

MAJOR PROBLEMS OF ALCOHOL ADDICTED PATIENTS WHO COME THROUGH DETOXICATION THERAPY

NAJWAŻNIEJSZE PROBLEMY PACJENTÓW UZALEŻNIONYCH OD ALKOHOLU,
PRZEBYWAJĄCYCH NA TERAPII ODWYKOWEJ

Jolanta Karyś, Monika Szpringer

Faculty of Health Sciences, The Jan Kochanowski University of Humanities and Sciences in Kielce
Dean: prof. Stanisław Głuszek MD

SUMMARY

Introduction. An indispensable aspect of alcohol addiction is the magnitude of problems of addicted people. Alcohol ruins health and the life of an addicted person. Uncontrolled drinking of alcohol does not solve problems, but it leads to subsequent more complex problems. An alcohol addict does not stop drinking although the spiral of problems caused by alcohol heaps up at a dynamic rate.

Aim. The aim of the study is to present problems which alcohol addicted people experience on a daily basis.

Material and method. The empirical investigation included 105 patients of the therapeutic programme carried out on different levels. The investigation was carried out during 5 months, i.e. from November 2007 to March 2008.

Results and conclusions. From among the surveyed patients the most numerous group consisted of the age range 31–40 years; next 41–50 – 28%; 51–60 – 21%; 18–30 – 15%; and others – 4%. Married people were the largest group – 51%. The investigation has confirmed that alcoholism is a problem with which the patient cannot cope alone (99%). Alcoholism effectively ruins the life of an addicted person. It is the source of other numerous, frequently terminal diseases. The very fact of alcoholic addiction is only one of many problems resulting from drinking alcohol. Cognition of the major important problems inflicted by alcoholism upon addicted people permits to analyse this phenomenon with a better insight. It also allows to understand better addicted persons and their problems with which they struggle on a daily basis and to improve the efficiency of therapy.

Key words: alcohol addiction, alcoholic disease, disaccustoming therapy, alcoholism.

STRESZCZENIE

Wstęp. Nieodzownym aspektem uzależnienia od alkoholu jest ogrom problemów osób uzależnionych. Alkohol rujnuje zdrowie i życie osoby popadłej w uzależnienie. Niekontrolowane picie nie tylko nie rozwiązuje problemów, ale prowadzi do kolejnych, coraz poważniejszych. Alkoholik nie przestaje pić, mimo że spirala problemów, wywołanych przez alkohol piętrzy się w dynamicznym tempie.

Cel. Celem pracy jest przedstawienie problemów, jakich na co dzień doświadczają ludzie uzależnieni od alkoholu.

Material i metoda. Badaniem empirycznym objęto 105 pacjentów programu terapeutycznego, realizowanego na różnych jego poziomach. Badania przeprowadzono w ciągu 5 miesięcy, tj. od listopada 2007 roku do marca 2008 roku.

Wyniki i wnioski. Spośród ankietowanych pacjentów najlicniejszą grupę stanowili chorzy w przedziale wiekowym 31–40 lat, następnie 41–50 – 28%, 51–60 – 21% 18–30 – 15% i inne 4%. Największą grupę badanych stanowiły osoby będące w związkach małżeńskich – 51%. Badanie potwierdziło, że alkoholizm jest problemem, z którym chory nie jest w stanie sobie sam poradzić (99%). Alkoholizm skutecznie rujnuje życie osoby uzależnionej. Jest przyczyną licznych innych chorób, często śmiertelnych.

Sam fakt uzależnienia od alkoholu jest tylko jednym z wielu problemów wynikających z picia. Poznanie najważniejszych problemów, jakie przysparza choroba alkoholowa osobom uzależnionym, pozwala głębiej zanalizować to zjawisko. Pozwala również na lepsze zrozumienie osób uzależnionych i problemów, z którymi zmagają się na co dzień, a zatem poprawić skuteczność terapii.

Słowa kluczowe: uzależnienie od alkoholu, choroba alkoholowa, terapia odwykowa, alkoholizm.

INTRODUCTION

Alcoholism is one of most serious social problems. It affects people of both sexes at various age. It begins guilefully, and over time it ruins the health

of a drinking person and of his or her family. When untreated it leads inevitably to untimely death. Statistics of alcohol abuse in Poland are alarming. About 2 per cent of the Polish population are people addicted to alcohol, which is the equivalent of two medium-

size cities. Solution of many emotional and physical problems of alcohol addicts requires solution of the problem of alcohol drinking. The process of the effective treatment of alcoholism requires a stay of an alcohol addicted person in a disaccustoming centre. However, despite the use of modern therapeutic methods, therapy is not always completed with a complete success. This results from the fact that alcoholism is a chronic illness. It has also been proved that the kind of motivation for treatment has an essential influence on its efficiency; being a decisive factor in the sobering process of patients after the completion of the disaccustoming therapy. Almost all patients subjected to treatment declare the wish to stop drinking alcohol, being aware of numerous devastations which alcohol causes in their life.

As it results from the investigation, alcoholic addiction involves many harms and losses for the addicted person and for anyone who has close relations with the addicted person [1]. Addicted persons feel that alcohol ruins their life, embracing its all aspects. They struggle with numerous problems resulting from drinking, a considerable part of which can act as motivators that inspire their fight with addiction. Health harms, resulting from alcohol addiction, can be divided into somatic and psychiatric complications. No less important are social harms of prolonged drinking of alcohol, which refer to a widely understood disturbances in relations of the addicted person with the social environment. Alcoholism can, therefore, lead to violence in alcoholic families, but it can also cause other undesirable phenomena, such as increase in delinquency and conflicts with the law, accidents, unemployment, poverty and homelessness [2, 3,4, 5]. Alcoholic addiction is, therefore, only one of many problems resulting from the abuse of alcohol. There are other problems involved, and understanding each of them permits to look for effective strategies and methods of the solution of individual problems. Increase in the number of people drinking alcohol on various occasions and for the improvement of mood considerably aggravates the risk for addiction [6]. It is worth while to look closer at the major problems of patients addicted to alcohol who undergo the disaccustoming therapy.

THE AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study is to present, on the basis of empirical investigation, problems which alcohol addicted people experience in their everyday life. It will permit to have a look at the alcoholic, a person afflicted with alcoholic disease from another perspective.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The empirical investigation was carried out at the Department of Alcoholic Therapy during a period of 5 months, i.e. from November 2007 to March 2008. 105 patients, who followed the basic disaccustoming programme, took part in the investigation. The group of respondents were patients who participated in the therapeutic programme on its different levels, beginning with the entry group, through all the stages, to the exit group. They were men of various social status and differentiated social background, age, education as well as professional and family situation.

The fundamental criterion of the selection of the group of the investigated patients was a diagnosed alcoholic addiction, patients' signed contract about the compliance with the principles and regulations, binding in the Therapy Centre and participation in the therapeutic programme during the period of investigation.

RESULTS

Of all the surveyed patients the most numerous group (32%) consisted of patients in the age range 31–40 years, next 28% of patients aged 41–50 years. Patients aged 51–60 years made 21% of the inmates of the Centre; 15% were young men, aged 18–30 years. The least numerous group included people in the age range 61–70 years, which was 4% of all the surveyed patients. The average age of all the surveyed people was 41 years.

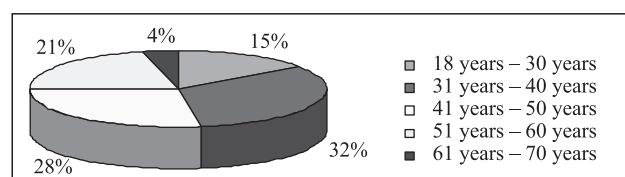


Fig. 1. Age range of patients under therapy

The majority of people who participated in the group therapy had elementary vocational education. They made up 51% of all respondents. The second biggest group consisted of patients with secondary education – 28% all of the investigated subjects. 18% of the investigated subjects had primary education and 3% of them had higher education.

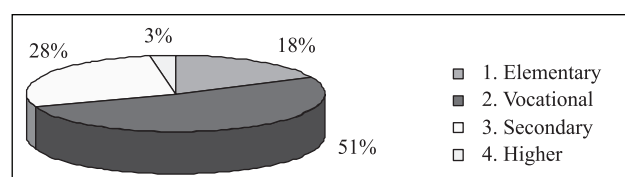


Fig. 2. Educational status

The largest group of the surveyed people were married persons – 51%; bachelors – 28%, divorcees – 18%, and widowers – 3%.

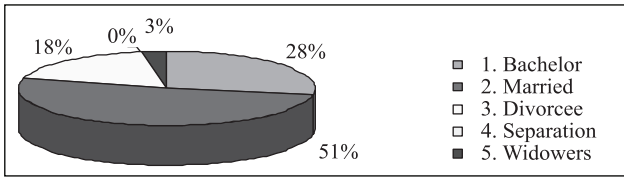


Fig. 3. The marital status of patients

Alcoholics entangled in psychological mechanisms of alcohol addiction reluctantly undertake the disaccustoming therapy. However, as the results of the investigation have shown, almost all of the surveyed patients admitted that alcoholic addiction was a source of many vital problems for them. Majority of them also declared that they were willing to acquire skills of coping with the alcohol problem; all of them declared that they were prepared to improve their life.

Table 1. Criticism of the problem of addiction

Alcoholism is a problem which I cannot solve by myself	n = 105	%
1. Definitely yes	92	88%
2. Rather yes	12	11%
3. Rather not	0	0%
4. Definitely not	1	1%

The fact that alcoholic addiction is a problem which cannot be solved by the patient alone was acknowledged by 99% of the surveyed people. The word “problem” includes all difficulties and harms resulting from the uncontrolled drinking. Only 1 patient acknowledged that alcoholism was decidedly not his problem. It is possible to conjecture that he joined the disaccustoming therapy through the motivation of the external environment which extorted from him the commencement of treatment.

Table 2. Ways of coping with vital problems

I cannot cope with problems that is why I drink alcohol	n = 105	%
1. Definitely yes	97	92%
2. Rather yes	8	8%
3. Rather not	0	0%
4. Definitely not	0	0%

The attitude of patients to this issue indicates how big problems patients have in overcoming daily difficulties without stimulating themselves with alcohol. This results from internal disposition, situational factors or also educational deficits. All the surveyed

people (100 %) admitted they lacked skills of coping with daily problems without the use of alcohol as “support”. 92% of respondents indicated “definitely yes”, and 8% – “rather yes”.

Table 3. Alcohol as the source of problems

Drinking alcohol is the reason of many problems of mine	n = 105	%
1. Definitely yes	91	87%
2. Rather yes	12	11%
3. Rather not	2	2%
4. Definitely not	0	0%

Alcohol as the cause of vital problems was indicated univocally by 87% of the surveyed subjects; however 11% answered “rather yes”. Only 2 persons did not perceive the relationship between drinking and problems resulting from them. Probably they entered therapy in consequence of strong external motivators, and negative answers can indicate their understated criticism.

Table 4. The destructive effect of alcohol on whole life

Alcohol destroys my whole life	n = 105	%
1. Definitely yes	87	83%
2. Rather yes	15	14%
3. Rather not	2	2%
4. Definitely not	1	1%

Alcoholism leads to the degradation of life in all its aspects. 83% of the surveyed people indicated the magnitude of devastations caused by alcohol in their life; 14% admitted that alcohol has rather a destructive influence on their life. Only 3 patients denied that drinking destroyed their life, and one of them definitely rejected such eventuality. Perhaps alcohol has not made yet drastic harms in the life of these patients, or these patients are firmly stuck in disease mechanisms that they cannot perceive these harms.

Table 5. Loss of control over drinking

I cannot drink in controlled way	n = 105	%
1. Definitely yes	77	73%
2. Rather yes	20	19%
3. Rather not	4	4%
4. Definitely not	4	4%

73% of the surveyed patients admitted the lack of control over drinking; and 19% respondents answered “rather yes”. The answer “rather not” and “definitely not” was indicated by 8 patients. In reality, it is alcohol that controls the addicted person and not on the contrary. The addicted person believes only that he or she

“controls the situation”. Most often the addicted person builds up an illusory strategy of “safe drinking”.

Table 6. Problems in relations with family and friends

By drinking alcohol I hurt people I care for	n = 105	%
1. Definitely yes	77	73%
2. Rather yes	24	23%
3. Rather not	4	4%
4. Definitely not	0	0%

The effects of alcoholism afflict all persons with whom the alcoholic has close relations, particularly family members. Chaos, uncertainty and impermanence, and frequently acts of violence, are manifested in all the spheres of family life of an alcohol addict. 77% of the patients answered “definitely yes” and 24% – “rather yes”. It proves that respondents are aware of the disadvantageous influence of drinking on their relations. Only 4 persons, i.e. 4% of the surveyed people, opined that they did not do any harm to anybody by their conduct. Perhaps those respondents were single people who lived solitary lives. It is also possible to infer that these statements result from the lack of criticism, which is the effect of the biosocial degradation or personality disorders.

Table 7. The problem of guilt and shame

While drinking alcohol I feel ashamed and guilty	n = 105	%
1. Definitely yes	71	67%
2. Rather yes	26	25%
3. Rather not	7	7%
4. Definitely not	1	1%

The so called “moral hangover” is experienced by the addicted person as a feeling of guilt and shame. This problem was admitted by 67% of the surveyed people; 25% answered “rather yes”. Not everyone, however, indicated, that they felt guilt and shame due to drinking alcohol. This result is puzzling and permits better to understand the multifactoriality of the phenomenon (kind of motivation, patient’s personality, presence of damages within the central nervous system, degradation, and other).

Table 8. The problem of pressure on the part of close relations and friends

While drinking alcohol I feel marked by relatives for what I do	n = 105	%
1. Definitely yes	53	51%
2. Rather yes	33	31%
3. Rather not	14	13%
4. Definitely not	5	5%

The alcohol addict usually has not the possibility of “comfortable” drinking, i.e. without attracting the atten-

tion of others. He or she is most often under pressure of the family who urge him or her to stop drinking or commence treatment. The alcohol addict isolates himself or herself from social relations and he or she isolated. 51% of the surveyed people recognized it as their own problem, answering “definitely yes”, and 31% – “rather yes”. However, as many as 18% of the surveyed people indicated the negative answer. Paradoxically, defence against the pressure of other people can generate the so-called alcoholic’s pride. It is a manifestation of subjective satisfiability and power. It is a desperate defence of illusions about personal value and power [3].

Table 9. Health problems

While drinking alcohol I destroy my life	n = 105	%
1. Definitely yes	43	41%
2. Rather yes	34	32%
3. Rather not	18	17%
4. Definitely not	10	10%

Alcoholism leads both to psychical and physical changes of the addicted person. Eventually physical degradation follows. For many it was the only motive to ask for professional help [3]. The relationship between drinking and health problems was confirmed by 41% of the surveyed people, and 32% indicated the answer “rather yes”. The group which answered “rather not” – 17% and “definitely not” – 10%, most surely did not feel yet the disastrous effects of drinking on their health.

Table 10. The problem of the threat of the loss of family

While drinking alcohol I am conscious that I loose my family	n = 105	%
1. Definitely yes	47	45%
2. Rather yes	20	19%
3. Rather not	21	20%
4. Definitely not	17	16%

Untreated alcoholism sometimes leads to family breakup, and always to its dysfunction, or even pathology. 45% of the surveyed people recognized this problem as their own; and 19% responded “rather yes”. 20% of the surveyed patients did not feel any threat for the loss of their family, and 16% of the surveyed people did not confirm any threat of the loss of family.

Table 11. Financial questions

Because of drinking alcohol I have financial problems	n = 105	%
1. Definitely yes	43	41%
2. Rather yes	32	30%
3. Rather not	20	19%
4. Definitely not	10	10%

Alcoholism often causes financial problems of addicted people. 41% of the surveyed subjects admitted financial problems, saying “definitely yes”; 30% responded “rather yes”; whereas 29% of the surveyed subjects answered that they did not have financial problems due to drinking alcohol.

DISCUSSION

Alcoholism is a disease particularly destructive for individuals and their families. Uncontrolled drinking is a problem itself, it also brings many harms and losses; it creates new problems and intensifies the existing ones. Consequences concern not only addicted people, but they also cause many social and health problems.

The investigation has confirmed that alcoholism is a problem with which the patient cannot cope alone (99%). Alcoholic disease has its origin and further course from the warning phase, through a critical one until the chronic one, while effects of this disease become more and more noticeable for both the addicted persons and their environment. Alcohol is drunk by people who believe that their problems will not be so acute as they seem to be in the state of sobriety (100%). However, instead of expected improvement, other vital problems arise; they lead addicted persons to psychophysical and social degradation. Self-destruction is one of the major effects of alcoholism.

In fact, everything begins with the problem of the lack of control over drinking, which is one of the criteria of alcoholic addiction (92%). Nevertheless, a part of respondents (8%) denied that they lost the ability of controlling the situation in which they reach for alcohol. It is true that there are moments in which addicted persons can refrain from drinking, and even – to some degree – they can control their addiction – however, sooner or later a situation arises when alcohol controls addicted persons.

The surveyed people acknowledged wronging their family and close relations (96%) as one of the major problems. It is a fact that alcoholic addiction even of one person stamps on all the family – on both adults and children. Over time all of them fall into the trap of so called codependence, i.e. a harmful adaptation to life in abnormal situation. Alcoholic addiction leads to domestic violence. It sharpens emotional problems of the alcoholic and disturbs self-control. Persons who become aggressive under the effect of alcohol admit to have used violence in relation to family members also in the state of sobriety. The investigation proved that respondents were acutely aware of it.

Untreated alcoholism may lead to a break-up or even loss of the family. It also happens sometimes that the alcoholic who is in the process of regaining sobriety loses his or her family. Decision to stop drinking comes too late and even decisive steps fail to bring positive changes. The majority of respondents recognized the loss of family as their own problem (64%).

Another essential problem of addicted persons is a sense of guilt and shame (92%). These problems are usually interrelated and they are caused by the violations of norms and ethical rules by the alcoholic. When drinking alcohol, the addicted person feels socially stigmatized and feels discomfort (82%). The more his or her life concentrates around alcohol, the more he or she secludes himself or herself from other people.

Alcoholism is an illness which ruins the whole life of an addicted person, including his or her health, too. It is the cause of other numerous diseases, some of them being terminal. Chronic alcoholism leads to severe disturbances as well as somatic psychiatric changes. It is sometimes the cause of impotence and sterility. Many of these disturbances can regress in the conditions of long abstinence. 73% of the surveyed people acknowledged that they had health problems resulting from drinking alcohol. A large group of the investigated subjects (27%) did not notice yet deep health changes, which indicates a short duration of the disease.

The essential problems of alcoholics are also financial matters (71% of the investigated subjects indicated them). The whole family with the alcohol problem often falls into debt, and more often its living standard deteriorates (“because money must be spent on alcohol”). The financial problems of an alcohol addict can also result from conflicts with the law, job loss and in extreme cases they can lead to homelessness.

CONCLUSION

Alcohol drunk pathologically causes an incessant suffering of the addicted person. It is a problem which is not easily admitted by alcoholics, who repulse assistance from outside. Under this “shell” of apparent listlessness and reluctance is usually hidden a great need of warmth, acceptances and support.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- [1] Miller M, Górski TT, Miller DK. *Naucz się żyć od nowa*. Warszawa 2000: 51.
- [2] Mellibruda J, Sobolewska–Mellibruda Z. *Integracyjna psychoterapia uzależnień*. Warszawa 2006: 28–124.

[3] Babiarczyk M, Koziej S, Szpringer M. Wybrane problemy współczesnej młodzieży. Kielce 2007: 136.
[4] Perlorenzi C, Senni A. L'alcolismo. Prospettive di ricerca e di intervento. Roma 2001: 96.

[5] Gallimberti L, Il bere oscuro. Milano 2005: 135.
[6] Barbagli M, Colombo A, Savona E. Sociologia della devianza. Bologna 2003: 77.

Address for correspondence:

prof. dr hab. Monika Szpringer
Zakład Profilaktyki Społecznej
Wydział Nauk o Zdrowiu UJK w Kielcach
25-317 Kielce, Al. IX Wieków Kielc 19
e-mail: mszprin@poczta.onet.pl
tel. 048 41 349 69 31