

Mechanisms of Escape and Mindful Attention Awareness of Persons with Substance Related Problems in Select Rehabilitation Centers in Lipa City

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Abstract: The objective of the study was to know the mechanisms of escape and mindful attention awareness of 120 respondents with substance related problem (SRP) in rehabilitation centers in Lipa City, Batangas. The study utilized descriptive and correlational research design; self-constructed and adopted questionnaire to assess the respondents' Mechanisms of Escape (MOE) and Mindful Attention Awareness (MAA) respectively. The data gathered were analyzed using frequency, percentage, weighted mean, T-test/ANOVA and Chi-square. Results shown that majority of the respondents were male, aged 18 to 25 year old, high school graduates, single, age at first drug use was 18 to 25 year old, have been rehabilitated for 1 to 3 months and their occupation before rehabilitation were categorized under blue collar jobs.

The results revealed significant relationship between Mechanisms of Escape (MOE) in terms of (authoritarianism, destructiveness and conformity) and Mindful Attention Awareness (MAA) with the following statistical results ($\chi^2= 536.622$, $p= 0.046$), ($\chi^2= 499.283$, $p= 0.000$) and ($\chi^2= 718.337$, $p=0.000$) respectively, at 0.05 level of significance. Findings elucidated recommendations for local government units, school community and rehabilitation centers. The study suggests future investigation on whether emotional regulation/self-control can serve as the protecting factor in the relationship between MOE and MAA, to test whether socioeconomic status can serve as the mediating factor in the relationship between authoritarianism and mindfulness and social support as the moderating variable in the link between MOE and MAA.

Keywords: mechanisms of escape (MOE), authoritarianism, destructiveness, conformity, mindful attention awareness (MAA), substance related problem (SRP).

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Introduction

Problem on substance use has been one of the controversial issues in the Philippines nowadays. The government is very ambitious in making a drug free country with its initiatives to stop this pervasive and expensive activity that affects the whole society. According to Dangerous Drug Board's (DDB) 2017 Nationwide Survey on the Nature and Extent of Substance Abuse in the Philippines, there were around 1.8 million drug users in the Philippines, around 2.3 percent of the population. The figure has doubled on the second quarter (May) of 2017 as the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) estimated that there were 4.6 million substance use personalities in the country. "It is considered to be the highest figure cited by the administration since launching the drug war last July 2016." The statistics shown was very alarming since Substance Related Problem (SRP) has been one of the grave mental health problems in the country due to its adverse effects.

The researchers argued that it is noteworthy to identify phenomena relative to substance related behaviors. In line with this, the researchers would like to hypothesize if persons with SRP are using mechanisms of escape (MOE), authoritarianism, destructiveness and conformity theorized by Fromm (1942) as cited by Feist and Feist (2008). These are the different forms of escape person with SRP might use when experiencing anxieties. Despite that little has been known if none with regards to studies theorizing Fromm's concept of MOE relative to substance use, the researchers argued that this theory has heuristic value as they believe that it could guide them in solving one of the grave societal problems, to identify this specific phenomenon (MOE) relative to substance use.

In terms of authoritarianism postulated by Fromm (1942) is the tendency to give up the independence of one's own individual self and to fuse one's self with somebody or something outside oneself to acquire the strength which the individual self is lacking. Due to anxiety which produces a frightening sense of aloneness and isolation, the researchers hypothesized that persons with SRP acquire strength by using substance that enable them to become authoritarian when under the influence of drugs. This is related to destructiveness, the second mechanism of escape conceptualized by Fromm (1942).

It is also rooted on the feelings of aloneness, isolation and powerlessness by destroying people and objects; a person or a nation attempts to restore lost feelings of power. They are able to regain their strength by being destructive to the people around them which can be a form of being authoritarian as well when under the influence of drugs. Meadows (2016) claimed that those who are feeling more socially isolated generally deal with increased mental health and substance abuse issues.

American Addiction Center (2018) reported that all forms of domestic violence are influenced by drug addiction or alcoholism. Violence toward domestic partner maybe considered as one of the most concerning and serious issues. Domestic violence is not limited to physical acts such as hitting, punching, slapping or pulling hair. On the other hand, domestic violence which is considered to be legal in nature can also include sexual abuse (e.g. marital rape, threatening a partner in a sexually abusive and demeaning way and molestation) and psychological abuse (e.g. controlling the partner, blackmail, threatening harm to children, violence toward pets and intimidation) as explained by the U.S. Department of Justice.

Meadows (2016) explained that the opposite holds as true as well that addiction to drugs and alcohol may not just be an effect of isolation but also the cause of isolation. This explains that

many individuals resort to substance use whenever they experience aloneness and many experience aloneness because of substance use. Destructive behaviors are evident to persons with SRP to escape from their anxieties that lead them to substance use and/or anxieties brought by the negative impact of drug use.

Moreover, some of the reasons of young people for taking drugs are because they want to fit in, escape from problems, relieve boredom, and seem grown up, rebel and to experiment. Conformity, the third MOE, theorized by Fromm (1942) involves people's way of escaping from a sense of aloneness and isolation by losing their individual self and becoming whatever other people want them to be. It can be related to peer pressure which is an important factor in drug use. Being a member of a social group that they can turn to in time of aloneness and isolation may encourage people to keep on using these substances.

Despite age, status and occupation everyone can be a victim of this public health issue. Difficult as it may be to face one's problems, the consequences of substance use are always worse than the problem one is trying to solve through drug use. Regardless of cost, it is important to consider effective care to ensure that the money invested by the family of the persons with SRP is worth spending for the rehabilitation of their family members for fast recovery and prevention of relapse. As Arnett (2016) claimed that as substance related problems result in greater expense than treatment and service. Regardless of the cost, effective care is worth the money spent. The interventions must be efficient and demonstratively effective despite the limitations and issues in accessing care or treatment.

Mindfulness Therapy has been widely used in treating persons with SRP. Researches on mindfulness have identified these benefits; reduced rumination, stress reduction, boosts working memory, less emotional reactivity, more cognitive flexibility and relationship satisfaction. In the context of the study, mindful attention awareness (MAA), the second phenomenon under study, would help persons with SRP become aware of the cues and triggers, mechanisms of escape, relative to their substance related behavior.

The study of Dakwar *et al.*, (2011) stated that Mindful Attention Awareness deficits the individuals using the substance and impairments in mindful attention may perhaps lead to increased vulnerability to SRP. In addition, the role of mindful attention in protecting against relapse is well-recognized in drug treatment. Relapse prevention through mindfulness therapy emphasizes developing awareness of cues and triggers so that the individuals can be more easily navigated and it encourages participants to remain aware of the consequences of their intentions and decisions, no matter how seemingly irrelevant to substance use.

Hence, researchers would like to determine the link between the mechanisms of escape (MOE) and mindful attention awareness (MAA) of persons with Substance Related Problem (SRP) in select rehabilitation centers in Lipa City, Batangas. This study may specifically be avenues for the persons with SRP on how these MOE can be served as cues and triggers relative to their substance related behavior. As researchers would establish the influence of MOE to substance related behaviors, this study hoped to introduce mindfulness therapy intervention program that would eventually lessen the utilization of the hypothesized mechanisms of escape. Bayles (2014) postulated that as they become cognizant of the cues (MOE) that led to their substance use, they will start accepting their behaviour without being judgmental to themselves. Therefore, they would be mindful to deal with their anxieties without being authoritarian, destructive and to resist conforming to drug related activities of their peer group.

Method

Research Design

The study utilized a descriptive and correlational design. Specifically, it sought to determine the association between the respondents' mechanisms of escape (MOE) and mindful attention awareness (MAA). Mechanisms of escape were treated as an independent variable and mindful attention awareness as the dependent variable. Measures with established acceptable validity and reliability were used to gather data from the respondents.

Participants

The respondents of the study comprised of 120 clients with substance related problems in select rehabilitation centers in Lipa City, Batangas. The respondents was qualified to participate based on the following inclusions and exclusions: (1) must be 18 years old and above to ensure that they have established patterns of behavior concerning MOE and MAA (2) clients rehabilitated due to substance related problems (3) clients rehabilitated due to psychiatric or psychological problems were excluded in the study (4) individuals who are fully recovered and stay in the rehabilitation for After Care, volunteering and employment purposes were also excluded despite they have history of substance use.

Instruments

Self-constructed survey questionnaire was used by the researchers to measure the respondents' MOE. In constructing the questionnaire, the researchers used concepts found in previous research and studies related to their research variables. With author's approval, the researchers adopted the questionnaire of Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) of Kirk Brown and Richard Ryan (2003). The measures consist of statements that describe the respondents' mechanisms of escape and mindful attention awareness.

Sample statements in terms of **authoritarianism** include "*I become aggressive and threaten people around me when I am under the influence of drugs*", "*I feel distressed whenever someone is trying to control me*", "*I befriend people of wealth and authority for my personal protection and to gain power.*" and "*I use drugs to become powerful.*" Sample statements on **destructiveness** include "*I tend to hurt my family members physically (e.g. by hitting, punching, slapping or pulling their hair) when I am on drugs.*", "*I tend to break objects when I am under the effect of illegal drugs.*", "*I use drugs when I feel alone or upset/lonely.*",

"I use drugs to escape from the bad situations I am into." "*I still use drugs even though I know it is bad for my health.*" Lastly, in terms of **conformity** sample items include "*I find it difficult to say no to people.*" "*I do things even though I know they are doing wrong when I am with my friends.*", "*I do not resist whenever my friends invited me to take drugs.*" and "*I always say yes to my friends whenever they invite me to take drugs because I feel accepted by them.*"

The respondents rated their agreement on each statement of the research questionnaires on a 4-point scale: 4 (Strongly Agree), 3 (Agree) 2 (Disagree) and 1 (Strongly Disagree). Experts in the field of Psychology (one psychiatrist and three psychometricians) were also considered for further validation of the research instruments.

The researchers administered a pre-survey or pilot testing to test the reliability of the self-constructed survey questionnaire which comprised of 40 respondents from one of the private rehabilitation centers other than rehabilitation centers under study. After retrieval of the pre-survey questionnaires, the researchers tallied the data and computed for the reliability. The

researchers used SPSS software and Cronbach's Alpha as statistical tool in getting the reliability of the self-constructed survey and adopted questionnaires. Cronbach's coefficients alpha for the whole scale of MOE and MAAS were found to be 0.91 and 0.92 respectively.

Data Gathering Procedure

Letter of request were sent to select Rehabilitation Centers of Lipa City to allow them to conduct the study to their clients with substance related problems. It was imperative to include in the letter the objectives of the study and how rehabilitation centers, mental health professionals and specifically persons with substance related problem will be beneficial in the present study. It also noted that the researchers would follow the terms and conditions that the rehabilitation would impose during the conduct of the study. Upon approval, the researchers conducted the survey as scheduled by the rehabilitation centers. The researchers were deemed important to show professionalism and competence in the conduct of survey. Informed consent as the first part of the questionnaires was important to be discussed to ensure support and cooperation among the respondents. In this regard, the researchers could come up with significant and substantive information. Right after the conduct of data gathering, debriefing and processing activity would be conducted to respondents if the needs had arisen. Lastly, the retrieved questionnaires were tallied, computed, tabulated, interpreted and analyzed.

Results and Discussion

1. Profile of the Respondents

Majority of the respondents were male (f=118, 98%), aged 18 to 25 year old (f=53, 44%), high school graduates (f=68, 57%), single (f=59, 49%), age at first drug use was 18 to 25 year old (46, 38%), have been rehabilitated for 1 to 3 months (f=68,57%) and their occupation before rehabilitation were categorized under blue collar category (f=79,66%).

2. Assessment of the Respondents on Mechanisms of Escape

Table 1. Assessment of Respondents Mechanisms of Escape

Mechanisms of Escape	Composite Mean	Verbal Interpretation
Authoritarianism	2.32	Slight
Destructiveness	2.57	Moderate
Conformity	2.68	Moderate
Overall	2.52	Moderate

Table 1 shows the overall level of mechanisms of escape was Moderate with a composite mean of 2.52. Conformity garnered the highest level of assessment with a composite mean of 2.68 followed by destructiveness and authoritarianism with a weighted mean of 2.57 and 2.32 respectively.

This revealed that the persons with substance related problem are slightly dependent with other people to acquire their lacking strength. Also, the findings is supported by the study of Grann and Fazel (2004) as cited by Desmarais *et al.*, (2016) claimed that the widely recognized risk factors for violent behavior are alcohol and drug use problems. The results also revealed that they use drugs as a form of escape to their loneliness and aloneness despite their knowledge of its adverse effects to their health.

In terms of conformity is supported by the study conducted by Hendricks *et al.*, (2015) which revealed that peer related factors may worsen problematic behaviors substance use. Also, according to him adolescents who are confronted with peer pressure are more likely to

engage in problem behaviors such as substance use, than adolescents who are only bored and or have nothing to do during their spare time. In addition, Liu and Iwamoto (2007) claimed that Asian American men who had peers using substances were two times more probably bingeing drink, thrice more possibly using other illicit drugs and four times more likely using marijuana.

3. Assessment of the Respondents on Mindful Attention Awareness

Table 2. Assessment of the Respondents Mindful Attention Awareness

	Composite Mean	Verbal Interpretation
Mindful Attention Awareness	2.54	Slight

Table 2 shows that the respondents have slight mindful attention awareness with a composite mean of 2.54. The result proved the researchers' assumption that persons with substance related problems have low mindful attention awareness that may lead them or worsen their substance use. The current study was supported the study of Dakwar *et al.*, (2011) which found out that adults seeking treatments for substance abuse had lower mean scores on a measure of trait mindfulness relative to the national comparison group.

4. Significant Difference on the Respondents' Mechanisms of Escape when Grouped according to Profile Variables

T-test and ANOVA were utilized to test significant difference on the respondents Mechanisms of Escape when grouped according to profile variables. The results show on Table 3 that when grouped according to demographic profiles, the mechanisms of escape of the respondents show significant difference in terms of age and sex with a computed value of 1.196, $p=0.045$ and 3.398, $p= 0.016$ respectively.

It only shows that whatever civil status, educational attainment, age of first drug use, length of stay in the rehabilitation center and occupation do not differ on their use of mechanisms of escape. Only age and sex show significant difference in the use of mechanisms of escape. Males have higher rates of substance use than woman.

Table 3. Significant Difference on the Respondents' Mechanisms of Escape when Grouped according to Profile Variables

	Computed Value	P-Value
Age	1.196*	0.045
Sex	3.398*	0.016
Civil Status	1.445	0.080
Highest Educational Attainment	1.476	0.069
Age of 1 st Drug Use	1.476	0.143
Length of Stay in the Rehabilitation Center	1.437	0.084
Occupation before entering the Rehabilitation Center	1.077	0.382
* $p<.05$		

On the other hand, emerging adults aged 18 to 25 and being male are more likely to use mechanisms of escape. It is supported by the study of Stone *et al.*, (2012) discussing that substantial evidence suggests that young adults are at an increased risk of problems if they

are male, have substance-dependent parents, experience externalizing behaviors during adolescence, have favorable attitudes toward substance use, exhibit a lack of belief in conformity or the moral order, have low commitment to school, or if they use substances during adolescence, particularly if they are “early” users.

5. Significant Difference on the Respondents’ Mindful Attention Awareness when Grouped according to Profile Variables

Table 4. Significant Difference on the Respondents’ Mindful Attention Awareness when Grouped according to Profile Variables

	Computed Value	P-Value
Age	1.642	0.055
Sex	2.260	0.054
Civil Status	2.064*	0.009
Highest Educational Attainment	2.020*	0.011
Age of 1 st Drug Use	2.021*	0.011
Length of Stay in the Rehabilitation Center	1.405	0.135
Occupation before entering the Rehabilitation Center	1.368	0.154
*p<.05		

T-test and ANOVA were utilized to test the significant difference on the respondents Mindful Attention Awareness when grouped according to profile variables. The results show that when grouped according to demographic profiles, the mindful attention awareness of the respondents show significant difference in terms of civil status, highest educational attainment and age of 1st drug use with a computed value of 2.064, p=0.009, 2.020, p= 0.011 and 2.021, p= 0.011 respectively.

Since most of the respondents are single, it only shows that single individuals have lower mindful attention awareness when compared to married individuals. The study is supported by Heinz *et al.*, (2008) which postulated that marriage is a protective factor against drug use. The findings suggested that being married and having a close relationship with one’s partner are associated with better outcomes over time which can improve mindfulness on married individuals who have been suffering from substance abuse.

The economist Deaton (2015) discussed that less educated white Americans struggling in the job market in early adulthood are probably experiencing accumulated difficulties over time, including health and personal problems that often result to drug overdoses, alcohol related, liver disease and suicide. Also, Transcend Recovery Community (2015) posited that there is a relationship between addictions on the level of one’s education. It suggested that someone who is educated enough have more resources in facing the challenges in life that can also support their style of living. It was found out that those with low level of education are heavy drinkers and smokers and people who have substance abuse.

The result is parallel to the study of Odgers *et al.*, (2008) which discussed that earlier exposure to alcohol and drugs during adolescents has poor outcomes in adulthood. This explains the significant difference of age 1st drug use in terms of mindful attention awareness. It can be depicted that the earlier an individual got exposed from drugs, the more it can damage the brain functioning resulting to psychological impact of low mindfulness. Possible

damage of brain structure may lead to low mindful attention awareness as it affects its normal functioning.

6. Relationship between Mechanisms of Escape and Mindful Attention Awareness

Chi-square was used to test the relationship between respondents' Mechanisms of Escape in terms of Authoritarianism, Destructiveness and Conformity and Mindful Attention Awareness.

Table 5 presents the summary of computations when testing was done on the relationship that existed between mechanisms of escape and mindful attention awareness of the respondents. The computed value of the test for significant relationship between authoritarianism, destructiveness and the conformity to the level of mindful attention awareness among persons with substance related problem are 536.622, $p = 0.046$, 499.283, $p = 0.000$ and 718.337, $p = 0.000$ respectively.

Table 5. Relationship Between Mechanisms of Escape and Mindful Attention Awareness

Mechanisms of Escape	Computed Value (χ^2)	P-Value
Authoritarianism	536.622*	0.046
Destructiveness	499.283*	0.000
Conformity	718.337*	0.000
* $p < .05$		

Since all the p -values of the three forms of mechanisms of escape are lower than the 0.05 level of significance ($p < 0.05$), the null hypothesis was rejected and concluded that there was a significant relationship that existed between the respondents' assessment on the mechanisms of escape and mindful attention awareness. The result shows that as mechanisms of escape increases, the level of mindful attention awareness decreases. The two variables are inversely related with each other.

Despite low level of being authoritarian, results show its correlation with their level of mindfulness. This only implies that they may not be aware of their behaviour as they agree that they tend to become aggressive and threaten the people around them when they are under the influence of drugs. The respondents disagree that they acquire power and authority over people around them (e.g. family members, peer groups, etc.). It is in contrast with the report of Rappler (2016) wherein it discussed the list of government officials who were connected to drugs. This implies that those persons who have high authority tend to get more involved in illegal drug activities. They use their power to support their wrong doings and provide themselves the security to cover up their illegal activities.

However, in terms of respondents being rehabilitated, they may not be aware that they use authoritarianism as form of escape or defense from situation they lack strength or power due to drug related behaviors. It can be deduced that it is important to consider socioeconomic status in future studies as it may result difference in the level of assessment of authoritarianism and mindfulness among varied socioeconomic demographic.

On the other hand, the relationship of destructiveness to mindfulness is being supported by the study of Tang *et al.*, (2016) postulated that clinical symptoms of addiction are craving, impulsivity, negative mood and increased stress reactivity. These symptoms cause damage in

some brain areas. The persons who use drugs feel rewarded (e.g. feeling of euphoria) with its effects resulting to psychological dependence. It means, every time they feel stressed they resort to drugs as a form of escape to their situation (e.g. loneliness, isolation and anxiety). During the time that they use drugs, they consider more of its temporary rewarding effect especially when they try to escape from being alone and lonely and became unmindful of its negative impact to their health and occupational and social relationships. Since substance use is related to craving, impulsivity, negative mood and stress reactivity, all related to disrupted emotional regulation processes, it can be deduced that that it is important to take into consideration to investigate on the relationship between substance use, emotional regulation and mindful attention awareness.

Lastly, the relationship between conformity and mindfulness is evident in the study of Tarantino *et al.*, (2015) revealed that parent–child conflict was related to low mindfulness when self-control was low. This results to more intense drug related problems when low in mindfulness. Since they have low self-control, this may lead to conform to their peer group which can influence them to substance related activities.

7. Proposed Research Intervention Program: Mindful Attention Awareness Therapy

As person with substance related problem escape from their anxieties, being mindful is the opposite of this behavior. It will help them cope without being disturbed, anxious and lonely. They will detach themselves from those sensations and learn positive coping and not to resort with drug use.

Objectives

- To develop trust through different awareness and observation exercise.
- To increase commitment to treatment
- To reduce anxiety through mindfulness on cues and triggers relative to substance use such as isolation, loneliness, authoritarianism, destructiveness and conformity

Implementing Institution/Target Group: Rehabilitation Centers Treatment Team and Persons with Substance Related Problems

Date of Implementation: On the 4th to 6th month of stay in the rehabilitation as the persons with substance related problem may have adjusted to the rehabilitation process already.

Expected Outcome: Persons with substance related problems will become mindful of the cues and triggers relative to substance use; they will also become aware on the negative impacts of using the mechanisms of escape (authoritarianism, destructiveness, conformity) to their physical, psychological, occupational and social relationships.

The therapy may also include plans and skills training on how to deal with their peer groups without conforming to their drug related activities. In this way, they would be mindful to deal with their anxieties without being authoritarian, destructive and to resist conforming to drug related activities of their peer group. Clients will be taught on ways to seek for social support in time of anxiety and loneliness and not to isolate themselves and resort to drug use.

Recommendations

1. The researchers recommend to the local government units educational programs and assistance among disadvantaged high school graduates (18-25 years of age) as they are prone to substance use. They can also develop programs in community level about anti-drug

campaign/awareness for them to be educated to the negative impacts of drugs in their biopsychosocial well-being.

2. The result of this study can serve as a basis for school based intervention program/s to minimize the possible utilization of Mechanisms of Escape among students for both prevention and intervention purposes (e.g. anti-drug seminar, individual interview, counselling, etc.). On the other hand, Peer Counseling can also be strengthened so that students will avoid isolation in times that they are lonely and not to resort to drug intake when they experience anxieties.

3. The result of this study could serve as input in instruction, research and extension in both BS Psychology and BS Criminology Programs.

4. This study could serve as basis in the rehabilitation centers treatment program. Mindfulness Therapy is the main objective of this study. Since Mechanisms of Escape is proven to be related to Mindfulness, cues and triggers relative to drug use such as loneliness, isolation, authoritarianism, destructiveness, conformity, etc. can be used as prime consideration in their treatment plan.

5. To future psychologists, the result of this study could serve as basis in their practice when treating persons with substance related problems.

6. To the future researchers, results of this study suggest investigating on whether emotional regulation/self-control can serve as a protecting factor in the relationship between substance use, mechanisms of escape and mindful attention awareness. It is also to consider socioeconomic status as mediating factor in the relationship between authoritarianism and mindfulness. Lastly, social support can be tested as the moderating variable in the relationship between mechanisms of escape and mindful attention awareness since persons with substance related problem tend to resort to drug use when feeling alone and lonely.

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