervention measures.

Finally, most drug addicts take drugs by inhalation. This method has become one of the most common ways of taking drugs due to its convenience and concealment. Existing studies have also confirmed the trend of inhalation as the main means of taking drugs (Volkow, N. D., Wang, G. J., Fowler, J. S., et al., 2000), emphasizing the importance of strengthening the supervision of public places and reducing the channels for the circulation of illegal drugs.

4.2. General Analysis of the Sense of Life Meaning and Relapse Tendency among Drug Addicts

The results show that the relapse tendency of drug addicts in Shaoguan Compulsory Isolation Rehabilitation Center is relatively low. This result may reflect the effectiveness of the current drug rehabilitation measures and the good self-control ability demonstrated by the participants after receiving treatment. However, the highest score is 47 points, which indicates that although the overall trend is good, there are still a few individuals with a relatively high risk of relapse. For this part of the high-risk population, it is necessary to further take targeted intervention measures, such as strengthening psychological counseling and expanding the social support network, to reduce the possibility of their relapse.

The sense of life meaning among drug addicts is at a moderately high level, which indicates that most drug addicts have begun to form certain life goals, but there is still a certain degree of vagueness or uncertainty regarding the meaning of life. In addition, the difference between the minimum score of 20 points and the maximum score of 121 points illustrates that there are significant individual differences among drug addicts in terms of the sense of life meaning. Such differences may be affected by various factors such as personal experiences, educational backgrounds, and social support.

In response to these findings, the following suggestions can be put forward:(1) For those individuals with a higher tendency to relapse, more intensive psychological counseling and social support services should be provided to help them build a stronger ability to resist temptations.(2) By carrying out activities such as life education and career planning training, help drug addicts to find and clarify their own life goals, and enhance their sense of life meaning.(3) Considering the differences among individuals, formulate personalized rehabilitation plans to meet the specific needs of different drug addicts and improve the rehabilitation effects.

4.3. Analysis of the Differences in Different Demographic Variables

The data indicate that educational attainment and marital status are not factors that affect the sense of life meaning and relapse tendency of drug addicts. The study by Liu, M., & Li, G. (2015) explored the association between educational level and substance use disorders through the data of the National Survey on Drug Use and Health. Although the study showed that a lower educational level might increase the risk of substance abuse, it did not clearly point out that the educational level directly affects the sense of life meaning or relapse tendency. Moos, R. H., Finney, J. W., & Ouimette, P. C. (1999) stated that marital status has an important impact on rehabilitation, but it is not the only determining factor. This might imply that other factors such as an individual's psychological resilience and social support system are more important.

The study found that the sense of life meaning of migrant workers is significantly lower than that of other occupational groups. This might be attributed to various factors such as poor job stability, lack of social support networks, harsh working conditions, identity issues, and economic pressure. A lower sense of life meaning not only affects an individual's mental health but also might lead to social barriers and a decline in work efficiency. To improve this situation, it is recommended to take comprehensive measures: strengthen the social security system to provide more comprehensive social security services for migrant workers; build community support networks, including psychological counseling and legal assistance, to enhance their sense of belonging and social integration; enterprises should optimize the working environment, arrange working hours reasonably, and improve employees' welfare and treatment to promote physical and mental health; at the same time, carry out vocational skills training and personal development programs to help them enhance their sense of self-worth and development potential.

4.4. Influence of the Sense of Life Meaning on Relapse Tendency

The results show that there is a significant negative correlation between the sense of life meaning and the relapse tendency. The higher the sense of life meaning, the lower the relapse tendency, and the sense of life meaning can predict the relapse tendency. People who are full of hope and have clear goals in life have a more definite and strong confidence in drug rehabilitation, which can, to a certain extent, reduce the occurrence of relapse behavior. Those who live aimlessly and have a low sense of life meaning are more likely to be tempted by drugs again during and after the drug rehabilitation process, leading to relapse.

The individual sense of life meaning is affected by multiple factors. In the complex and diverse modern life, drug addicts are more likely to lose the values and meanings that support social life and fall into an "existential crisis", easily becoming detached from society. Especially in most enterprises and job positions in society, once it is known that a person has a history of drug use, they are easily excluded. This kind of potential discriminatory behavior is difficult to avoid and further worsens the difficult situation of those who have successfully rehabilitated from drugs in social life.

Existential psychology emphasizes the importance of individuals seeking the meaning and purpose of life for their mental health. Frankl (1946) proposed in his work "Man's Search for Meaning" that finding the meaning of life is one of the basic needs of human beings. When individuals feel that their lives are meaningful, they are more likely to adopt a positive attitude towards life, thereby reducing negative behaviors such as substance abuse. For drug addicts, helping them discover and understand the meaning of life can enhance their ability to face challenges and improve their psychological resilience in coping with stress. This helps them maintain a positive attitude during the rehabilitation process and reduces the possibility of relapse.

Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) points out that an individual's intrinsic motivation and autonomy are important driving forces for their behavior. When individuals

perceive the meaning and purpose of life, their intrinsic motivation is stronger, and they are more likely to adopt positive behavior patterns and avoid negative behaviors such as relapse. Specifically, when drug addicts can set and pursue meaningful goals, they are more likely to maintain a positive attitude towards life, thereby reducing the risk of relapse.

Therefore, to reduce the relapse tendency of drug addicts, we can start from enhancing their sense of the meaning of life. Through psychological counseling, life education, career planning and other means, help drug addicts find and clarify their own life goals and enhance their sense of the meaning of life. For example, group discussions, individual counseling and other activities can be carried out to guide them to explore personal values and life goals.

5. Conclusion

Based on the above analysis and discussion, the following conclusions can be drawn:

(1) The compulsory isolated drug addicts are mainly young and middle-aged individuals, with a large proportion being self-employed in business. They are characterized by a low educational level and a higher proportion of being unmarried, and the most common way of taking drugs is inhalation.

(2) The level of the sense of life meaning among drug addicts is at a moderate level, and their relapse tendency is relatively low.

(3) Educational attainment and marital status have no significant impact on the sense of life meaning and relapse tendency of drug addicts. Among them, the level of the sense of life meaning of drug addicts who are migrant workers is the lowest.

(4) There is a significantly negative correlation between the sense of life meaning and the relapse tendency of drug addicts, and the sense of life meaning can predict their relapse tendency to a certain extent.

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