Locus of control in narcotic addicts: State or trait phenomenon?

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LOCUS OF CONTROL IN NARCOTIC ADDICTS: STATE OR TRAIT PHENOMENON

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PROBLEM

Heroin addicts assigned to a state-operated residential treatment center were administered the Rotter I-E Locus of Control Scale (Rotter®) as part of a routine psychological test battery. When financial difficulties precipitated a surprise announcement that the center soon would be closed and all its residents released, the I-E scale was readministered. The purpose was to explore the changes attributable to the “experimental manipulation” caused by the facility’s closing. In preparing to cope with the outside world again, a shift toward increased internality in the addicts’ attitudes toward themselves was anticipated.

METHOD

Subjects. The 31 Negro and Puerto Rican male heroin addicts of low socioeconomic status. All were criminally committed to the treatment center from New York City, for a period not to exceed 36 months (midsemester) or 60 months (fall semester). The average stay at this facility was 9 months. As had a mean IQ of 90.8, a mean age of 18.6 years, and a mean educational level of 9.2 years.

Measure. Rotter’s® 20-item I-E Scale was used as the measure of locus of control. Scoring was keyed in the external direction so that the I-E Scale measured a continuum of externality. Thus, a high score represented a high degree of externality; a low score, a low level of external control expectancy.

Procedure. All addicts who entered the facility were assigned to take a group administered psychological test battery, including the I-E Scale, before the end of their second week in residence. After it was announced that the facility was closing officially and the residents informed that they would soon be released to “aftercare” in their home communities, the 31 who had been tested were retested immediately. The time lag between the pre- and posttests ranged from 5.5 weeks to 1 week, with a mean of 2.5 weeks.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The mean protest score was 12.2; SD 4.8. The mean posttest score was 9.5; SD 4.2. A t-test for related groups was performed on the pre- and posttest scores, yielding a t-value of 7.91, significant beyond the p < .001 level. In addition, a Pearson r was computed, yielding a test-retest correlation coefficient of -.38 for the 31 pairs of I-E scores (t = 2.21; p < .05).

Virtually all previous forms of control studies® have shown positive correlations in test-retest design, ranging from .39 to .88 for varying samples and time intervals. Thus, the highly significant finding of a drop in external locus of control precipitated by the mere announcement of impending release from institutionalization is consistent with a state-trait conceptualization of the locus of control construct. Whereas the trait component reflects a particular lifestyle or personality pattern, the state element may show day-to-day changes depending on variables in the individual’s environment and his perception of it.

*Data were collected under the direction of the senior author while employed as a clinical psychologist at Green Haven Rehabilitation Center, operated under the Narcotic Addiction Control Commission of New York State. Thanks are due to David Miller, Principal Psychologist at the Center, for his assistance in the collection of data. Requests for reprints should be sent to G. P. Kocher, Psychology Section, Department of Psychiatry, Children’s Hospital Medical Center, 300 Longwood Avenue, Boston, Mass. 02115.
SUMMARY

Incarcerated drug addicts (N = 31) were administered the Rotter's 1966 Locus of Control Scale. Test results were significant beyond the p < .001 level and indicated that locus of control can be subject to short-term environmentally-induced fluctuation. These findings suggest the need for modification of present theory to include state-trait differences relating to I-E expectancy.

REFERENCES

5. Rotter, J. B. Internal versus external control of reinforcement. Psychol. Manage., 1966, 8 (1), (Whole No. 600, 1-20).