One of the serious problems being faced by every society today is drug abuse. The incidence of drug abuse has almost doubled during the last two decades and is a matter of deep concern as the age of initiation has declined by a number of years.

Clinical theorists have developed socio-cultural, psychological and biological explanations as to why people abuse or become dependent on various substances. The psychodynamic theorists believe that people who abuse substances have powerful dependency needs that can be traced to their earlier years. According to behaviourists operant conditioning plays a key role in the development and maintenance of substance abuse. They argue that the temporary reduction of tension or raising of spirits produced by a drug has a rewarding effect, thus increasing the likelihood that the user will seek the reaction again. Similarly the rewarding effects of a substance may eventually lead users to try higher dosages or more powerful methods of ingestion. Cognitive theorists further argue that such rewards eventually produce an expectancy that substances will be rewarding, and this expectation is sufficient to motivate individuals to increase drug use at times of tension. It has been observed that psychoactive drug addicts frequently use immature, primitive and psychotic forms of defense mechanisms, they employ poor coping mechanisms to combat stress and anxiety.

In the light of the above theoretical literature the present investigation was therefore undertaken to compare the drug addicts and the non addicts on personality characteristics, defense mechanisms and family environment.
The main objectives of the study are:

1. To identify the personality characteristics of the drug addicts as compared to the non-addicts.
2. To explore the nature of defense mechanisms adopted by drug addicts and non-addicts.
3. To study the nature of family environment of drug addicts and non-addicts.
4. To identify the distinct features that discriminate the drug addicts from the non-addicts.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses have been proposed for this investigation:

1. It is expected that there shall be significant differences between the addicts and non-addicts on all the indices of neuroticism with addicts scoring high on this dimension.
2. It is expected that there shall be significant differences between addicts and non-addicts on the indices of extraversion with addicts scoring high on excitement seeking and low on assertiveness.
3. It is expected that there shall be no significant differences between drug addicts and non-addicts on the dimension of openness.
4. It is also hypothesized that the non-addicts shall score high on all the indices of agreeableness as compared to the drug addicts.
5. It is also expected that the addicts will score low on all the facets of conscientiousness.
6. It is also expected that there shall be significant differences between addicts and non-addicts on the use of defense mechanisms.

7. Finally, it is expected that there shall be significant differences in the family environment of addicts and non-addicts.

Sample

The study was conducted on a sample of 250 male subjects (125 drug addicts and 125 non-addicts) in the age range of 17 to 30 years, mainly belonging to the rural areas. The average educational qualification of the subjects ranged from 10th to 12th grade. The incidental sampling technique was used for the selection of the sample. Drug addicts were approached at the three reputed De-addiction centres of Amritsar city. After the doctor had diagnosed the patients as addicts, an initial interview was conducted with them. Non-addicts or the comparison groups who had never taken or ingested any drug/substance, were chosen from a comparable background. They were approached at their respective village centres. Both the groups belonged mostly to the lower socio-economic status.

Measures Used

In order to obtain the necessary data the following measures were used:

4. Personal information schedule: This schedule contained details about demographic variables such as age, education, residential area, marital status, socio-economic status, religion, birth order and a detailed enquiry about the drug taking behaviour and dependence.

Analyses

The obtained data was subjected to the following statistical analyses:

1. Frequency distributions for the tested variables (NEO PI-R-35, COPE-5, FES-10, demographic variables-3) were set up along with their means, standard deviations, skewness and kurtosis respectively.

2. Reliability coefficients for the scores on all the measured variables have also been estimated by the test-retest and split-half method.

3. The frequency distribution and percentage of onset age of drug addiction was computed.

4. Graphic representation of the data obtained on personality characteristics, defense mechanisms and family environment for the addicts and non-addicts have been presented.

5. Comparison of means has been conducted by using the t-test to find out the significant differences between addicts and non-addicts on all the measured variables.

6. Discriminant analysis was further applied to identify the main distinguishing characteristics of drug addicts and non-addicts.
Results

The main findings of the study are:

1. The frequency and percentage of onset age for addiction has been estimated which reveals that 58.4 percent of the total sample of drug addicts belongs to the age range of 12 to 20 years with the mean age of 20.36, which indicates that the adolescents are most vulnerable to substance abuse.

2. The graphic representation of the obtained data on personality characteristics shows that the mean scores of drug addicts are higher on all the indices of neuroticism, excitement seeking scale of extraversion whereas low on the dimensions of agreeableness (except for modesty) and low on conscientiousness. The graphs also indicate that the two groups differ on defense mechanisms and family environment scales.

3. In order to find out whether there are significant differences between drug addicts and non-addicts on all the measured variables, the t-test was applied. The results indicate that drug addicts have scored higher on all the subscales of neuroticism and low on all the subscales of conscientiousness, as compared to the non-addicts. Further on, the non addicts have scored higher on the subscales of extraversion except for excitement seeking and also higher on the subscales of agreeableness except for modesty, as compared to drug addicts. No significant differences have been found between the two groups on the dimension of openness.
4. Similarly, the comparison of means for the two groups on defense mechanisms shows that drug addicts have significantly scored higher on denial, isolation and turning against self whereas non-addicts have scored significantly higher on projection and regression.

5. Finally, the family environment of the two groups also differs significantly. The non-addicts have scored higher on family cohesion, expressiveness, independence, achievement orientation, intellectual-cultural orientation, active-recreational orientation, moral-religious emphasis and organisation whereas drug addicts have scored high on family conflict and family control which indicates that the family environment of drug addicts is not conducive for the healthy growth and development of children.

6. The discriminant analysis reveals that conscientiousness, deliberation, self-discipline, achievement striving, dutifulness and competence are the most distinguishing personality characteristics of non-addicts whereas impulsiveness, neuroticism, vulnerability, depression, angry-hostility and excitement-seeking are the most distinguishing personality characteristics of the drug addicts.

7. Further on, the discriminant coefficients on defense mechanisms reveal that the distinguishing defense mechanisms of drug addicts are turning against self, isolation and denial whereas incase of non addicts the distinguishing defense mechanisms are regression and projection.
8. Finally the discriminant coefficients of the family environment of the two groups indicate that the distinguishing features of non-addicts family environment are achievement orientation, independence, organisation, cohesion, active-recreational orientation, intellectual-cultural orientation, moral-religious emphasis and expressiveness whereas in case of drug addicts, family conflict and family control are the main distinguishing features of their family environment, a condition which makes the children more prone and vulnerable to drug addiction.

The above results reveal a qualitative difference in the personality characteristics, defense mechanisms and family environment of drug addicts and the non-addicts. The drug addicts because of their emotional instability are more anxious, impulsive, depressed, less competitive and lack self discipline, as a result they use maladaptive defense mechanisms such as turning against themselves, denial and isolation i.e. their hostility is internalized, they deny the reality and derive satisfaction through substance abuse. The non-cohesive and incongenial family environment further adds to their distress and makes them easily vulnerable to substance abuse. In view of these findings it is suggested that there is a need for cognitive-behavioural restructuring for a healthy reciprocal interaction between the addicts and their respective family members through adequate counselling procedures, in addition to de-addiction/ detoxification of the addicts.