

CORRUPTION ADDICTION: A DISORDER OR A TRAIT?

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ABSTRACT

The paper delves into the intricate and controversial concept of corruption, exploring whether it could be viewed as a disorder akin to addiction or as an inherent trait within individuals. It begins by defining corruption from economic and societal perspectives, highlighting its role as a form of dishonesty and abuse of power. The systemic nature of corruption is also discussed, emphasizing its entrenchment in societal structures and practices. While not formally recognized as a psychological disorder, this concept draws parallels with addiction by featuring compulsivity, tolerance, withdrawal, negative consequences, and escalation. The paper concludes that, based on the reviewed literature, corruption addiction appears to be more of a disorder than a trait. It highlights the impact of environmental factors, the distress and dysfunction caused by corruption, and the lack of empathy as factors that contribute to the classification of corruption as a disorder. The paper recommends subjecting individuals in public office to corruption tests, providing rehabilitation and recovery options for corrupt individuals, and imposing strict penalties to deter corrupt behavior.

Keywords: *Corruption Addiction, Disorder, Trait, Addiction, and Behaviour.*

INTRODUCTION

Corruption has continued to be a menace that has eaten deep both in developed and developing nation of the world It is true to say that corruption is more severe and persistent in developing country such as Nigeria (source?). Over the years, the transparency international annual corruption perception Index consistently rate Nigeria as one of the most corrupt countries in the world. In Nigeria, corruption manifests itself in a variety of ways and in all sectors from the social, political and bureaucratic to the educational and cultural. Corruption is perpetrated in a variety of ways which include embezzlement, inflation of contracts, fraud, manipulation or distortion of information by public officials positioned between politicians and, extortion (Eskeland & Thiele, 1999; Fjeldstad, 1999). The government in a bid to reduce the menace of corruption in Nigeria created the anti-corruption agencies such as the Economic Financial crime commission (EFCC) and Independent Corruption and other Practices Commission (ICPC) in year 2000 and 2002. These agencies have recorded some achievements in the fight against corruption, but the menace is still very high especially among public sectors (Damilare et al., 2019); thereby impacting negatively on the socio-economic landscape of Nigeria.

Amidst the myriad discussions surrounding this ubiquitous ill, a provocative question emerges: Is corruption merely a transgressive act, or could it, in fact, be a deeply ingrained trait within certain individuals? In the following discourse, we will delve into the complexities of corruption, dissecting



its multifaceted nature, and critically examining whether it can be categorized as a disorder secondary to addiction, or if it is an inherent trait lurking within the human psyche.

In this regard, corruption has been defined as the misuse of public office for personal gain (Hodgson, 2021). Williams (2021) saw it as individual actions that abuse entrusted power for private gain. One prominent conceptualization of corruption highlights its role as a form of dishonesty and abuse of power. In this context, corruption is viewed as an act of deception and betrayal of public trust. It involves individuals or institutions using their authority and influence for personal gain, often through bribery, embezzlement, or favoritism, eroding the foundations of fair governance and justice.

Another dimension of corruption underscores its systemic nature, as emphasized in the "corruption as a system" model (Rose-Ackerman, 1999). This perspective recognizes that corruption can become deeply ingrained in the structures and processes of a society or institution. It operates as a hidden network of practices and relationships, where corrupt behaviour is not isolated but interconnected, making it challenging to detect and root out. Corruption can also manifest in various forms, such as grand corruption involving high-level officials and large-scale embezzlement, or petty corruption at the grassroots level (Johnston, 2005). The concept of corruption is often associated with only public offices, but in the real sense it cut across public and private sector, Therefore it is important to see the place of corruption even in private organizations.

As captured in the World Bank 2020 Global Report on Advancing Government Efficiency and Promoting Transparency approaches the issue of anti-corruption from a systemic perspective, emphasized that; Addressing the intricate and multifaceted nature of corruption revealed that, while technical remedies and compliance measures play enabling roles, they seldom possess the stand alone capacity to eradicate corruption entirely. In numerous societies, corrupt practices have entrenched themselves within historical origins, societal conventions, and political ethos. It is not uncommon to discover robust connections among authority, political dynamics, and financial interests (World Bank, 2020).

In this study the construct corruption addiction refers to a phenomenon where individuals habitually engage in corrupt practices, driven by a compulsive and recurrent urge for personal gain, power, or illicit rewards. While not a formally recognized psychological disorder, the concept of corruption addiction draws upon elements of behavioural addiction and deviant behaviour to shed light on individuals who repeatedly and excessively participate in corrupt activities. Addiction is characterized with the following: Compulsivity, tolerance, Withdrawal, Negative Consequences and escalation (Potenza et al., 2002; Kaye et al., 1998; Heatherton & Wagner, 2011). By this it means that people are not able to control corruption even when they know it consequences and over time, individuals may develop a tolerance to the rewards gained from corrupt behavior, leading to a heightened need for increasingly unethical acts to achieve the same level of satisfaction (Marazziti et al., 2012; Sussman et al., 2011).

Meanwhile, the term trait is a fundamental concept in the field of psychology and personality research, referring to enduring and relatively stable individual characteristics or patterns of behavior, thought, and emotion. A trait can be thought of as a relatively stable characteristic that causes individuals to behave in certain ways (Worthy et al., 2022). On the other hand, is disorder, denoting a deviation from a state of normalcy or a disruption in the regular functioning of an individual's mental, emotional, or physical well-being. A disorder typically refers to a mental or emotional condition that significantly impairs an individual's thoughts, feelings, behaviors, or overall functioning, leading to distress, dysfunction, or impairment in daily life, which medically goes beyond mental health but cuts across physical health conditions (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; American Diabetes Association, 2022). In essence, the term "disorder" serves as a critical concept for identifying and categorizing conditions that deviate from the expected norms of physical or mental health.



The question becomes if there are people who are relatively having the characteristics that predispose them to corruption addiction and corrupt behaviors or if it is actually a disorder that can be dealt with and treated using psychological approaches. To this end this paper reviewed scholarly works around the subject matter with the aim of drawing conclusion from existing literary works to explain corruption in our society.

Corruption Addiction: A Disorder

The concept of "corruption addiction" presents a compelling but complex perspective that amalgamates elements of behavioural addiction, deviant behavior, and societal dynamics. While it is not a recognized mental health disorder in established diagnostic manuals, it offers valuable insights into understanding individuals who exhibit repetitive and compulsive engagement in corrupt practices.

Corruption addiction is characterized with Compulsive Behavior; where it is marked by compulsive and recurrent engagement in corrupt activities despite awareness of their negative consequences (Marazziti et al., 2012). Just as individuals with substance addiction exhibit an irresistible urge for drugs or alcohol, those with corruption addiction may experience an overwhelming compulsion to seek personal gain or power through illicit means. While that continues the individual develops tolerance and escalation of corrupt behaviors. Similar to addiction, individuals with corruption addiction may develop tolerance over time, requiring progressively more unethical actions to achieve the same level of satisfaction (Sussman et al., 2011). This can lead to an escalation of corrupt behavior, as individuals take increasingly high risks to attain their goals (Heatherston & Wagner, 2011).

When individuals with corruption addiction are prevented from engaging in corrupt practices, they may experience withdrawal symptoms, such as anxiety, restlessness, or a strong desire to return to their corrupt activities (Potenza et al., 2002). This suggests a psychological dependence on corrupt behavior. Individuals with corruption addiction persist in their behavior, even when they recognize the harm it causes. These behaviors often lead to severe legal, ethical, and personal consequences (Kaye et al., 1998), much like individuals with addiction who continue to use substances despite adverse outcomes.

Corruption addiction is not solely an individual issue; it also encompasses societal and environmental dimensions. Cultural norms, institutional weaknesses, and societal acceptance of corruption can contribute to its perpetuation (Transparency International, 2021). In some contexts, corrupt practices may be normalized, making it challenging to break the cycle. World Health Organization (2022) noted that one in every eight persons in the world suffers from substance abuse disorder, while, Charny (1997) was of the opinion that corruption should be categorized as a disorder. He argued that Intense and extensive power strivings, Lack of empathy for people, and indifference to the suffering of others amongst others he listed, should be categorized as mental disorder. According to him he argued that these behaviors lead to distress and dysfunction to the people and as such meets the definition of abnormality in psychology.

In another study that investigated seventy-six inmates who were imprisoned for cases centered around corruption and battery, it was discovered that personality disorders were associated with them, the prominent personality disorder discovered was obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), the implication of OCD in them demonstrates the place of personality disorder in Corruption (Fernández-Montalvo & Echeburúa, 2008). Although, van Deurzen (2017) used a multilevel and dynamic analyses, and discovered that that the level of societal corruption is detrimental especially for the mental health of religious persons and individuals that experience material adversity.

Further, studies revealed that corruption addiction can be likened to gambling, where the area implicated for addiction is seen to be affected in people who are involved in corrupt behaviors (Allen, 2022). Studies demonstrated that addict substances like Drugs and alcohol stimulate the



brain's reward center, inciting the release of chemicals (neurotransmitters). When these substances are consumed, most commonly, dopamine is released, producing short-term feelings of euphoria and pleasure. Due to the brain and body recognizing these side-effects of a sense of joy and fulfillment, this fosters someone's motivation to repeatedly engage in these risky addictive behaviors, such as binge drinking, taking drugs or in this case corrupt practices (Schwartz, 2020). It was discovered that addiction develops initially as a goal-oriented behavior and it is a resultant effect of learning. Data are reviewed that indicated that these transitions from use to abuse to addiction depend upon shifts from ventral to dorsal striatal control over behavior, mediated in part by serial connectivity between the striatum and midbrain dopamine systems. It is believed that the possibility of targeting drug memory re-consolidation and extinction to reduce Pavlovian influences on drug/corrupt practice-seeking as a means of promoting abstinence and preventing relapse. (Everitt, 2023; Desert Hope Treatment, 2023).

Dopamine is a naturally occurring neurotransmitter in the brain that is released when an individual engages in pleasurable and rewarding activities. From an evolutionary perspective, this mechanism serves as a crucial survival strategy. Dopamine is naturally released by the brain during healthy activities, but substances like cocaine or heroin (or compulsive behaviours such as gambling, shopping, or overeating) can trigger the brain to release excessive dopamine levels. These substances or behaviours also inhibit the brain from reabsorbing dopamine, artificially prolonging the pleasurable experience (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2022). Consequently, the brain undergoes a process of associative learning, rewiring itself to associate the intense euphoria from drugs or compulsive behaviour solely with feelings of pleasure, reward, and the anticipation of more pleasure and reward. Consequently, healthy activities no longer evoke the same level of interest and are eventually disregarded and forgotten (Everitt, 2023).

More so, Sharma, et al. (2021) found that the relationship between corruption and mental health is stronger among women, and that there are no heterogeneous effects by poverty status. In another study it was revealed that the increase on corruption perception could aggravate depression and it was believed that there is a link between corruption and mental disorder (Zhang, 2022).

While "corruption addiction" is not a formal psychiatric disorder, it offers a valuable conceptual framework for understanding individuals who repeatedly engage in corrupt behavior. This concept highlights the interplay between psychological factors, societal influences, and environmental conditions that contribute to the persistence of corruption. Further research into this concept could aid in developing more effective strategies to combat corruption at both the individual and societal levels.

Corruption addiction and Trait

Corruption addiction, when viewed as a personality trait, offers a unique perspective on the complex interplay between an individual's character and their propensity for engaging in corrupt practices. While traditional personality traits like the Big Five (openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism) provide insights into general personality dimensions, corruption addiction as a personality trait delves into a more specific facet of an individual's disposition. Corruption addiction as a trait is a thought-provoking concept that suggests certain individuals may possess personality characteristics that make them prone to engaging in corrupt practices. While this notion is not formally recognized in established psychological or psychiatric classifications, it offers a valuable lens through which to understand the repetitive and compulsive nature of corrupt behavior.

Some key feature of the trait is that it is compulsive. Individuals with a propensity for corruption addiction may display compulsive tendencies, finding it difficult to resist opportunities for personal gain, even when it contradicts their moral values. This trait often aligns with a greater willingness to take risks. Those with a corruption addiction trait may be more inclined to pursue corrupt actions, driven by the allure of immediate rewards (Sobhani and Bechara, 2012).



Additionally, corruption addiction as a trait may be linked to a diminished capacity for empathy. Such individuals may prioritize their self-interest and gratification over the well-being of others, displaying limited remorse or guilt (Babiak & Hare, 2006). Also, just as other personality traits influence recurrent behaviors, individuals with a corruption addiction trait may engage in corrupt activities consistently over time (Tangney et al., 2007). It's crucial to recognize that the expression and development of corruption addiction as a trait are influenced by various environmental factors. Socioeconomic conditions, cultural norms, and the presence of corrupt opportunities can amplify or attenuate the influence of this trait (Mauro & Carmeci, 2004).

According to Zhao et al. (2016), the Dark Triad of personality positively predicted bribe-offering intention, which was mediated by the belief in good luck in gain-seeking. The relationship between narcissism and bribe-taking intention, and that between psychopathy and bribe-taking intention was mediated by the belief in good luck in penalty-avoidance. However, this belief in good luck did not mediate the relationship between Machiavellianism and bribe-taking intention.

Additionally, addiction has been related to personality traits and chief among them is the Urgency-Premeditation-Perseverance-Sensation Seeking-Positive Urgency (UPPS-P) impulsive trait, other personality traits related to Anxiety, Depression, Impulsivity and Risk taking has been implicated in addiction, which includes repetitive corrupt behaviours (Mitchell, & Potenza, 2014; Rømer et al., 2018).

Addiction showed a gender-related difference in the risk of developing an addictive behavior, with a significantly higher percentage of risk seen for several addiction tendencies among the males than female. Statistically significant correlations emerged between some personality determinants and certain addictive behaviors (Munno et al., 2016). Studies have demonstrated that girls are more likely not to overcome cravings and eventually relapse (National Institute for Drug Addiction -NIDA, 2022). Therefore, women who are corrupt are more likely going to engage in corrupt behavior even when they do not want to, or actually know it is not a good behavior. Though studies have demonstrated that some women tend to overcome addiction faster than men, and the explanation given is that some are genetically prone to addiction and such people tend to manage addiction better or better still takes more time before they become addicted.

METHOD

Content analysis was used to systematically examine and interpret the data collected, particularly, the researchers searched for the following key words; corruption, corruption addiction, addiction and disorder, this helped to identify patterns, themes, and trends in relation to the study. The first step was to select the source materials or texts to be analyzed. These materials included written documents, articles, books, and speeches. The researchers reviewed literature that are available in respect of the subject matter and further discussed the findings of the study in tandem with the results gotten from several scholarly works and eventually reached a conclusion.

DISCUSSION

From the perspective of the reviewed literature, it was indicated that corruption addiction is more of a disorder than a trait. Individual seek more corruption to meet their corruption needs each time (Sussman, Lisha, & Griffiths, 2011; Heatherton & Wagner, 2011). This explains why individuals are more likely to increase their levels of corruption as their portfolio increases especially in the context of Nigeria. As the positions they occupy increases, they are likely to heighten the bar and taste for their corrupt practices, this evidently is a big psychological disorder that should be managed.

Further, just like addicts' experience withdrawal symptoms, each time they want to stop, corrupt individuals also experience withdrawal symptoms in forms of anxiety, restlessness, or a strong desire to return to their corrupt activities (Potenza, et al., 2002; Kaye, et al., 1998). Nigerian corrupt addicts also experience unnecessary worries over where to get more money to squander



and lead extravagant lifestyle. More so, they may become restless that the money they are getting might start going to another person if they stop “harnessing” it, hence, this explains why they don’t want to leave those sits, and when they eventually must leave, they look for someone who will replace them and still send them “returns”. This evidently could lead to serious restlessness and intrusive thoughts that could lead to other psychological issues and eventually leading to a relapse in cases where they might have stopped for a while, making it more of an addiction.

Studies also showed that environment influences abuse and eventually addiction (Transparency International, 2021; World health Organization, 2022). Cultural norms that promote corrupt practices: such as expecting people at certain levels to lead a particular style of life could actually lead to corruption and when this behaviour is encourage by people around it could lead to addiction. In the cases of Nigerian politician, our political culture is a negative one and also affects the way our politicians search for money both through legal and illegal means. Nigerian corrupt individuals try to convince people they are doing well, by spending much on unnecessary things. This poor cultural and environmental habit is indeed watering the deadly seed of corruption in our society.

Furthermore, corruption is a disorder because it is abnormal and psychologically abnormality depicts a disorder, more than a trait (Charny, 1997). Abnormal behaviours deviate from the norm, cause distress and dysfunction to an individual or people around them and constitutes danger to the individual or people around them (Fernández-Montalvo, and Echeburúa, 2008; van Deurzen; 2017; Allen, 2022). Corrupt Nigerian are ready to cause distress and danger to people lives just to embezzle money. A contract could be awarded and a corrupt individual can squander the money and do not care what happens to the masses that will use the road. They could sit on the wealth meant for the people and watch people suffer and die, without having any remorse. This indicates that these individuals are actually not normal and needs psychological intervention.

Findings also indicated that psychological disorders such as OCD and other personality disorders have been linked to corruption (Everitt, 2023; Desert Hope Treatment, 2023). who are corrupt are susceptible to psychological disorders and maybe because they are still rich and are able to fund their lifestyles, their disorders are not indicated and treated easily, hence the need for urgent intervention. Also, parts of the brain involved in gambling addiction has been implicated in addiction (Allen, 2022). showing that addiction is more of a disorder than a mere trait.

On the other hand, is the ideal of corruption being a trait. Findings in this study shows that Impulsive traits implicated in obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) and substance misuse was seen in the inmates who were jailed for corruption (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2022). Individuals who have this trait have the impulse to take what does not belong to them and may easily embezzle public funds without a second thought. and may not be able to control that impulse just like people who are suffering from OCD. Just like substance abusers get the impulse to abuse drugs, individuals are more likely going to want to get the impulse to engage in corrupt practices. Meanwhile, from the trait view, it is believed that individuals with certain traits might value their self-interest and gratification over the wellbeing of others (Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007). This explains why a corrupt individuals steal the funds meant for the wellbeing of retirees and watch them wallow in poverty, without blinking their eyes. From this study, it is evidently a disorder than a trait.

Conclusion

From the forgoing, it is evident that individuals who are suffering from corruption addiction is more likely to been seen as people with disorder. The fact that they seek more corruption to meet their corruption needs- known as craving in addiction and that they are likely to suffer from withdrawal symptoms is likely a fact pointing to it as a disorder. More so, the fact that the environment could that promotes it is likely going to increase its chances just like drug/substance pro-environment is likely to increase its abuse makes it more a disorder than a trait. Furthermore, corruption addiction



meets the criteria of causing distress, dysfunction and likely danger to others especially, makes it more a disorder which is also known as abnormal behaviour. Though few literatures might have attributed corruption addiction to traits, they still believe that corruption as a trait is born out of environmental factors than mere in born trait.

Recommendation

Having identified corruption to be more a disorder born out of environment, the following recommendation if followed, could help manage and care for corruption cases in our society:

1. Individuals that via for public offices should be subjected to corruption test, just as we have substance test. This will help identify them and treat them psychologically. Further it will .help to avoid giving them offices that can tempt them.
2. Corrupt individuals should be sent to addiction therapist to help them through the process of rehabilitation and recovery just like people who suffer from substance addictions.
3. Corrupt individuals should be punished according to the provision of the law. This will encourage people to rehabilitation on their own, especially when they see what has happened to other corrupt individuals.

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