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Alcohol addiction - a psychosocial perspective

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Abstract

Alcohol is the most widely used addictive substance, representing a genuine social phenomenon of global importance. Addiction to alcohol, as a dysfunctional pattern, has an undeniable impact on the overall functionality of the addict and his entourage. Alcohol addiction and alcohol itself represents something different for each individual depending on their socio-economic status and gender-based affiliation while maintaining a cultural cliché. The study aims to analyze the way in which individuals perceive alcohol and alcohol consumption according to gender, age, background, level of training and even consumer status.

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1. Introduction

Alcoholism blends its history with that of humanity, making its way along different historical periods and civilizations, by being a genuine social binder. Research on alcoholism, beginning with the individual, and continuing with the study of the relationship between behaviour and alcohol, social representation and the structure and dynamics of alcohol abuse. The socio-cultural factors are fundamental in the initiation of alcohol use.

Alcohol is the most widely used substance for addictive purposes. Alcohol abuse generates multiple organic and psychiatric consequences, with a complex social impact. The term alcohol addiction represents a pejorative meaning by its "social label". Beyond the social stigma imposed by alcoholism, rooted in the consciousness of humanity from ancient time, it has developed the concept of alcoholism as a disorder back in the mid '30, thus promoting model for its treatment. Specifically, alcoholism is distinguished as a maladaptive syndrome, more than a disorder,

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with different clinical forms and without a predictable natural evolution in subjects. Prelipceanu (2011) states that the evolution of the behavior of alcoholics can stop anytime and can also resume unexpectedly .

Studying this phenomenon represents a real worldwide problem, going beyond the impact of alcohol beginning with the individual and ending up with the socio- professional aspects and family issues that it raises, as Ades (1984) claims.

2. Features of alcohol addiction

According to Babor, (2008), alcoholism is a fundamental problem of the contemporary society both through its medical implications and the marked decrease in functionality at work, by it's propensity to accidents of various nature starting from a slight diminishing attention to the alteration of thought processes. It is fundamental to understand how people perceive alcohol and alcohol consumption in order to establish a consumer's pattern. Beyond an indisputable genetic component underlying alcohol addiction, Epstein, (2001) demonstrates that one can speak of an authentic social legacy, based on a cognitive process which targets family-based behaviours, having a repetitive and easily transferred character.

Alcohol addiction according to DSM V (2013) is defined as being a dysfunctional pattern of alcohol consumption, which leads to manifest clinical disorders stretched on a period of 12 months (for that it has to be fulfilled at least two of the following criteria):

1. the alcohol is used in large amounts for a long period of time
2. persistent desire / great efforts to give up alcohol
3. time invested to buy, to consume alcohol or to recover after its effects
4. craving
5. recurrent alcohol consumption with a deficiency in social and family integration
6. continued drinking despite a deficiency both relational and professional
7. decreased involvement in social, family and professional activities because of alcohol use
8. the use of alcohol in risky situations for health
9. continued drinking despite increased risk for poor health
10. tolerance
11. withdrawal

The first episode of acute alcoholic intoxication occurs frequently in adolescence but usually most people develop disorders related to alcohol consumption after the age of 30.

Often alcohol addiction is mistakenly perceived as an untreatable medical condition based on numerous recurrences of alcohol abuse. However, severe cases represent only a small proportion, typically people with alcohol addiction show a more promising prognosis. Risk factors and also prognostic factors often include cultural attitudes, the wide availability of alcohol, personal experience related to alcohol consumption and also the stress level.

3. Objectives

This study aims to assess the attitude of a certain population group towards alcohol and also towards its multidimensional implications in all aspects of life. In order to achieve this goal we have created and validated a tool to assess one's opinion regarding the consequences of alcohol abuse and also regarding alcoholic beverages in general.

4. Research methods

We assessed the opinion of 200 subjects regarding alcohol and alcohol addiction using a questionnaire, that we designed, having 35 items (initially the questionnaire had 43 items, 8 of them being excluded on a consistency basis) aimed at various aspects of alcoholism and its psychosocial implications, it's effect on family life, work and health, responses being graded from 1-4 (1-strongly disagree while to 4-strongly agree). This questionnaire was created by the authors of this study in our native language (Romanian), being an original tool and not being assumed from other

studies. The questionnaire's name is "Social representation of the alcohol addiction". It was applied in similar conditions to all subjects included in the study (Table 1). In order to carefully measure the questionnaire's precision and its reliability we managed to calculate the alfa Cronbach index, which was 0,701 that confirmed the questionnaire's validity. Factor analysis was used to evaluate the concepts included in the study, reducing the number of variables and identifying the hidden patterns (the alpha Cronbach index is situated between 0,821 and 0,703 for each factor).

Table 1. Questionnaire assessing various aspects of alcoholism perception - "Social representation of the alcohol addiction".

1	The alcohol consumption in one's family affects the lives of the other family members.	1	2	3	4
2	Excessive alcohol consumption is admitted at parties.	1	2	3	4
3	Unemployment can be an excuse for excessive alcohol consumption.	1	2	3	4
4	The quality of work is affected by alcohol addiction.	1	2	3	4
5	Many car accidents occur because of the driver's alcohol addiction .	1	2	3	4
6	Alcoholism in young people is due to a dysfunctional family life.	1	2	3	4
7	Alcohol consumption creates a state of well, of joy.	1	2	3	4
8	Specialized institutions offer their support and are effective in correcting alcohol addiction.	1	2	3	4
9	Excessive alcohol consumption greatly increases the risk for serious diseases.	1	2	3	4
10	Disappointments, failures, dissatisfaction can lead to alcohol addiction.	1	2	3	4
11	Entourage influences one`s attitude towards alcohol.	1	2	3	4
12	Educated people are less inclined alcohol consumption.	1	2	3	4
13	Alcoholics do not ever admit their problem.	1	2	3	4
14	Alcoholics can give up the comfort of their families in order to procure their drink.	1	2	3	4
15	Alcoholism is seen more often in young people.	1	2	3	4
16	Family plays an important role in giving up alcohol consumption.	1	2	3	4
17	Alcohol addiction can alter behavioural traits of individuals.	1	2	3	4
18	Lack of education or poor education associates with not recognizing the risks of excessive alcohol consumption.	1	2	3	4
19	Alcohol addiction of one of the parents or close relatives can influence the drinking behaviour of children and young people.	1	2	3	4
20	Alcoholics arouse fear of those around.	1	2	3	4
21	Excessive alcohol consumption is bad for one`s social life.	1	2	3	4
22	Excessive alcohol consumption can cause serious work accidents.	1	2	3	4
23	Alcohol addiction leads to aggressive even violent behaviour .	1	2	3	4
24	Alcoholics arouse repugnance of those around.	1	2	3	4
25	The increasing number of people addicted to alcohol is directly proportional to that of crime.	1	2	3	4
26	People in rural areas consume excessive alcohol.	1	2	3	4
27	Alcoholism can be considered a disease.	1	2	3	4
28	For alcoholics there are no excuses.	1	2	3	4

For processing data we used SPSS, with the help of factor analysis , through which we grouped their responses into 8 categories (factors) and subsequently analyzed the effect of independent variables like sex, age, origin, education, socio-economic background, level of education, marital status . We applied Independent Samples T Test for independent variable with two levels and One-Way ANOVA for the variable with more than two levels.

The subjects are between 20 and 60 years old, equally distributed by gender, educational level and socio-economic variables.

5. Results

Alcohol addiction is a prominent phenomenon of contemporary society, based on a causal complex, leading to serious consequences to family microclimate functionality, as well as social and professional environment. Alcoholism has many connotations, going from a catalyst for fun, palliation for depression, to a genuine risk factor for the occurrence of many serious medical conditions and a determinant for psychosocial dysfunctions. Alcoholism is different for each individual: for some it is a refuge, for others a torture, all that depending on the person's personal motivation also affiliated to the social demands.

The eight factors that were placed in the questionnaire, as items, were in fact dependent variables of the study, representing the subjects opinion on alcohol addiction as follow: the bidirectional relationship between the

family and the addict as an individual, the general attitude towards alcoholism and alcoholics and their social image, the potential causes of alcoholism, the influence of the socio-economic status, family and education as regard to alcohol consumption, the social implications of the use and abuse of alcohol and not least to the disorders that an alcoholic suffers.

With the help of the T-test and the One Way ANOVA we obtained a $p < 0.05$ in the analysis of the independent variables based on the 8 supporting factors, observing differences in terms of how the subjects perceive alcoholism, according to their age (p between 0,01 regarding the general attitude towards alcoholism and 0,04 regarding the potential causes of alcoholism), sex (p between 0,001 for the social implications of use and abuse of alcohol and 0,035 regarding the potential causes of alcoholism), level of training (from $p = 0,02$ regarding potential causes of alcoholism to $p = 0,04$ for the influence of socio-economic status), environment (p between 0,003 for disorders suffered by alcoholics and 0,02 for the relationship between family and the addict as an individual), background and consumer status (p situated between 0,001 regarding the general attitude towards alcoholism and alcoholics and 0,04 for family and education as regard to alcohol consumption). Thus globally, the most powerful correlation was established between the 8 factors and background and between the 8 factors themselves and the alcohol consumer status. The most significant relationship was between the background and the factor that suggests subjects opinion regarding the potential psychiatric disorders of alcoholics and between consumer status and the general attitude regarding alcohol addiction.

After statistical analysis of the influence of the independent variables, related to the individuality and identity of the subjects questioned, there were some differences in how they perceive alcoholism. Thus it has been identified a significant difference in terms of alcoholism interpretation by women versus men, being that the female subjects agreed to a more negative connotation of alcoholism in absolutely all levels, but especially in terms of family impact.

Also subjects with a higher education are much more aware of the alcoholism's negative impact than the subjects with a slightly less educational level. On the other hand, subjects in the 41-60 years old group perceive alcoholism as a serious phenomenon, difficult to control, while the subjects in the 20-40 years old group have a more loose perspective on alcohol addiction, underestimating its bio-psycho-social importance.

Predictably, rural people give much less pejorative connotations to alcoholism than those in the urban areas, which can be attributed to the poor access to information and the continuation of inherited behavioral patterns in an environment where the reward system is not that varied.

Paradoxically, the subjects that by filling the questionnaire were crossed as harmful alcohol users, have a very tolerant view on the social image and impact of alcoholism, from casual consumers or non-consumers, despite the negative experiences they have felt because of their vice.

6. Conclusions

Alcoholism is now a true phenomenon from a bio-psycho-social point of view, requiring a global approach, given its complex causation and its serious consequences both to the family life, as well as the social and professional environment. Individuals perceive differently the impact and importance of the abuse of alcohol given their gender, age, education level, background, and also consumer status. Alcohol is the substance of abuse most widespread and available, but also the most acceptable in socio-cultural terms.

Addiction is a state of subordination, submission, which leads to the loss of certain liberties, being the excessive manifestation of an abnormal and harmful behaviour. Amid the loss of personal freedom, people change, a certain number of behavioural traits change, but insidiously, thus ignored for long periods of time. The addiction pushes one's self to deception and lies in order to preserve their self-esteem and that of their entourage.

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