

## **Understanding different types of drug addiction: a psychodynamic approach**

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### **Introduction**

Problematic use of alcohol and other psychoactive substances were examined by several researchers, however, answers to questions were sought almost exclusively at the level of personality characteristics measured by self-completion questionnaires. Most of these researches focused on sensation seeking and deficits of controlling emotions or other control functions as key factors. At the same time clinical studies – although they allow for the examination of deeper psychic layers – provided findings that could not or could hardly be tested empirically. Mainly diagnoses and case studies referred to the examination of the personality of drug users applying projective methods as well, which approach could not provide adequate data with regards to the requirements of statistical analysis. One outstanding study of Studer (1979) can be mentioned however, who gathered different drug users' Szondi test profiles but these materials were interpreted as characteristic case studies without group comparisons.

Thus our research has a gap-filling nature in this topic, because it examines a greater sample of drug users of a relatively wide spectrum by projective testing with special emphasis on specific psychodynamic characteristics. Furthermore, it also provides a glimpse into the psychodynamic background of functional characteristics of the personality of addicts, meanwhile creates an opportunity for drawing conclusions on and having a further outlook to the psychodynamic explanation of the development of addiction.

## **Psychoanalytical approach of drug use**

For a long time use of drugs was approached by psychoanalytic literature exclusively from the pleasure-generating, regressive aspect thereof. Later on, focus shifted from drives and conflicts to ego and self structures, as well as to the role of emotional control and adaptation to reality (Brehm and Khantzian, 1997).

Modern psychoanalytic theories determine psychic vulnerability, disorders and pain as predisposing factors, and they view the choice of drugs as a consequence of a non-random choice. In the examinations and therapy of addicts, higher emphasis is laid upon structural factors, self-conditions, object relations, and to the circumstance how all these aptitudes play a role in psychopharmacological processes during which the addiction develops (Khantzian, 1985).

The regressive approach was later replaced by progressive theories focusing on adaptivity. Wieder and Kaplan (1969) were among the first who specified the reasons of addictions, and the choice of drugs within, to be a specific damage in the organisation of personality and the development of the ego. According to their view, the individual uses drugs – as chosen “prosthesis” – to compensate for their deficiencies through those, and, so to say in an adaptive manner, attempts to resolve conflicts. Wieder and Kaplan (1969), and also Milkman and Frosch (1973) substantiated also empirically that use of a specific drug is the result of a personal selection process, which may be connected to the preferred method of defence of the individual (Khantzian and Treece, 1977). According to Wurmser all compulsive drug use should be viewed as an attempt to cope with emotional problems, in which process the effects of the drug are artificial, substitutional defence mechanisms against overwhelming emotions (Wurmser, 1977, 1995).

This theory is carried on by Khantzian (1985) in the self-medication hypothesis of addictive disorders, and he emphasises that drug use is of secondary character in each case, and the primary deficiency may be approached via neurologic and developmental psychological methods (Demetrovics, 2010). Khantzian (1985) asserts that the use of a given drug is never an accidental choice; the individual chooses the drug whose psychopharmaceutical properties alleviate the specific dominant pain that the person is experiencing. In this context drug use is a, however maladaptive, form of coping. Drug use therefore can be seen as the individual’s own attempt at self-medication. The goal of the opiate user is the treatment of painful affective states, the

handling of stress and dysphoria, the braking of unconscious aggressive impulses and making outside aggression bearable. Clinical data show that the above-mentioned characteristics already exist before opiate use, and that opiate use helps to alleviate these symptoms. (Demetrovics, 2000).

## **Participants**

As present study aimed to examine different types of drug problems, we intended to include a wider scope of drug users. The survey sample comprised a group of alcoholics, opiate addicts, cannabis users and a normal control group of an adequate number of individuals. Our objectives included that age of the subjects should be between 18-40 years, and each subsamples contained 20-30 subjects. All the participants were man and most of them had 10-12 years of education.

It took nearly a year to gather the test material of the 92 subjects of the whole sample in collaboration with the institutes listed below. The 10-profile-Szondi test was administered by specially trained psychologists or psychology students at the institutes.

Description of the sample:

1. The cannabis user group consisted of 24 subjects recruited at the Pécs and Kaposvár Drug Outpatient Centre of the Integrated Drug Therapy Institution. The mean age of this group is 22.38 years.
2. The Addictology Rehabilitation Department of Szigetvár Hospital provided a part of the alcohol user sample (13 subjects) while another 15 alcohol patients were assessed at the Alcohol Rehabilitation Department of the Merényi Gusztáv Hospital in Budapest (15 subjects). The alcohol users' whole sample consists of 28 subjects whose mean age is 39.46 years.
3. Opiate users were assessed at the Nyírő Gyula Hospital Drug Outpatient and Prevention Center. The mean age of this group consisting of 20 subjects is 35.78 years.
4. Control subjects were selected having the same parameter as the drug user samples regarding age, level of education and socio-economical data. The mean age of the control group is 25.45 years.

Figure 1. The characteristics of the sample

<b>Subsamples</b>	<b>Number of subjects</b>	<b>Mean age</b>
1. Opiate users	20	35.78
2. Cannabis users	24	22.38
3. Alcohol users	28	39.46
4. Control group	20	25.45
Altogether	92	

## **Method**

The 10-profile-Szondi Test is a projective procedure that is suitable to measure the general personality characteristics of the individual within the framework of Szondi's drive-theory. The test does not only provide an option for the interpretation at the level of the individual, but also includes the possibility for making group comparisons. Although administering a 10-profile-Szondi test is a time-consuming task, it is still a more simple method compared to other projective tests while having the important advantage of offering a group-level comparison and interpretation since it allows for both quantitative and qualitative analyses. Another advantage is that the test is suitable for the assessment of average personality characteristics as well as clinical psychopathology. Furthermore, it is not only a good guide for setting up a diagnose but also shows some functional and psychodynamic processes in personality.

In our study we analyzed the data of the 10-profiles Szondi tests by using the most frequent vector reactions, the most frequent drive classes and most frequent loaded factor reactions.

The most frequent vector constellations were generated by the "R" marked program with the help of an algorithm, which shows how the individual vector reactions varied within the group, and as a result the most frequent constellation can be determined. Figure 2, 5, 11 present the vector frequency of the groups, selected the three most frequent vector combinations in the rank.

Figure 4, 7, 10, 12 show the frequency of the drive classes in the specific samples, and Figure 3, 6, 9 present the frequency of the loaded factor reactions in percentage.

In our analyses we interpret only the most frequent reactions.

## Results

### 1. Characteristics of the opiate users' Szondi test profiles

In the S vector (+ -) (see Figure 2) it is shown that the opiate users have a sensual drive need and demand for love. The (h +) factor represents the tender part of sexuality, and it contains little or no motoric energy. The factor reaction is related to the deep needs of the person for sensual contact and means that he passively and submissively wants to have contact with the love object („feminine” type of love in our culture).

In psychopathological cases these patients want to be loved by somebody the way they were loved by their mother. This basic need is not possible to live out (perhaps because of the strength of this need or because of the environmental frustrations) and determines the whole sexual orientation of the adult personality. Individuals fixed at this level are not able to make necessary transition toward a more active „masculine” type of sexuality. The (s -) factor marks that there is tension in the area of aggression but it is not accepted by the person. Also shows the low level of physical activity, the non-aggressive behaviour, masochism, and the tendency for withdrawing rather than fighting in reality.

The S vectorial constellation (+ -) shows a dissociation of the two components of sexuality. These subjects are characterized with a passive, “feminine” sexuality, who are dependent, submissive individuals with low need for physical activity.

In the P vector (+ -) we can see an ethical and moral censorship which might cause the need for indemnity (the wish “being good”). Emotions are felt strongly but are not easily expressed.

The (hy -) factor represents that these subjects are unwilling or unable to demonstrate their feelings, they are shy, but in the same time they may have a vivid phantasy life, a tendency for daydreaming, because the emotions are not acted out, but rather are felt as an inner, subjective experience. These subjects have strong exhibitionistic drive needs which are frustrated because it is not possible to live them out.

The Sch vector constellation (+ -) in childhood represents that the child structures the world in terms of his unconscious needs (p -) and then introjects (k +) the result (Déri 1949, p. 217) He thinks: “I am the world. I can have the characteristics of any person or animal of the world.” This sign shows the feeling of (maybe magic) omnipotence

as well. The (p -) is an ego-diastric function and shows the need to ignore the boundaries between the ego and the other, the wish to dissolve into the other, and to be absorbed by the other. In adulthood the Sch (+ -) represents the same ego-function, the projection and introjection of the earlier projected contents. It means that the ego determines what it wants to see and incorporate from the outer world.

The C vector is the Contact vector in Szondi's theory. The C (- +) vector reaction shows the faithful relation with the original object. The subject clings to its first object of love and refuses to seek another. In this way, this relation can be described as incestuous as it refers to some extent, to the child's primary incest feeling. This relation is based on the illusion that the object is imperishable and that it could always totally satisfy the subject. This is an illusion that cannot stand the attack of reality. Thus (d -) factor reaction causes unhappiness while it indicates that the attachment to the primary object has not been surrendered, hence the individual depreciates the other concrete, material objects. Subjects in this *d* category are likely to be extremely loyal to the object once cathected with libido. They stick to their love object disregarding the realistic possibilities of whether or not they can reach their goal. This attitude makes them generally more idealistic and less practical than individuals with (d +). In this sense, (d -) subjects are the real "conservatives" who shrink from innovations and changes because they are not able to invest their libido in new objects (Déri, 1949).

Szondi says that the clinging drive *m* is necessarily present in all the relationships with another person (with any "object"), for instance in marital relationships as well. According to psychoanalytic theories the primary bond with the mother remains the prototype of these relationships, as the mother is the first "Haltobjekt". In opiate users we find that this contact is problematic. The subject clings with great anxiety, while the drug compensates the missing of the desired relationship.

Figure 2. The most frequent vectorial constellations in the opiate users sample

	S		%	P		%	Sch		%	C		%
Opiate	+	-	30	+	-	36,84	+	-	56,25	-	+	22,2
users	+	+	25	0	+	26,32	-	+	18,75	0	+	22,2
(n= 20)										+	+	16,7

On the next figure (see Figure 3) we can see the loaded reaction of the factor reactions.

The loaded reaction in Szondi's theory means those drive needs which are impossible to live out and therefore may cause danger and psychopathology in the subject's life.

Analyzing the opiate sample's loaded reactions by the method of border and middle (it is a qualitative type of analysis) it is seen that there is danger at the borders (see S and C vectors). The above-mentioned directions get much more emphasis by the exclamation marks (S h+! s-! and C d-! m+!). These constellations strengthen that the subject has strong need for love, refuses aggression meanwhile he clings to an earlier love object with much anxiety. It seems that there is no way to come out from this process. The C (0 +!) points out the drug addiction in the general sense, and the neurosis of abandonment.

Meanwhile in the middle we can see the (p +!) loaded reaction, the frequency of this factor reaction is less than the (p -!), but when it occurs, it has much pressure. Schp+ shows the inflation among the ego-functions. In the same time in the Paroxysmal vector the (hy -!) shows extreme anxiety in the subjects.

Figure 3. The most frequent loaded factor reactions in the opiate user sample

S		P		Sch		C	
Sh+	Ss+	Pe+	Phy+	Schk+	Schp+	Cd+	Cm+
h+! 20,5% h+!! 7% h+!!! 2%					p+! 14% p+!! 3%		m+! 12,5% m+!! 2,5%
Sh-	Ss-	Pe-	Phy-	Schk-	Schp-	Cd-	Cm-
	s-! 7,5% s-!! 1%		hy-! 15,5% hy-!! 12,5%			d-! 3% d-!! 1%	

As it is shown at Figure 4, the most frequent drive class is the **Phy-** in the opiate user sample. This class represents that factor's drive peril from where the drive need can't discharge. According to Szondi, this drive class in case of young people with C (- +) can be a preparanoid sign.

Figure 4. Frequency of drive classes in the opiate user sample

S		P		SCH		C	
Sh <sup>+</sup>	Ss <sup>+</sup>	Pe <sup>+</sup>	Phy <sup>+</sup>	Sch k <sup>+</sup>	Sch p <sup>+</sup>	Cd <sup>+</sup>	Cm <sup>+</sup>
4	0	0	0	0	1	0	2
Sh <sup>-</sup>	Ss <sup>-</sup>	Pe <sup>-</sup>	Phy <sup>-</sup>	Sch k <sup>-</sup>	Sch p <sup>-</sup>	Cd <sup>-</sup>	Cm <sup>-</sup>
1	1	0	9	2	0	2	0

## 2. Characteristics of the cannabis users' Szondi test profiles

In cannabis users we can see the same vector constellations at the border as the opiate S (+ -) and C (- +) (see Figure 5). We don't repeat here the analytic interpretations of these signs (see it in the chapter above), only point out that the cannabis users have the same dangerous drive needs. In the middle the P (+ -) vector reaction represents - the also already mentioned - "being good" and indemnity tendency, the ethical and moral needs with anxiety. The most frequent vector reaction in the Sch vector is the (0 -), which shows another type of ego-function. This ego projects itself to the outer world meanwhile it has no boundaries! Schk is 0, which means that there is not any decision making, this ego totally dilates itself by projection. This pattern of the ego-functions differs greatly from that of the above described opiate users.

Figure 5. The most frequent vectorial constellations in the cannabis user sample

	S		%	P		%	Sch		%	C		%
Cannabis	+	-	26	+	-	31,58	0	-	38,8	-	+	27,8
users	+	+	17,33	0	-	26,32	+	-	11,11	+	+	16,67
(n=24)	0	+	17,33				-	0	11,11			

If we have a look at the loaded factors of the cannabis users (Figure 6) we can see nearly the same drive perils at the border and the middle as the opiate group. In S vector the strong need for love – which need is impossible to satisfy; in C vector the extremely strong need to cling to an object – which need is satisfied by the drug. In the middle in the Phy-! constellation there are lots of anxiety, meanwhile all the ego functions are problematic.

Figure 6. The most frequent loaded factor reactions in the cannabis user sample

S		P		Sch		C	
Sh+	Ss+	Pe+	Phy+	Schk+	Schp+	Cd+	Cm+
h+! 9,58% h+!! 2,5%	s+! 9,16% s+!! 2%			k+! 2,5%	p+! 6,25% p+!! 1,25% p+!!! 0,4%		m+! 17,8% m+!! 8,3% m+!!! 0,4%
Sh-	Ss-	Pe-	Phy-	Schk-	Schp-	Cd-	Cm-
	s-! 7,92% s-!! 2%		hy-! 6,25% hy-!! 5% hy-!!! 0,4%	k-! 3,3% k-!! 1,25%	p-! 2,5%	d-! 3,75%	

The most frequent drive class in the cannabis users' sample is the **Cm+!**. This sign – without loaded reaction – could be the drive class of the everyday man, but the exclamation mark shows the extraordinary degree of the need to cling to another object. These subjects feel constant distress owing to the loss of the love object. In the background of this anxiety we find the insatiable need of being accepted.

According to Szondi Cm+! drive class represents the addictions.

Figure 7. The frequency of drive classes in the cannabis user sample

S		P		SCH		C	
Sh <sup>+</sup>	Ss <sup>+</sup>	Pe <sup>+</sup>	Phy <sup>+</sup>	Sch k <sup>+</sup>	Sch p <sup>+</sup>	Cd <sup>+</sup>	Cm <sup>+</sup>
5	2	1	0	0	1	0	6
Sh <sup>-</sup>	Ss <sup>-</sup>	Pe <sup>-</sup>	Phy <sup>-</sup>	Sch k <sup>-</sup>	Sch p <sup>-</sup>	Cd <sup>-</sup>	Cm <sup>-</sup>
1	1	1	4	1	0	1	0

### 3. Characteristics of alcohol users' Szondi test profiles

The alcoholics' problems at the border (see Figure 8) has much in common with the above presented drug samples (S + -) and (C - +). It represents the strong need for being loved with masochistic tendencies. The difference is – in comparison to the drug samples - that in the *s* factor the second frequent constellation is the (s +). This sign strongly refers to muscular energy and motoric tension, and indicates the activity level of the person. If this tension becomes higher, the possibility of destructive or sadistic behaviour increases. In the same time in the sphere of sexuality the *s* drive-need represents the active, „masculine” aspects of sexuality.

The Paroxysmal vector shows the sense of guilty (P + -) with anxiety, or in the P (0 +) constellation the “brutal”, aggressive affects and emotion which can be discharged by the subject. In the Ego Vector the Sch (- +) constellation signs that the alcoholics’ are characterized by negation, this destructive ego is inflated with great ideas and plans but feels that the subject cannot obtain them. The vector constellation shows the subjectively experienced conflict of this. The next most frequent reaction is the Sch (- 0) which is a neurotic ego and points out that every expression of desire will be denied by the ego. The satisfaction cannot be reached in the outer world only in the form of disguising it as a symptom. The C vector indicates the subjects’ contact problem. The constellation C (- +); C (0 +) in loaded forms are the typical signs of addiction.

Figure 8. The most frequent vectorial constellations in the alcohol user sample

	S		%	P		%	Sch		%	C		%
Alcohol	+	-	25,3	+	-	41,67	-	+	42,11	-	+	34,78
users	+	+	18,52	0	+	33,33	-	0	26,32	0	+	21,74
(n=28)	+	+/-	14,81									

The loaded factor reactions (see Figure 9) emphasise the above-mentioned mechanisms and meanings. The danger at the border, the extreme need for love which is not possible to satisfy, and in the Contact vector the (m +!) points out the need for exaggerated dependence, as the fear of losing the love object. This latter sign also indicates the great intolerance to frustration. The (k -!) and (p +!) strengthen the ego’s destructive mechanism and the inflative tendencies.

Figure 9. The most frequent loaded factor reactions in the alcohol users sample

S		P		Sch		C	
Sh+	Ss+	Pe+	Phy+	Schk+	Schp+	Cd+	Cm+
h+! 15,71% h+!! 6,6% h+!!! 2%	s+! 10%	e+! 2,85%			p+! 2,85%		m+! 13,9% m+!! 1,4%
Sh-	Ss-	Pe-	Phy-	Schk-	Schp-	Cd-	Cm-
	s-! 7,5%		hy-! 12,14% hy-!! 3,2% hy-!!! 1,07%	k-! 4,2% k-!! 2,5%			

The alcoholics' most frequent drive class is the **Sh+** (see Figure 10), which shows the unsatisfied needs for being loved. Szondi wrote (1972) that these individuals' 'fate possibilities' are determined by the dissatisfaction of this drive need. These subjects get into this drive class because of the loss of the mother or another earlier loved object. These individuals feel lonely and suffer from it, therefore they try to find another love object. In the case of alcoholics the substitute of this missing love object can be the alcohol.

Figure 10. Frequency of drive classes in the alcohol user sample

S		P		SCH		C	
Sh <sup>+</sup>	Ss <sup>+</sup>	Pe <sup>+</sup>	Phy <sup>+</sup>	Sch k <sup>+</sup>	Sch p <sup>+</sup>	Cd <sup>+</sup>	Cm <sup>+</sup>
10	3	1	0	0	0	1	1
Sh <sup>-</sup>	Ss <sup>-</sup>	Pe <sup>-</sup>	Phy <sup>-</sup>	Sch k <sup>-</sup>	Sch p <sup>-</sup>	Cd <sup>-</sup>	Cm <sup>-</sup>
0	0	0	5	5	0	1	1

#### 4. Characteristics of the average controls' Szondi test profiles

The average control group shows another S vector constellation. This sign S (- -) represents the fusion between the two basic needs of sexuality (h, s), but neither of them is accepted in an unmodified form. It may show the sublimated sexuality, but in this case (10-12 classes in education) rather indicates the repressed sexuality. These subjects have high frustration tolerance, for whom having the specific love-object is more important than the real sexual act. The C (0 +) without loaded reactions represents the normal contact in adulthood.

In the middle the ethical, moral behaviour has control P (+ -) and the Ego vector shows the negated inflation. In average measure it means that the ego wants to be greater, meanwhile the stand taking ego refuses these wishes. Without loaded reaction (k -) shows that the subject gives up his desires and wants to conform to society.

Figure 11. The most frequent vectorial constellations in the average control sample

	S	%	P	%	Sch	%	C	%
Average control group	- -	26	+ -	26	- +	52	0 +	33
(n=20)	0 -	20	- -	20	0 +	15	- +	22
			0 +	20				

The most frequent drive class is the **Cm+** in the average sample, which - according to Szondi (1972) - without loaded reactions can be the drive class of the everyday man. The dominant drive need is “clinging to another person”, which need is one of the basic needs of human nature.

Figure 12. Frequency of drive classes in the average control sample

<b>S</b>		<b>P</b>		<b>SCH</b>		<b>C</b>	
Sh <sup>+</sup>	Ss <sup>+</sup>	Pe <sup>+</sup>	Phy <sup>+</sup>	Sch k <sup>+</sup>	Sch p <sup>+</sup>	Cd <sup>+</sup>	Cm <sup>+</sup>
1	0	0	1	0	2	0	5
Sh <sup>-</sup>	Ss <sup>-</sup>	Pe <sup>-</sup>	Phy <sup>-</sup>	Sch k <sup>-</sup>	Sch p <sup>-</sup>	Cd <sup>-</sup>	Cm <sup>-</sup>
2	4	0	3	2	0	0	0

## Discussion

As a result of our study we could determine the similarities and the differences of the personality features of the three types of drug users and the control group. The results were the same risks at the extremes in cases of drug users; these individuals have an extraordinary need for being loved and in the same time they have a strong need for acceptance. The insatiable needs lead to addiction; in the absence of a satisfying love object the subject clings to different chemicals. In the middle of the moral, ethical paroxysmal vector we find the sense of guilt and the demand for indemnity. The Sch vector shows different ego-functions in drug users; opiate users' most frequent reactions are projection (p -) and introjection (k +), which create an autistic ego as the subject accepts all his contents that he has projected from himself to the outer world. The cannabis users' peculiar ego-function is the projection without any attitude of mind (Sch 0 -). In both drug users the projection determines the ego-function. The alcoholics' main ego-functions are the inflation and negation, the ego has the tendency to enlarge itself but in the same time these wishes are negated.

The drive class shows in the Szondi test those drive needs which represent high risks and are impossible to satisfy. Among opiate users we find Phy-! showing extraordinary anxiety and that can be a preparanoid mark. In cannabis users the drive class is the Cm+! that shows the extreme need for clinging to an object, which object,

in absence of the love partner, can be the drug. In the alcoholics' sample the Sh+! drive class represents the dissatisfaction of the need of being loved.

As a result of our study besides the common reactions at the border we could reveal differences in the drug users' ego-functions as well.

## **Summary**

In our study we compare different drug users' personality features. The 10- profiles Szondi test was administered to opiate users, cannabis users, alcoholics and an average sample. The total sample consisted of 92 subjects, the sizes of the subsamples were between 20-30 subjects. The age range was 18-40 years, majority of subjects were in young adulthood.

Our aim was to reveal the psychodynamic background of the different drug users' personality characteristics and find in-depth psychological explanations to addictive behaviours.

We identified the same danger at the border - S (+! -!) and C (-! +! or 0 +!) – which shows the extreme need for being loved with a masochistic tendency and the insatiable need for clinging to an object. In the middle the paroxysmal ethical, moral vector shows feelings of guilt and anxiety P (+ -!). In the Sch vector – based on the most frequent reactions - we found that addicts of different drugs apply diverse ego-mechanisms: opiate users introjection (Sch + -), cannabis users projection (Sch 0 -) and the alcoholics negated inflation (Sch - +). The different subsamples have dissimilar drive classes causing the drive peril. The opiate users are characterized by the Phy-!, the cannabis users the Cm+! and the alcoholics the Sh+! classes.

Present study contributes to the description and analysis of the most important personality features of different drug user groups.

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