

Compulsive buying in university students: its prevalence and relationships with materialism, psychological distress symptoms, and subjective well-being

Estíbaliz Villardefrancos*, José Manuel Otero-López¹

Department of Clinical Psychology and Psychobiology, Faculty of Psychology, University of Santiago de Compostela, A Coruña, Spain

Abstract

Background: Compulsive buying has become a severe problem among young people. The prominent role that psychological variables play in this phenomenon support their consideration in establishing a risk profile for compulsive buying that serves as a guide for the development of prevention and treatment programs with guarantees of effectiveness. However, there are only a small number of studies in existence which have explored the compulsive buying prevalence among students, and none of them have been conducted in a Mediterranean country.

Objectives: This study aims to estimate the compulsive buying prevalence in a sample of university students from the region of Galicia (Spain). We also intend to determine if statistically significant differences exist between compulsive buyers and non-compulsive buyers in relation with gender, materialistic values, psychological distress symptoms and subjective well-being. Lastly, the clarification of which of the determinants examined represent risk or protection factors for compulsive buying constitutes another important objective of this paper.

Methods: A total sample of 1448 university students participated in this study. They answered a battery of self-reports assessing gender, compulsive buying propensity, materialism, distress symptomatology, and well-being. Participants were initially classified as either compulsive buyers or non-compulsive buyers. Both groups were compared for the aforementioned variables through chi-square testing or variance analyses. Then, a multivariate logistic regression analysis was conducted to determine which of these determinants make up a risk profile for compulsive buying.

Results: The estimated prevalence of compulsive buying in the sample of university students considered was 7.4%. Statistically significant differences between compulsive buyers and non-compulsive buyers were detected for gender, and each and every one of the psychological variables explored. Specifically, it was confirmed that compulsive buyers obtained significantly higher scores in materialism's dimensions of importance, success, and happiness, and in the psychological distress symptoms of anxiety, depression, obsession-compulsion, hostility, and somatization. On the contrary, they presented significantly lower levels in self-esteem, life satisfaction, and optimism. Results of the logistic regression analysis confirmed that high scores in the importance dimension of materialism, in combination with the experiencing of symptoms of anxiety, depression, obsession-compulsion, hostility, and somatization, would constitute risk factors in relation with this phenomenon, and high levels of life satisfaction would act as a protection factor as for compulsive buying in the sample of students considered.

Conclusions: Current findings revealed that 7.4% of the large sample of Spanish university students considered were classified as compulsive buyers. Additionally, it was confirmed that while materialism and psychological distress symptoms would represent vulnerability determinants increasing the propensity for compulsive buying, the high scores in life satisfaction would act to decrease the likelihood of becoming a compulsive buyer. Accordingly, our results suggested that prevention and intervention efforts in relation with compulsive buying among young people should include specific components aimed at the reduction of the importance assigned to money and possessions, and also at the relief of psychological distress symptoms.

© 2015 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Previous research indicates that adolescents and young people present a high risk for becoming compulsive buyers [1,2]. Specifically, the group between 18 and 24 years of age has been singled out in relation with the initiation of compulsive buying [3]. Some studies developed in the United States employing samples of students have obtained

* Corresponding author at: Department of Clinical Psychology and Psychobiology, Faculty of Psychology, Campus Vida, University of Santiago de Compostela, 15782, Spain. Tel.: +34 981 563100x13882; fax: +34 981 528071.

E-mail addresses: estibaliz.villardefrancos@usc.es (E. Villardefrancos), josemanuel.otero.lopez@usc.es (J.M. Otero-López).

¹ Tel.: +34 981 563100x13882; fax: +34 981 528071.

percentages of prevalence of this problem ranging from 3.5 to 9% [1,2,4,5]. These worrying figures, in combination with the variety of negative consequences stemming from this phenomenon at psychological, academic, financial, and familiar levels, make the study of the prevalence of compulsive buying in young people and its associated risk factors an urgent assignment for the researcher's agenda. Hence, the examination of compulsive buying and its potential risk and protection factors in a large sample of university students is the main focus of interest in this study.

Compulsive buying has been defined as a chronic and excessive form of shopping and spending characterized by intrusive thoughts and uncontrollable urges to buy that lead to repetitive purchasing episodes [6,7]. It turns into a primary response to negative feelings that provides immediate short-term gratification, but which ultimately causes harmful consequences to the individual and others [7–9]. Many efforts have been made in order to identify the variables that are involved both at the onset and with the continuance of this problem. As a result, there is currently a general consensus regarding these two aspects of the phenomenon, one of which is the multiethiological character of compulsive buying, with a diversity of determinants (socio-demographic, psychological, for instance) taking part in the configuration of the problem. At the socio-demographic level, the relevance of gender and age should be duly noted, with some studies showing that women [7,10] and young people present a higher vulnerability to compulsive buying [11–13]. Another relevant finding on the subject makes reference to the fundamental role that psychological variables of distinct nature (personality traits, values, goals, self-concept, for instance) play in compulsive buying. More specifically, the endorsement of materialistic values has been confirmed in a few studies conducted on general population based samples [14,15], and students [16,17], as one of the main risk factors in relation with this phenomenon. Psychological distress symptoms, including anxiety and depression, in keeping with a vast amount of literature in the field [18–21], constitute important triggers for compulsive buying episodes. Moreover, echoing the emphasis given it in seminal studies on the obsessive–compulsive characteristics of the problem [7,22], some researchers have paid special attention to the examination of these symptoms in relation with compulsive buying [23]. However, there are only a small number of studies examining the role of other symptoms such as somatization, and hostility [13,24]. In this regard, the combining of some determinants that have been thoroughly examined in this field (i.e., materialism, anxiety, depression, obsession–compulsion) with others which have received scant attention—somatization and hostility—represents an innovative aspect of this study.

As well as the aforementioned significance of materialism and symptomatology, low levels in different indicators of subjective well-being like self-esteem [3,25] and life satisfaction [14,26,27] have been confirmed as vulnerability factors in relation with compulsive buying. Notwithstanding,

in spite of the growing research interest in the examination of other kinds of personality determinants like optimism in relation with different problems including chemical addictions [28] and eating disorders [29], little is still known with respect to the potential role of optimism in compulsive buying [30]. Accordingly, taking into account previous evidence and given the scarcity of studies that have examined the potential role of cognitive indicators of subjective well-being in compulsive buying, they are prominent features of this research.

Lastly, in an attempt to contribute not only to a better understanding of the phenomenon but to also do the same with prevention and intervention, we pretended to determine which of the different variables included in this study act as risk or protective factors for this problem. In summary, this research intends to fill some of the potential gaps in the field such as the analysis of compulsive buying among young people from a Mediterranean country, namely Spain, the integration of sets of psychological variables of distinct nature, including materialism (i.e., the importance, success, and happiness dimensions), distress symptoms (i.e., anxiety, depression, obsession–compulsion, somatization, and hostility), and cognitive indicators of subjective well-being (i.e., self-esteem, life satisfaction, optimism) and the clarification of the role of these determinants in a risk profile for compulsive buying in a large sample of university students. Specifically, our main objectives are the following: (a) to estimate compulsive buying prevalence; (b) to elucidate if statistically significant differences exist between compulsive buyers and non-compulsive buyers as for gender, materialism dimensions, psychological distress symptoms, and subjective well-being; (c) and to establish a risk profile for compulsive buying based on these sets of variables.

2. Methods

2.1. Procedures and participants

This study has been developed in the framework of a wider research project aimed at the analysis of the compulsive buying phenomenon and its associated variables in the region of Galicia (Spain). Sample data were collected during the second 4-month period in the academic year between February and May 2014. In recruiting a large sample of university students from distinct knowledge areas, members of the research group, along with hired personnel who collaborated in the field work after a training period, went to different faculties of the University of Santiago de Compostela (Spain). Specifically, data were collected in the Schools of Economics, Education, Nursing, Journalism, Medicine, Philology, History, Philosophy, Psychology, Pedagogy, Mathematics, Biology, Pharmacy, Law, Labor Relations, Physics, and Chemistry. Prior to the handing out of questionnaires, we contacted some professors from different schools who gave us the opportunity of presenting our research to their students, with those who voluntarily accepted to do so filling out the battery of self-reports during

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/317952>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/317952>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)