PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS OF ADDICTS

Summary

The book reflects a problem with outstanding public importance – substance use disorders. Over the last decades research reveals that there are number of negative consequences related to the alcohol and drugs abuse and dependence. There are both direct negative effects to the quality of life of addicts and their relatives and indirect harm to society in general. Although a lot of studies have been done in this field, the characteristics of the personality profile of addicts are still subject of discussion. At the same time, an in-depth knowledge related to the personality characteristics of people with substance use disorders is essential for development of evidence-based programs for prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation of addictions.

The focus of the work is identification of the main characteristics related to the personality profile of addicts and their integration in a model that reflects the basic forms of manifestation of psychological functioning of the individual. It presents a comparative analysis of externalizing and internalizing personality characteristics in individuals with substance use disorders (designated as the treatment group) and individuals from the general population (the control group). The treatise is structured in three chapters.

The first chapter systematizes the basic concepts related to the use, abuse, and dependence on psychoactive substances, as well as their classification and description. An overview of biological (genetic and neurobiological), psychological and social (psychodynamic, behavioral, social-cognitive) theories related to substance use is given and the widely used in addictions bio-psycho-social model is presented. Factors associated with progress to substance addictions are summarized in three groups: physiological, environmental, and individual.

The second chapter is devoted to the relationship between personality and substance use disorders. Contemporary models and approaches to personality research are discussed, including the popular and widely used five-factor model. Data on the personality profiles of addicts are summarized. Finally, a conceptual model of personality dispositions summarizing behavioral, emotional, and social problems in addicts is proposed, based on a distinction between externalizing and internalizing characteristics.

The third chapter presents thorough analysis of empirical studies of the most common externalizing (antisocial behaviour, impulsivity, sensation seeking,

aggressiveness and risk-taking) and internalizing (emotional stability, self-esteem, anxiety and depression) characteristics of individuals with substance use disorders. Special attention is paid to studies that consider these characteristics as a symptom of the psychopathology that occurs along with substance abuse or addiction. To assess these characteristics among patients with substance use disorders in Bulgaria self-report scales are constructed using questions from the International Personality Item Pool-IPIP. Initially selected items for each scale are reduced when needed, based on reliability and factor analyses. The relationship between the externalizing characteristics on one hand and the internalizing one on the other is studied. Comparisons of levels of the manifestation of the studied characteristics are made both between the control and treatment groups and between the two subgroups from the treatment group and the control group. Analyses of the association between early onset/ presence of relatives with substance abuse or dependence and the studied characteristics are also performed.

Results show that the developed scales for assessment of externalizing and internalizing characteristics have very good internal consistency and high reliability. There are positive and significant relationships between the studied personality characteristics of the externalizing spectrum. Positive and significant relationships were also found between the following pairs within the internalizing spectrum: Emotional Stability and Self-esteem; Anxiety and Depression. Although the characteristics are related and mutually defining, all of them also have distinct differentiating functions.

The data also reveals that the participants from the treatment group (both alcoholics and drug addicts) had significantly higher levels of antisocial behaviour, impulsivity, sensation seeking, aggressiveness, risk-taking (without significant diference when split to subgroups and compared with controls), anxiety and depression and significantly lower levels of emotional stability and self-esteem in comparison to the representatives from the control group. Antisocial behavior is the only characteristic that is significantly higher in drug addicts in comparison to alcoholics.

The analysis of the association between the specifics of substance use and studied personality characteristics shows that addicts with early onset have significantly higher levels of antisocial behaviour, impulsivity, sensation seeking, aggressiveness and significantly lower levels of emotional stability. Only the charactersistic sensation seeking has significantly higher levels among addicts with relatives with substance abuse or dependence.

The ultimate goal of this book is to draw the attention of the researchers, practitioners and policy makers working in the area of addictions to the potential of the

knowledge about personality characteristics of addicts for development of evidence-based programs for prevention, treatment and rehabilitation of substance use disorders. Data about the personality characteristics can be used both for early identification of youth at risk and as a hint for better treatment and rehabilitation and relapse prevention strategies when working with addicts. The results presented in the treatise are good initial point for further research of the potential of the personality as a key factor in the process of formation and overcoming of the problems related to the substance use disorders.