

Intolerance of uncertainty and affective lability among histrionic and non-histrionic persons

Humaira Bibi, Summaira Naz, Mussarat Jabeen Khan

Department of Psychology, Hazara University, Mansehra, International Islamic University Islamabad, Pakistan

Objective: To find the relationship between intolerance of uncertainty and affective lability and to measure age and gender differences on these variables among histrionic and non-histrionic persons.

Methodology: This correlational study was conducted at Educational Institutes of Hazara Division from August to December 2018. Sample of 300 individuals were selected through convenient sampling technique. Brief Histrionic Personality Scale (BPHS), Intolerance of Uncertainty Scale-12 (IUS-12) and Affective Lability Scale (ALS) were used for this study.

Results: Intolerance of uncertainty had significant

positive association with affective lability. Age of individuals has non-significant negative association with intolerance of uncertainty and affective lability. Significant differences of histrionic and non-histrionic individuals were observed on intolerance of uncertainty and affective lability; while non-significant gender differences were observed on these variables.

Conclusion: Histrionics have higher tendency to develop intolerance of uncertainty and affective lability than non-histrionics. (Rawal Med J 202;46:131-134).

Keywords: Affective lability, histrionics, intolerance.

INTRODUCTION

Histrionic personality disorder (HPD) is the modern category in diagnostic classifications.¹ It is derived from the old notion of Hysteria.¹ Hysteria is a traditional one, including a great number of pathological conditions.² HPD can be diagnosed if a person suffers from 5 or more of the following symptoms (a) to feel uncomfortable when not in focus of attention (b) seductive or provocative behavior (c) irregular and superficial emotions (d) uses physical appearance to attract attention (e) speech style is impressionistic but lacking content and is unclear (f) dramatic and exaggerated expression of emotions (g) high suggestiveness, easily influenced by others (h) to consider many relationships to be more intimate than they really are.³ In general population, prevalence rate of HPD is 2 to 3%. There is possibility that people may develop more than one personality disorder. Women are four times more likely to be diagnosed with histrionic personality disorder than men.⁴ People with HPD usually consider that their behavior is normal and struggle to identify a problem.⁵ This lack of insight may lead to under-diagnosis of HPD until later in life.⁶

Intolerance of uncertainty (IU) is a dispositional fear

of unknown and to respond negatively to uncertain events or situations, and it is an important maintaining factor in number of different anxiety disorders.^{7,8} It is individual's inability to tolerate negative reaction that is triggered by the perceived absence of significant, important or satisfactory information, and continued by the associated perception of ambiguity.⁹ Affective lability is the tendency to experience strong and variable emotions, which disturbs the functioning and well-being. It predicts worse outcomes (e.g., suicidal ideation and attempts) among individuals with Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD).¹⁰ Clinical and neuro-scientific evidence suggests that affective lability and difficulties with emotion regulation contribute to BPD.¹¹ Dysregulated affect is the key characteristic of number of pathological conditions, such as bipolar disorder, depression, intermittent explosive disorder and borderline personality disorder.¹² Affective lability is main feature of emotional dysregulation, it is speedy shifts in outward emotional expressions. It is specifically related to bipolar disorder and BPD, though the level of lability differs between emotional states in these disorders.¹³

Previously studies have been conducted on intolerance of uncertainty and on affective lability.^{14,15} But no one previous study investigated the relationship between these two variables among individuals with histrionic personalities and histrionic personality disorder, especially in Pakistan limited researches were done on it. No literature is available on the relationship of intolerance of uncertainty and affective lability especially on histrionic and non-histrionic persons, so the present study fulfilled this missing gap in literature. This study aimed to find the relationship between intolerance of uncertainty and affective lability and to measure age and gender differences on these variables among histrionic and non-histrionic persons.

METHODOLOGY

The sample of 300 individuals (histrionics $n=150$; non-histrionics $n=150$) was chosen using convenient sampling technique after screening 840 participants from educational and organizational institutes of Hazara Division. Inform consent was obtained from all participants. Brief Histrionic Personality Scale (BHPS) was used for screening of participants. Overall sample included 300 participants with age range 16 to 55 years. 150 participants with (39% males, 61% females), who obtained greater than cut off scores on BHPS, were included in the study. The other 150 individuals having scores less than cut off point on BHPS were also included in the final sample as comparison group. BHPS has 11 items related to histrionic personality disorder symptoms.¹⁶ The scoring criteria is a 4-point Likert scale (from 1 = never true to 4 = always true). Alpha value for BHPS was .91.¹⁶ Intolerance of Uncertainty Scale¹⁷ has 12 items which measure the level of tolerance for dealing with uncertain situations. The scoring criteria is 5-point Likert scale (from 1 = not at all characteristic to 5 = entirely characteristic of me). Alpha value for this was .91.¹⁷ Affective Lability Scale (ALS) assess the emotional lability of individuals.¹⁸ ALS has 18 items that rated on a 4-point likert scale (from 0 = very uncharacteristic of me to 3 = very characteristic of me). Alpha value for ALS was .70.¹⁸

First BHPS was used on 840 participants for screening. 150 participants who obtained greater than cut off scores and 150 participants who obtained less scores than cut off point on BHPS were selected for further analyses.

Statistical Analysis: Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS version 23.

RESULTS

The data of 300 individuals were analyzed. The reliability values for BHPS, IUS and ALS are .87, .86 and .92, respectively, which shows higher internal consistency of these scales. BHS, IUS and ALS have above average construct validity because all scales have significant positive item-total correlation results.

Table 1. Correlation between Histrionic Personality, Intolerance of Uncertainty, Affective Lability and Age (N=300).

	BHS	IUS	ALS	AGE
BHPS	-	.69**	.72**	-.03
IUS	-		.64**	-0.07
ALS	-	-	-	-0.05
AGE	-	-	-	-
<i>M</i>		36.19	46.46	23.02
<i>SD</i>		9.45	12.04	4.45

Note. BHPS = Brief Histrionic Personality Scale, IUS = intolerance of uncertainty scale; ALS = affective lability scale; *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation. ** $p < .01$

Table 2. Mean, Standard Deviation and t-values of Histrionic and Non Histrionic Personality on Intolerance of Uncertainty and Affective Lability (N=300).

	Non-Histrionic ($n=150$)		Histrionic ($n=150$)		<i>t</i> (298)	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>	95% CI	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>				<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>
IUS	31.18	7.74	41.20	8.29	10.82	.001	0.23	-11.84	-8.19
ALS	40.05	10.89	52.87	9.46	10.88	.001	0.28	-15.14	-10.50

Note. IUS = intolerance of uncertainty scale; ALS = affective lability scale; *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation.

Table 3. Mean, Standard Deviation and t-values of Gender on Intolerance of Uncertainty and Affective Lability (N=300).

	Men ($n=116$)		Women ($n=184$)		<i>t</i> (298)	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>	95% CI	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>				<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>
IUS	36.78	9.60	35.82	9.36	.852	.395	0.23	-1.25	3.16
ALS	46.97	11.43	46.15	12.44	.573	.567	0.28	-1.99	-3.63

All scales had higher level of internal consistency and construct validity. Significant positive correlation appeared between intolerance of uncertainty and affective lability among histrionics and non-histrionics that support the first hypothesis of the present study (Table 1). Histrionic and Non Histrionic Personality on Intolerance of Uncertainty and Affective Lability means are shown in Table 2 and Gender on Intolerance of Uncertainty and Affective Lability means are shown in Table 3.

DISCUSSION

Our study results are similar to a study which stated that IUC is generally related to emotional instability.¹⁹ Another recent study concluded significant positive correlation between intolerance of uncertainty and difficulties in emotional regulation.²⁰ Our results indicated non-significant negative correlation of age with intolerance of uncertainty and affective lability among histrionics and non-histrionics. A previous study concluded that emotional wellbeing increases with age.²¹ Another study found that both emotion regulation skills and ability to tolerate the uncertainty enhanced with age; which ultimately increases the ability to tolerate uncertainty when facing with potential risks or threats.²² A recent research results indicated that affective lability significantly decreases with age.²³ Analysis revealed significant differences of histrionics and non-histrionics on intolerance of uncertainty and affective lability that support the third hypothesis of the present study.

Borderline personality disorder and histrionic personality disorder have close relationship.²¹ Individuals with bipolar disorder have higher scores on affective lability scale than healthy control group.¹⁹ Another recent study concluded that affective lability and personality disorders are positively linked, so individuals with borderline personality disorder have higher level of intolerance of uncertainty and they feel greater difficulties in regulation of their emotions.²⁰ Findings revealed non-significant gender differences on intolerance of uncertainty and affective lability which do not support third hypothesis of the current study. A previous study had similar findings by revealing non-significant gender differences on intolerance of

uncertainty.²⁴

The findings of this study will be very helpful in both theoretical and practical fields. This study is helpful in fulfilling the gap in literature, for practitioners and clinical psychologists to know about different characteristics and features of histrionics. These Findings will also helpful to understand the differential features and symptoms of histrionics and normal individuals. Clinical practitioners can anticipate the effect of these symptoms on the behavior of people with histrionic personality disorder, and to understand how to reduce these symptoms.

The current study was conducted on the adolescents and adults of Hazara Division only, and did not include other areas of Pakistan and other age groups. Future research conducted across different areas of Pakistan by using ignored different age groups for confident result generalization.

CONCLUSION

This study concluded significant positive correlation of intolerance of uncertainty and affective lability, while age has non-significant association with these variables among histrionic and non-histrionic persons. Non-significant gender differences were found on intolerance of uncertainty and affective lability. Significant differences of histrionics and non-histrionics were found on intolerance of uncertainty and affective lability.

Author Contributions:

Conception and Design: Humaira Bibi
Collection and Assembly of data: Humaira Bibi
Analysis and interpretation of data: Mussarat Jabeen Khan
Drafting of the article: Summaira Naz
Critical revision of the article for important intellectual content: Summaira Naz
Statistical Expertise: Mussarat Jabeen Khan
Final approval and guarantor of the article: Humaira Bibi
Corresponding author email: Mussarat Jabeen Khan: mussarat.jabeen@iiu.edu.pk

Conflict of Interest: None declared

Rec. Date: Feb 19, 2020 Revision Rec. Date: Nov 15, 2020 Accept Date: Dec 21, 2020

REFERENCES

1. Sulz S. Hysterie I: histrionische pers nlichkeitsst rung. Der Nervenarzt 2010;81:879-88.
2. Novais F, Ara jo AM, Godinho P. Historical roots of histrionic personality disorder. Front Psychol 2015;6:1463.
3. Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders:

- DSM-5. 5th ed, American Psychiatric Association. 2013.
4. Nestadt G, Romanoski AJ, Chahal R, Merchant A, Folstein MF, Gruenberg EM, McHugh PR. An epidemiological study of histrionic personality disorder. *Psychol Med* 1990;20:413-22.
5. Cale EM, Lilienfeld SO. Histrionic personality disorder and antisocial personality disorder: sex-differentiated manifestations of psychopathy. *J Pers Disord* 2002;16:52-72.
6. Rienzi BM, Scrams DJ. Gender stereotypes for paranoid, antisocial, compulsive, dependent, and histrionic personality disorders. *Psychol Rep* 1991;69:976-8.
7. Bakkevig JF, Karterud S. Is the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, fourth edition, histrionic personality disorder category a valid construct. *Compr Psychiatry* 2010;51:462-70.
8. Shulman RB. The Psychiatric Approach to Headache. *Headache Migraine Biol Management* 2015;223-238.
9. Hewitt SN, Egan S, Rees C. Preliminary investigation of intolerance of uncertainty treatment for anxiety disorders. *Clin Psychol* 2009;13:52-8.
10. Buhr K, Dugas MJ. The role of fear of anxiety and intolerance of uncertainty in worry: an experimental manipulation. *Behav Res Ther* 2009;47:215-23.
11. Boelen PA, Reijntes A. Intolerance of uncertainty and social anxiety. *J Anxiety Disord* 2009;23:130-5.
12. Gentes EL, Ruscio AM. A meta-analysis of the relation of intolerance of uncertainty to symptoms of generalized anxiety disorder, major depressive disorder, and obsessive-compulsive disorder. *Clin Psychol Rev* 2011;31:923-33.
13. Oglesby ME, Schmidt NB. The role of threat level and intolerance of uncertainty (IU) in anxiety: An experimental test of IU theory. *Behav Ther* 2017;48:427-34.
14. Buhle JT, Silvers JA, Wager TD, Lopez R, Onyemekwu C, Kober H, et al. Cognitive reappraisal of emotion: A meta-analysis of human neuroimaging studies. *Cereb Cortex* 2014;24:2981-90.
15. Benazzi F, Akiskal HS. A downscaled practical measure of mood lability as a screening tool for bipolar II. *J. Affect Disord* 2005;84:225-32.
16. Ferguson CJ, Negy C. Development of a brief screening questionnaire for histrionic personality symptoms. *Pers Individ Differ* 2014;66:124-27.
17. Carleton RN, Norton MA, Asmundson GJG. Fearing the unknown: A short version of the intolerance of uncertainty scale. *J Anxiety Disord* 2007;21:105-117.
18. Contardi A, Imperatori C, Amati I, Balsamo M, Innamorati M. Assessment of affect lability: Psychometric properties of the ALS-18. *Front Psychol*. 2018; 9: 427.
19. Aminoff SR, Jensen J, Lagerberg TV, Hellvin T, Sundet K, Andreassen OA, Melle I. An association between affective lability and executive functioning in bipolar disorder. *Psychiatry Res* 2012; 198(1): 58-61.
20. Bottesi G, Tesini V, Cerea S, Ghisi M. The association between intolerance of uncertainty, emotion regulation, impulsivity, and general distress in patients with Borderline Personality Disorder: Preliminary evidence. *Clin Psychol*. 2017; 22(2):137-147.
21. Blagov PS, Fowler KA, Lilienfeld LO. Histrionic personality disorder. United States of America: Sage Publications; 2007.
22. Kamen C, Pryor LR, Gaughan ET, Miller JD. Affective lability: Separable from neuroticism and the other big four? *Psychiatry Res* 2010;176:202-7.
23. Santangelo PS, Koenig J, Kockler TD, Eid M, Holtmann J, Koudela-Hamila S, Parzer P, et al. Affective Instability across the Life Span in Borderline Personality Disorder – A Cross-Sectional E-Diary Study. *Acta Psychiatrica Scand* 26 August 2018 <https://doi.org/10.1111/acps.12950>
24. O. Rosen N, Knauper B, Sammut J. Do individual differences in intolerance of uncertainty affect health monitoring? *Psychol Health* 2007; 22:413–30.