**The Rich Use Cocaine for Different Reasons Compared to the Poor**

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It has long been established by medical research that certain personality types are more attracted to illicit drugs. But now a just published study from Florida State University College of Medicine, and the United States National Institute on Ageing, suggests that it's your personality combined with your financial circumstances, which can together powerfully shape your illegal drug use.

Those prone to negative mood, scoring high on Neuroticism questionnaires, plus who are antagonistic, hostile, disorganised and undisciplined, are more likely to use drugs, than those who score at the opposite pole of these character traits. Other research that assesses personality before substance use starts, suggests character can predict illegal drug use. But, drugs also have powerful effects on the brain and may even alter personality.

However, what has not been investigated until now, was how wealth impacted on personality in taking drugs. Being surrounded by poverty and the availability of drugs also appears to be strongly predictive of taking up heroin and cocaine habits.

In other words, if you know a cocaine user who is wealthy, as opposed to one who is poor, does just knowing these contrasting financial circumstances, allow you to predict whether their personality type will be different?

The answer to this question appears to be yes.

This intriguing result has just been uncovered in a study entitled Personality traits and illicit substances: The moderating role of poverty, conducted by Angelina Sutina, Michele Evans and Alan Zonderman.

The investigation probed the personality, cocaine and heroin habits of 412 people in the USA where 50% of participants were living below the federal poverty line.

The study, published in the academic journal Drug and Alcohol Dependence, found that being disorganized and undisciplined, or scoring low on 'conscientiousness', was particularly predictive of cocaine and heroin use, but only if you had relatively more economic resources.

For those living below the official federal poverty line, it appeared that poverty was the overwhelming factor that predicted taking illicit drugs. In financially tough circumstances, a disorganised and undisciplined personality type became irrelevant.

In other words, if you meet someone who has abused cocaine, but isn't poor, it's much more likely that the reason they have taken to drugs is partly linked to a personality which is disorganised and undisciplined. Their personality is probably not the only reason why they're taking drugs, but this character trait was more predictive of drug use among those with relatively more financial resources.

Among those living above the poverty line, those who lacked discipline and those with the tendency to act before thinking, were more prone to drug use; yet these character traits were unrelated to drug use among those living in poverty.

The authors of the study conclude that under favourable economic conditions, the tendency to be organized, disciplined, and deliberate protects against drug use. These character dispositions, however, matter less when ﬁnances are precarious. In contrast, those prone to emotional distress and antagonism are at greater risk for current drug use, regardless of their economic situation.

One possible interpretation of this intriguing finding is that the stereotype of the drug using poor as feckless and unruly, is in fact the precise opposite of the truth. It's relatively richer people who suffer disorganised and undisciplined personality types, who are more drawn to drugs. When the poor are taking cocaine, it's much more likely to reflect their tough economic circumstances than their personality.

The authors to this new study conclude that evidence is converging on a typical personality proﬁle of drug users. Users of illicit substances are more prone to negative emotions, tend to be distrustful, manipulative, unreliable and undisciplined.

Broadly speaking it looks from these results that the richer you are, the more its likely your personality explains illegal drug use. The poorer you are, the more likely taking drugs reveals relatively less about your personality, and is more linked to your arduous financial predicament.  
However, the authors caution that drug use is extremely complex, and cannot be reduced to a single factor. Personality is just one aspect of the problem.

In particular, this study found that being less conscientious was a risk factor for drug use only among those with relatively more ﬁnancial resources.

In terms of the general links between personality and illegal drug use, the strongest effects emerged for 'Agreeableness' and 'Conscientiousness'. It looks like it's possible to predict how likely you are to take up illegal drugs from these particular aspects of character.

'Disagreeable' people, tend to be antagonistic, aggressive, and sceptical of others. They worry less about social approval and are more likely to be antisocial. Their lack of trust may also lead them to disregard public health messages about the dangers of illicit drug use. Those scoring high in 'Agreeableness', in contrast, tend to follow rules and are more likely to conform to social norms than their more antagonistic peers  
  
A key finding from this study is the importance of poverty in 'overwhelming' protective personality features, so leading to illegal drug use. Basically the study found that few economic resources overwhelmed the generally protective personality feature of self-control.

For those with more economic resources, a tendency toward being disciplined and deliberative was protective against drug use. But this investigation found the effect of poverty is strong, and can overwhelm other social and psychological factors that tend to be protective.

However, there was one particular aspect of character that continued to protect against illegal drug use despite poverty; 'Dutifulness'. Those who scored high on this facet of Conscientiousness were less likely to engage in drug use regardless of their poverty status. So sticking to principles and obligations leads to more self-control, despite the temptations and stresses of poverty.

Regardless of their economic situation, the study also found that those who are prone to emotional distress and those who are antagonistic, are at greater risk for current drug use, than those who are more emotionally stable and agreeable.

Bottom line - this research suggests that being wealthy and performing 'deviant' behaviours such as taking drugs might in fact indicate more dysfunctional personality types, than when the poor commit similarly 'deviant' actions.

For the rich, think personality. For the poor, their poverty may be enough to lead to drug use.

This research is suggesting that when richer people blame stress in their lives for their drug use, or whatever they do blame external to themselves, a deeper analysis would require an examination of the role of their personality, and their wealth. Many experience the same stresses, yet don't take to illegal drugs.