Chronic welfare dependency: A multivariate analysis of personality factors

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CHRONIC WELFARE DEPENDENCY: A MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS OF PERSONALITY FACTORS

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ABSTRACT

In North America chronic welfare dependency (CWD) is a serious problem that involves millions of individuals, costs billions of tax dollars, and represents a great waste of human resources. It is postulated that CWD, over the past 30 years, has been conceptualized too simplistically and relatively unimportant variables have been emphasized in rehabilitation programs. This study suggests that, whatever the etiological factors, CWD represents a complex set of interacting personality factors. The personality factors associated with CWD suggest that rehabilitation programs need to employ multimodal and sophisticated psychotherapeutic strategies, especially those developed for the treatment of anxiety and the neuroses.

INTRODUCTION

Although there are many issues of practical concern to a therapist employed in a welfare setting, one of the most difficult challenges relates to that group of individuals loosely labelled chronically dependent, long-term, multi-problem, or unemployed-employable. Basically these general terms refer to individuals who are physically capable of employment, are not incapacitated from the labor market due to psychiatric, intellectual or age problems, but are nevertheless in continuous receipt of public welfare (Magneson, et. al., 1969). These individuals seem unable to achieve tenure when placed in employment, and rely heavily on the 'sick role' as the explanation for their unemployment in spite of the fact medical documentation fails to support this (Tiffany, Cowan, and Shontz, 1969).

As Brown (1968) has pointed out, the chronic welfare recipient (CWR) has been of concern for close to 4 decades. MacLean (1971); 1973) has subsequently pointed out that the CWR has been the focus of numerous repetitious, descriptive and demonstration studies during this period, many of them so completely lacking in minimal research control that their results are of little value in terms of internal and external validity. Primarily the emphasis has been on assessing diverse and poorly defined treatment approaches to the problems of tenured work placement and societal adaptation.

However, a review of the literature did reveal some empirical contributions to this issue. Brown (1968), in a 31 month controlled study, found no significant differences between an experimental and control group of 50 *Ss* each on 34 dimensions (behavioral and social) as rated by trained but naive judges. The experimental group of 50 multi-problem welfare *Ss* received intensive and individualized casework whereas the control group *Ss* received normal casework

services. In short, intensive social work counseling made no difference in terms of significantly changing, after 31 months of treatment, 34 behavioral dimensions as rated by independent and trained judges with content analysis elicited from school, court, and community agency records.

This general finding appears to be the rule in controlled, empirical studies focusing on the CWR. Kupfer, Diadio, and Magneson (1970) seemed to have made significant therapeutic gains after two years of intensive, costly, and multidimensional rehabilitative counseling with a group of 96 chronically dependent, married male welfare recipients. Their final report recommended intensive and costly rehabilitative services for the problem of chronic welfare dependency (CWD). However, MacLean (1971) subsequently showed that when control group results were compared with experimental group results with 8 month follow-up data, the differences were not significant. In fact after two years of very intensive counseling and welfare services, the E *Ss* were actually receiving significantly more welfare monies than the control group *Ss*. When demographic variables were compared to a criterion of success, the assumed important factors accounting for chronic welfare dependency (e.g., age, education, number of children in family, etc.) proved to be of insignificant value in predicting outcomes.

Other studies, empirically conducted, report similar findings. Initial treatment successes (treatment success usually being defined as placement into tenured employment and a significant decrease or elimination of need for welfare monies and services) reported by Decore (1969) were found to be reversed in a follow-up study (Decore, Bourgette, and Lederer, 1970). The Arkansas Rehabilitation Service (1970) after 3 years of a special project aimed at experimenting with intensive efforts in helping 239 marginal workers obtain and retain employment had to report no significant treatment effects. Friedlander and Stuart (1971) in a controlled study with 478 hard-core welfare recipients found that none of the *Ss*'s biographic background data or their attitudinal characteristics were related to job performance or retention. Nor did a two-week orientation program have any effect on attitudes toward work, job performance, or job retention.

Personality Factors and Chronic Welfare Dependency

Over the years some authors (Geismar and Ayres, 1959; Friedman, 1963; Walker, 1965) have expressed the view that chronically dependent welfare recipients are difficult to place into long-term employment due to personality factors that are counter-facilitative of such demands. Walker (1965) suggested that the important variables accounting for CWD were in the category of psychological and social deficiencies. In this respect MacLean (1970) showed that on the basis of computer corrected 16 PF tests on 96 CWD *Ss*, 48.9% were identified as being neurotic and 48.9% as experiencing above normal to extreme anxiety. As a check, 60 *Ss* of this group were found to have completed the NSQ (Scheier and Cattell, 1961). Results were statistically identical to the 16 PF results.

Cattell, Eber, and Tatsuoka (1970) report a study concerned with 75 chronically unemployed *Ss* and 75 stably employed *Ss*. All *Ss* were matched for age, race, education, and intelligence. Results showed the chronically unemployed *Ss* tended to be more emotional (C-), more expedient (G-), more

apprehensive (O±), and to have a higher second-order anxiety and neuroticism score than their employed counterparts.

The preliminary evidence seems to suggest that perhaps CWD is not necessarily a problem of labor market trends, work skills, or other social-demographic variables. These variables may be part of the etiological background to the development of CWD, but chronic welfare dependency may be more a problem of personality factors that are counter-facilitative of necessary work skills and work habits.

Purpose of the Study

Unfortunately the literature is not unequivocal in relating CWD to anxiety and/or other personality variables which could be counter-productive to social and work adjustment. Cattell et. al. (1970) suggested that classificatory efficiency needed to be demonstrated, based on a discriminant function derived from CWD and employed *Ss*. This study was an attempt to fulfill this research need.

METHOD

The first step in accomplishing these objectives was to select three samples of male *Ss*. Group 1 was composed of operationally defined chronic welfare recipients (CWRs). Group 2 was composed of "new" to welfare *Ss*, or short-term welfare recipients (STWRs), and a third group, Group 3, was made up of *Ss* who were not on welfare, had never been on welfare, and signified stable employment over the last two years. This was the stable employment (SE) group. These three groups of *Ss* were then administered the 16 Personality Factor Questionnaire (16 PF) (forms A and B, 1967-68 edition). On the basis of the responses of the *Ss* to these test instruments, the personality dimensions which differentiated CWRs from non-CWRs were identified using a one-way ANOVA. Following this analysis, a discriminant analysis and classification of *Ss* was completed.

Subjects

All *Ss* in all groups had to meet the general criteria of being (1) married males, (2) between the ages of 25 and 40 years, (3) have at least a grade eight education level, (4) not score below the average range on intelligence (16 PF, B scale), and (5) have no obvious work-incapacitating, medical, or psychological disorder. Ultimately 307 *Ss* were selected for the study. Of this number 125 were *Ss* in group 1, 120 were in group 2 and 62 *Ss* were in group 3. It was anticipated that 120 *Ss* would be selected for each group. Unfortunately it proved impossible to acquire 120 *Ss* for the group 3 condition.

Group 1 (CWR) Ss. Group 1 *Ss* were randomly selected CWRs from the total caseload at the City of Edmonton Social Service Department.[1] All *Ss* in this group had to (1) have been in receipt of social assistance for a period of time greater than one year, (2) show a previous record of one or more welfare registrations, (3) demonstrate job instability by a change of three or more jobs for a two year period prior to the last or most recent social welfare registration, and (4) be considered by the referring social worker to be extremely difficult to place in employment and involve in rehabilitative counseling.

Group 2 (STWR) Ss. Group 2 *Ss* were randomly selected "new" to welfare subjects, from the total caseload of the City of Edmonton Social Service Department, and were classified as short-term welfare recipients. The *Ss* had to (1) have been on welfare less than three months, (2) have no previous record of social welfare registrations, and (3) demonstrate a history of job stability as operationalized by a change of jobs not more than once during the two year period prior to their social welfare registration.

Group 3 (SE) Ss. Group 3 *Ss* were the stable employment group. The *Ss* in this group had to (1) never have been on welfare, (2) presently be working and have been steadily employed at the same job for a period of two years or longer, (3) indicate no immediate intention of changing employment, and (4) be from the low, middle SES level. Potential *Ss* in this group were identified by a local insurance agent.

All *Ss* in all groups were informed that this was a research project, but the subject matter was not disclosed. It was explained that their personal identities would be completely safeguarded. It was stressed that in exchange for their personal privacy, it was hoped that they would be truthful in answering the questions on the 16 PF. It was suggested that anyone feeling they could not be completely honest in answering the questionnaire should retire from the project. Twelve subjects were eliminated because they had a poor reading ability. Twenty-eight other subjects stated they did not want to answer all the questions. Fourteen subjects completed form A of the 16 PF but not form B and therefore had to be dropped from the project. In the final analysis, 307 *Ss* were included in the study.

Differences Between Groups

Prior to the derivation of discriminant scores and subsequent classification of *Ss*, all test scores of all *Ss* were subjected to a one-way ANOVA computer program. This was done to determine, between groups, the significant differences on the basic 16 PF dimensions. In addition, second-order and specification equation scores (Cattell et. al., 1970) were determined for each group and subjected to the same ANOVA program. Test profiles were then determined for each group.

Discriminant Scores

Following the suggestion of Tatsuoka (1969), at least 60 *Ss* were randomly selected from each group for the purpose of deriving discriminant scores. For group 1, 65 *Ss* were randomly selected, for group 2 60 *Ss* were randomly selected, and the 62 *Ss* from group 3 were assigned.

Classification of Ss

For the classification of *Ss* analysis, the remaining *Ss* from group 1 (60 *Ss*) and group 2 (60 *Ss*) were used plus the 62 *Ss* from group 3.

Statistics

Significant differences between groups on the 16 PF dimensions were calculated by a one-way ANOVA computer program with the statistical level of

significance at .05. A discriminant analysis (Nunnally, 1967; Tatsuoka, 1970) and classification of *Ss* was completed by computer program.

RESULTS

Tables 1 and 2 present a summary of the results of this study. It can be seen that, on the primary dimensions of the 16 PF, there were significant differences between welfare (CWR and STWR *Ss*) *Ss* and SE *Ss* on the dimensions of C, E, H, I, L, M, O, Q_1 and Q_4. Only dimensions O and Q_4 were significantly different between CWR and STWR *Ss*. It will be noted this same finding is true of the second-order factors of invia-exvia, independence, creativity, and psychoticism. However, the three groups could be significantly differentiated on the second-order factors of neuroticism and anxiety.

It is clear, therefore, that in using the primary 16 PF dimensions to carry out a classification efficiency analysis, a truly efficient discrimination was not possible between the CWR and STWR groups. In actuality, since CWR *Ss* do not differ significantly from STWR *Ss* on seven of the nine primary 16 PF dimensions, the question of classification efficiency becomes one of welfare *Ss* as differentiated from SE *Ss*.

TABLE 1

COMPARISONS AMONG THE THREE STUDY GROUPS ON 16 PF PERSONALITY DIMENSIONS

Factor	Group						Significant Differences $p \leq .05$	p
	Chronically Dependent Welfare (1) Recipients		Short Term Welfare (2) Recipients		Stably (3) Employed			
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
A	5.41	1.67	5.94	1.87	5.35	1.99		
B	6.46	1.62	6.27	1.83	6.51	1.35		
C	3.12	1.87	3.55	1.89	5.00	2.08	1 & 3, 2 & 3	.0000
E	4.92	1.98	4.74	2.08	6.77	5.93	1 & 3, 2 & 3	.0001
F	5.24	1.96	5.34	2.09	5.32	2.05		
G	4.60	1.69	5.05	2.04	4.72	2.25		
H	4.03	1.98	4.50	1.97	6.72	1.66	1 & 3, 2 & 3	0009
I	4.89	1.87	4.82	2.04	6.03	2.16	1 & 3, 2 & 3	.0002
L	6.68	2.11	6.49	1.86	5.55	1.81	1 & 3, 2 & 3	.0008
M	5.70	1.96	5.39	2.20	7.37	8.29	1 & 3, 2 & 3	.0079
N	4.97	2.10	4.84	2.00	5.56	2.24		
O	7.28	1.78	6.44	2.06	5.44	2.06	1 & 2, 1 & 3, 2 & 3	.0000
Q_1	5.15	1.88	5.18	1.82	7.06	4.72	1 & 3, 2 & 3	.0000
Q_2	6.06	2.04	5.64	1.79	5.79	2.34		
Q_3	5.58	2.18	5.78	2.13	5.06	2.09		
Q_4	7.01	2.12	6.20	2.04	5.80	2.33	1 & 2, 1 & 3	.0004
Neuroticism	7.08	1.65	6.45	1.85	5.63	2.03	1 & 2, 1 & 3, 2 & 3	.0000
Q_{II} (Anxiety)	7.49	2.10	6.70	2.07	5.77	2.00	1 & 2, 1 & 3, 2 & 3	.0000
Q_I (Invia-Exvia)	4.40	1.99	4.76	2.14	5.66	2.40	1 & 3, 2 & 3	.0008
Q_{III} (Tough Poise)	5.12	1.41	5.04	1.73	5.19	1.80		
Q_{IV} (Independence)	5.54	1.71	5.01	1.71	6.69	2.23	1 & 3, 2 & 3	.0000
Creativity	5.64	1.62	5.23	1.49	6.54	1.87	1 & 3, 2 & 3	.0000
Psychoticism	5.10	2.01	4.48	2.13	5.74	2.06	2 & 3	.0004

TABLE 2

EXACT PROBABILITIES, USING THE SCHEFFE MULTIPLE COMPARISON OF MEANS AMONG THE THREE STUDY GROUPS ON THE 16 PF DIMENSIONS WHICH WERE STATISTICALLY SIGNIFICANT

Factor	Group	Group		
		Chronically Dependent Welfare (1) Recipients	Short Term Welfare (2) Recipients	Stably (3) Employed
C	1	1.0000	0.2066	0.0000
	2		1.0000	0.0000
	3			1.0000
E	1	1.0000	0.9026	0.0013
	2		1.0000	0.0004
	3			1.0000
H	1	1.0000	0.7284	0.0012
	2		1.0000	0.0109
	3			1.0000
I	1	1.0000	0.9622	0.0014
	2		1.0000	0.0007
	3			1.0000
L	1	1.0000	0.7546	0.0012
	2		1.0000	0.0097
	3			1.0000
M	1	1.0000	0.8413	0.0370
	2		1.0000	0.0104
	3			1.0000
O	1	1.0000	0.0036	0.0000
	2		1.0000	0.0056
	3			1.0000
Q_1	1	1.0000	0.9959	0.0000
	2		1.0000	0.0001
	3			1.0000
Q_4	1	1.0000	0.0136	0.0015
	2		1.0000	0.4875
	3			1.0000

TABLE 2 (Continued)

Neuroticism	1	1.0000	0.0288	0.0000
	2		1.0000	0.0156
	3			1.0000
Q_{II} (Anxiety)	1	1.0000	0.0115	0.0000
	2		1.0000	0.0174
	3			1.0000
Q_{I} (Invia-Exvia)	1	1.0000	0.4174	0.0009
	2		1.0000	0.0283
	3			1.0000
Q_{IV} (Independence)	1	1.0000	0.0751	0.0003
	2		1.0000	0.0000
	3			1.0000
Creativity	1	1.0000	0.1489	0.0019
	2		1.0000	0.0000
	3			1.0000
Psychoticism	1	1.0000	0.0615	0.1424
	2		1.0000	0.0006
	3			1.0000

TABLE 3

CLASSIFICATION EFFICIENCY BETWEEN THE WELFARE AND SE GROUPS

	Correct Classifications	Incorrect Classifications	Classification Efficiency
Welfare Ss	104	16	86.66%
SE Ss	42	20	67.74%
Total Ss	146	36	80.22%

Classification Efficiency Between Welfare and Non-Welfare Ss.

Table 3 presents the classification efficiency when SE *Ss* are differentiated from welfare *Ss*. As stated previously, a welfare subject category is achieved by combining all the *Ss* in the CWR and STWR groups into one group, a welfare group. When this is done, for the new 'welfare group' it can be seen that there are 104 correct *Ss* classifications and 16 misclassifications. Consequently the classification efficiency is 86.66%. Clearly, therefore, the primary 16 PF dimensions have proven efficient in terms of providing objective measures by which one can differentiate welfare from SE *Ss*. This finding is similar to the results reported by Cattell et. al. (1970). Primary 16 PF measures, however, and as used in this study, do not differentiate between welfare *Ss*, that is, between *Ss* in the CWR and STWR groups. The only two primary personality dimensions which differentiate between welfare *Ss* were O and Q_4. With the ANOVA results, however, the second-stratum factors of neuroticism and anxiety were found to differentiate between welfare group *Ss* at less than the .05 level of statistical significance.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study suggest that the "welfare experience" needs to be researched with much greater care and objectivity than what has previously been accomplished. The traditional conceptualization of a welfare recipient being the "needy" victim of a deprived background, or the technologically, labor-force-displaced person — and therefore only in need of supportive counseling and/or skills training — is a naive analysis (Clinard, 1970). These factors may play a part in the etiological background, antecedent to welfare registration and subsequent welfare dependency. But such environmental contingencies may have serious personality consequences, consequences that would require a comprehensive, multimodal approach to rehabilitation (Lazarus, 1974; 1975), psychotherapies developed specifically for the treatment of the neuroses and anxiety states (Wolpe, 1958; 1969) and psychotherapies with a focus on learning to take responsibility for one's own employment problems (Walker, 1969; Goldstein, 1973).

One fact stands out in research in the welfare field. When studies have employed control groups with follow-up analysis, treatment attempts to get CWRs off the welfare rolls and into tenured employment have failed (e.g. Brown, 1968; Decore, Bourgette, and Lederer, 1970; Friedlander and Stuart, 1971). Even very intensive, multiservice programs of two years duration (Kupfer, Diadio, and Magneson, 1970), that originally reported treatment successes, have been clearly shown — via a subsequent follow-up analysis — to be without success in terms of keeping CWRs in tenured employment (MacLean, 1971). A hypothesis might be that for CWRs, simply being placed into employment, or receiving some skills training is not sufficient. In fact, MacLean (1971) showed that intensive casework is not sufficient. As this study has suggested, new to welfare *Ss* already deviate significantly from stably employed *Ss* on personality dimensions that suggest the need for sophisticated therapeutic interventions (see above). Compared to SE *Ss*, STWRs are more neurotic, anxious, intraverted, dependent, less creative, and score higher on a measure of psychoticism. And it would seem the longer one is on welfare, the worse things get. As compared to STWRs, CWRs

score higher on neuroticism and anxiety. Perhaps this finding might help to explain why Brown (1968) stated that CWRs consume the lion's share of the welfare budget without demonstrating any propensity to change their welfare life style or work habits.

The primary premise of this author is that the 'welfare experience' is a multi-billion dollar puzzle that, to date, has been poorly researched, thus resulting in a lack of objective data. Studies have been done, but the results, because of poor research design, have contributed little to a science of the welfare phenomena. This study is a very small beginning, but it does suggest the factors associated with CWD will be complex and the need for research is evident.

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NOTE

[1]A city of 300,000 in Alberta, Canada.