



The development of Addiction-Prone Personality traits in biological and adoptive families



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ABSTRACT

This project investigated the predictors of Addiction-Prone Personality (APP) scores in youth and young adults from biological ($N = 328$, 53% female) and adoptive ($N = 77$, 53% female) families. The development of offspring's APP traits was examined from three different angles: (1) patterns in biological and adoptive families, (2) offspring's vs. parent's perceptions of familial environment, and (3) different points in the life span. The offspring's APP scores were found to be significantly predicted by parents' APP scores in both biological and adoptive families. Parents' APP scores and offspring's gender consistently showed significant direct influences on offspring's APP scores in biological families. The familial care factor (maternal and paternal care, family cohesion, and family adaptability) was found to be the consistent significant predictor of offspring's APP scores in adoptive families even when offspring became older. These results are consistent in showing that the social environment plays an important role in the development of Addiction-Prone Personality traits.

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1. Introduction

The abuse and misuse of a wide variety of substances and the consequences of such use have been a major societal problem all over the world (Kendler et al., 2012). Various studies have found significant associations between personality and substance use behaviors (e.g., Hicks, Durbin, Blonigen, Iacono, & McGue, 2012; Malmberg et al., 2012). The role of personality in the use of different substances (i.e., alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, etc.) as well as in polysubstance use has been well-established (e.g., Lackner, Unterrainer, & Neubauer, 2013). In recent years, more studies on personality and substance use have been conducted in the general population of both adults and youth, with several of these studies utilizing longitudinal research methodology. By doing so, researchers intended to investigate not only the personality of those individuals who are addicted to substances, but also how personality predisposes certain individuals to future substance use (e.g., Anderson, Barnes, & Murray, 2011; Krank et al., 2011). Over the last two decades, certain dimensions of personality underlying under-controlled or disinhibited behavior (i.e., impulsivity and

sensation seeking) have been identified as correlates of substance use among other forms of externalizing behaviors (Quinn & Harden, 2013).

In their extensive review of personality development, Caspi, Roberts, and Shiner (2005) point out that among the copious research studies on personality development and the influence of personality on various outcomes, only a very few studies have contemplated the influences of parental personality (e.g., Prinzie et al., 2012; Schofield et al., 2012). This is a curious oversight because parental personality could shape individual's behavior directly via modeling effects or indirectly through the influence of personality on parenting behaviors (Caspi et al., 2005). Schofield et al. (2012) investigated whether a parent's positive personality characteristics (i.e., the *alpha-linked personality* – high conscientiousness, high agreeableness, and low neuroticism) predict similar adolescent personality traits over time along with the role played by positive parenting in this process. Schofield et al. (2012) found that; (1) parents' personality positively predicted observed parenting; (2) higher levels of parental alpha-linked traits were associated with higher levels of adolescent alpha-linked traits; and (3) positive parenting positively predicted adolescent alpha-linked personality traits. These findings suggest that both parents' personality and the quality of parenting behaviors may play an important role in personality development during adolescence (Schofield et al., 2012).

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Finally, there is a fair amount of literature on associations between family socialization and broad personality traits (e.g., five-factor personality; [Saucier, Wilson, & Warka, 2007](#)), and between family socialization and the development of substance use behaviors ([Barnes, Murray, Patton, Bentler, & Anderson, 2000](#)). While many studies have found associations between personality traits, family socialization and substance use, only a handful of those focus on the *development* of specific personality traits such as *substance-use-proneness*. The nature of these personality traits – origin, lifetime change, association with other factors – continues to be a topic of debate. Therefore, we need more studies on the development of such specific personality traits and their associations with genetic and environmental factors in the lifespan.

1.1. Addiction-Prone Personality

Previous studies have shown that personality characteristics play an important role in predicting substance use behaviors and patterns ([Barnes et al., 2000](#)). The Addiction-Prone Personality (APP) scale is a new measure that has been designed to predict underlying vulnerability to substance use problems ([Anderson, Barnes, Patton, & Perkins, 1999](#); [Anderson et al., 2011](#); [Barnes et al., 2000](#)). The APP scale was originally developed by utilizing data from a large general population survey (Winnipeg Health and Drinking Survey; [Barnes et al. 2000](#)). Personality items that were linked with both a family history of alcoholism and a lifetime diagnosis of alcoholism were selected from a large battery of personality tests (see [Anderson et al., 2011](#) for the APP-21 items). The content of this scale suggests that individuals who score high on this measure are characterized by high novelty seeking and low self-regulation. Earlier studies with the APP scale found that this test is very good for discriminating drug addicts from non-addicts, and predicting the severity of addiction and likelihood of remission during recovery ([Barnes et al., 2000](#)). The APP scale is also a useful instrument for predicting alcohol and other substance misuse across both gender and age cohorts ([Anderson et al., 1999](#)). The APP scale was found to be significantly ($p < .001$) correlated with three of the Five-Factor Personality Scales – high APP scores are correlated with high Neuroticism, low Agreeableness, and low Conscientiousness ([Barnes et al., 2000](#)).

The associations between parents' and offspring's APP were examined in one of the early studies of APP (Vancouver Family Survey (VFS); [Barnes et al., 2000](#)). The term *offspring* is used to refer to children of both biological and adoptive parents in this report. It found that offspring's APP traits were significantly associated with their parents' APP in biological families. While these correlations were not significant in the smaller sample of adoptive families, the order of magnitude of the effects observed were roughly the same. The same study has also shown that a nurturing family environment was significantly associated with lower APP scores in offspring ([Barnes et al., 2000](#)). Results support the possible role of the social environment on the development of APP. To this day, there is no study examining the APP scale with family environment or with other types of addictive behaviors such as problem gambling, shopping, or eating disorder available.

1.2. The current study

This project was a secondary data analysis of the longitudinal data set (VFS), and investigated the predictors of the Addiction-Prone Personality (APP) scores in a community sample consisting of biological and adoptive families. The cross-sectional analysis of the first wave of VFS found; (1) the APP scores are significantly correlated with substance use (alcohol, tobacco, marijuana and other illicit drugs) in both parents and offspring; (2) males score higher

on the APP scale; (3) the offspring's APP scores are higher than parents' scores; however, within the offspring sample, the APP scores are not significantly different by age; and (4) socioeconomic status variables (parents' education, income and occupation) are not strong predictors of offspring's APP scores. In the current analysis, we particularly wanted to see whether or not the parents' APP scores and family socialization factors could predict the development of offspring's APP over time. Offspring's APP was assessed at two different points in time (7 years apart). The hypothesized theoretical model to be tested is presented in [Fig. 1](#).

The theoretical model was tested to answer three research questions:

1. Do the parents' APP scores and family socialization factors predict the offspring's APP scores and does the association pattern differ in biological and adoptive samples?
2. Do offspring's and parents' perceived family socialization factors show different association patterns with offspring's APP scores?
3. Does the effect of the family environment on offspring's APP scores diminish over time and does this diminished effect differ in biological and adoptive samples?

2. Methods

2.1. Participant selection

The Vancouver Family Survey (VFS) was conducted as a two wave longitudinal survey in the Greater Vancouver area. The descriptions of the recruitment of participants and the original design of VFS are available elsewhere ([Anderson et al., 1999](#); [Barnes et al., 2000](#)). At time 1 (1995–1996), extensive questionnaires were administered to mothers, fathers and youngest offspring in the 14–25 age range living at home from 473 biological and 128 adoptive families for a total of 601 families. Participating families received \$50.00 per family. Offspring in the adoptive families had to be adopted before the age of five, and most adoptions occurred early in the first year of life. The sample excluded adoptive families where there existed any biological relationship with one of the parents.

Beginning in 2003, follow-up data at time 2 were collected for the offspring sample of participants in the VFS (now ages 21–33). Potential participants were offered \$25.00 as an incentive to participate. A total of 215 females and 190 males ($n = 405$) were re-interviewed. This represented 67% of the participants originally tested at time 1. The refusal rate for this project was 18% with the remaining 15% of the sample lost for other reasons including death or failure to locate the individual ([Barnes, Anderson, & Jansson, 2008](#)). The final sample was comprised of 328 offspring from biological families and 77 offspring from adoptive families. Data for time 1 participants who did not participate at time 2 were excluded from this analysis.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Demographic domain

Demographic questions that were selected as being important in the current investigation as control variables were offspring's gender (0 = female and 1 = male) and adoption status.

2.2.2. Addiction-Prone Personality (APP)

The APP-21 measure was used to assess personality vulnerability to substance use. Each family member completed the APP-21 measure at time 1. Seven years later, 405 offspring completed the same APP measure at time 2. Recent study ([Anderson et al., 2011](#)) has shown that the APP-21 scale is a reliable measure, both

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