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Personality traits and global self-esteem of alcohol addicts

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Abstract

Recognizing alcoholism as a serious disease has prompted numerous studies which have sought to uncover those aspects of personality that differentiate people who become addicts from those ones who do not develop addiction. The purpose of this study is to examine the existence of differences in personality traits according to the alternative five-factor model and global self-esteem between alcohol addicts and non-clinical population. The research was conducted on the sample of 72 respondents – 36 alcohol addicts and 36 healthy individuals, with no mental and somatic disorders. The obtained results point to the existence of statistically significant differences between the groups in personality trait Neuroticism-Anxiety (N-Anx) and global self-esteem. The significance of the results lies in the possible contribution to the planning and implementation of a psychological treatment of alcoholism.

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1. Introduction

Alcoholism is a serious and chronic disease which brings a whole series of negative effects, both in somatic and the mental health of a patient. The treatment of this disease of addiction is long and it requires medical and psychological treatment of an individual, whose engagement in the treatment is crucial. However, there are a

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number of factors that make it difficult to identify the problem by patients and their environment. Social tolerance, the cultivation of the pattern of excessive alcohol consumption in various social situations, which is very often not only acceptable, but desirable, misconceptions about alcoholism as a bad habit, beliefs that alcohol contributes to having more fun favor the development of alcoholism and hinder the patient's perception of the problem and therefore the treatment. It can be said that alcoholism is a disease of an individual, a family and the whole society.

The etiology of alcoholism. Three factors are involved in the development of alcoholism: a human, social environment and substance – alcohol. Anxiolytic effects of alcohol, effects on mood and weakening of inhibitions, and thus easier establishment of social contacts are the effects of the substance significant for the development of the addiction. The tolerance of the society for the alcohol consumption affects the availability and higher consumption of alcohol. In consideration of etiological factors one should not neglect the influence of family factors on the development of the addiction. The function of the “channel” through which parents communicate, the symbiotic relationship with the parent of the opposite sex, while the other parent is often indifferent and absent, and the problem of addiction of one of the parents are some of the factors that favour the development of alcoholism (Maric, 2005). The search for the personality traits of the people addicted to alcohol, which distinguish them from those people who are not addicted has attracted the attention of many researchers and practitioners in the field. Many studies conducted in the 30's and 40's of the last century were aimed at detecting the “alcoholic personality”. From the search for the type of personality it was moved to the behaviours that are predisposing. However, the focus of studies was soon back to the personality and character traits which contributed to the detection of involvement of genetic factors that determine some traits and behaviours associated with alcoholism, and the growing phenomenon of polytoxicomans (with the expansion of drugs in the 60's and 70's of the last century) who had different personality traits than alcoholics (Mulder, 2002).

Cloninger (1987) examines the differences in the personality traits of people who belong to the Type 1 alcoholism (characterized by the possibility of long abstinence with the loss of control over drinking) and people belonging to Type 2 alcoholism (lack of control and abstinence). Type 1, which occurs after the age of 25, is characterized by the following dimensions: high RD (reward dependence) – emotional dependency, sentimentality, sensitivity to social cues, high HA (harm avoidance) – shyness, inhibition, vigilance, anxiety and low NS (novelty seeking) – loyalty, rigidity. People who belong to the Type 2 alcoholism, whose symptoms appear before the age of 25, are characterized by high NS (novelty seeking) – impulsivity, explosiveness, low HA (harm avoidance) - optimism, relaxation, nonchalance, energy and low RD (reward dependence) – emotional coldness, independence, obstinacy. So, people who have problems with alcohol are recruited from the group of passive-dependant and anxious personalities or from the group with antisocial features.

In the study that has examined the personal and genetic alcohol risk factors, the authors, combining the dimensions of Cloninger's and Eysenck's personality models, have found the results which indicated that negative emotionality (the sum of harm avoidance and neuroticism score) is associated with alcohol dependence in men, while positive emotionality (the sum of reward dependence and extraversion score) is associated with alcohol dependence in women. Behavioural undercontrol (the sum of Novelty Seeking, Psychoticism and reverse-scored Lie) is associated with alcohol dependence in both man and woman (Slutske et al., 2002).

The author of an alternative five-factor model of personality Marvin Zuckerman and Michael Kuhlman (Zuckerman & Kuhlman, 2000) in a study conducted on 260 students come to the result that risky behaviour, including, among other things, alcohol consumption, is associated with the following dimensions of personality: impulsive sensation seeking, aggression and sociability. Zuckerman especially points out the correlation between sensation seeking and risky behaviours. The sensation seeking is the need for excitement, change and innovation, as well as a preference for unpredictable situations and people (Zuckerman, 2002). Examining Cloninger division of alcoholics on Type 1 and Type 2 Zuckerman and Kuhlman (2000) report that the sensation seeking is associated with Type 2, and neuroticism may be important in Type 1.

Considering the results of the studies, Nolan-Hoeksema (2004) lists the following risk factors for the development of alcoholism: genetic factors, alcohol reactivity or sensitivity, gender, depression, coping style, impulsivity, antisocial behaviour, self-esteem. In the treatment of alcoholism, it is often worked on increasing self-esteem of the patient. However, despite the fact that there are evidence of the correlation between low self-esteem and alcohol-related problems, more in women than in men, these results are inconsistent, so the correlation remains insufficiently clear. Examining the correlation between self-esteem and alcohol use, harmful drinking patterns, and

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