Letter to the Editor

Empirical Evidence for a State Personality Group

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To the Editor:

Personality is generally considered to be stable, or at the very least, something that changes slowly over time. DSM-IV takes this stance for the personality disorders (1). However, there is no question that measures of personality characteristics can be elevated if measured when the patient is acutely ill with an Axis I disorder. These measures then return to baseline after resolution of the Axis I disorder (2,3).

Researchers have speculated about the possibility of personality being defined as both state and trait. State personality characteristics would vary over relatively short periods of time while Trait characteristics would be enduring. It is beyond the scope of this letter to mention all who have written in this area, but it ranges from 1968 (4) to a recent longitudinal study (5).

A key question is whether State PD can be distinguished from Trait PD and No PD. In two previous reports I did so in two different populations (6,7). In both of these cases the State group could be statistically separated from the Trait group. However, if a State group could be separated from the other groups by a personality variable, this is even more persuasive. I did this in the second report (7), but the first (6) did not. This letter reports a differentiation of the State and Trait groups in the first population (6) using a measure not included in the report at that time.

Not used in that report was the MCMI version 1, a validated personality instrument. One scale felt most likely to be relevant was chosen for the comparison. Using the scale which measured cluster B personality pathology the results were Trait PD (75.4, SD=11.7), State PD (70.6, SD=6.4) and No PD (55.6, SD=13.8). Even given the relatively small sample sizes (10, 3 and 5 respectively) Fisher’s Exact test indicates a significant difference, p=.025. This finding of a second population where State PD can be distinguished from No PD and Trait PD by personality measures increases the chances that State PD is a valid personality subgrouping worthy of further study.

REFERENCES


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