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*Family - opinions and expectations of alcoholics
from AA (Anonymous Alcoholics) groups*

Opinie, oczekiwania alkoholików grupy AA (Anonimowych Alkoholików)
na temat ich rodzin

Family as a whole system as well as its individual members plays an essential role in arising alcoholic problems and, as a result, in addiction development. Apart from its aetiological role, family is at the same time a victim of this addiction. The phenomenon of a vicious circle can frequently be observed in families facing alcoholic problems: defective family is conducive to using alcohol by one of its members and the addiction intensifies the pathology (1, 2, 5).

There is a theory which says that alcohol is introduced into family in order to help one of its members deal with his or her problems. Family system, according to this theory, functions on the basis of maintaining dynamic balance. In the beginning it is a sober system. However, in a natural way this system is interfered with conflicts within the family as well as conflicts between the family and the environment and symptoms of pathologies among individuals belonging to the family. These conflicts act against the family system and violate its stability. As a result the family members take up destructive actions that aim at retaining the balance through, among others, introducing alcohol into the family system (3, 4, 5).

Using alcohol by one (or even a few) family members changes family interactions; there is a sort of pretending that the problem has been solved. The solution, however, is of short duration and lasts as long as the family system undergoes intoxication. The disappearance of alcohol influence and behaviours connected with it brings back the sober balance in the family and thus exposes the family to a repeated experience of the same problems.

In the course of the process of becoming a family with an alcoholic problem alcohol is introduced and its abuse by one (or more) members of the family becomes a basic principle in organizing and shaping family life (4, 5).

OBJECTIVE

The aim of the survey was to study: 1) the role of the family in the process of an alcoholic's recovery; 2) the most frequent mistakes in communication between family members and a recovering alcoholic; 3) methods of supporting total abstinence expected by alcoholics; 4) principles and patterns of relationships within the family expected by recovering alcoholics.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

In order to solve research problems the method of representative survey was applied. The survey was made in the form of the questionnaire consisting of 29 questions grouped in 4 thematic blocks. The first one included questions describing alcoholics under examination, the second contained information about addiction development. The third one contained questions concerning alcoholics' opinion about their own families and the fourth one - questions concerning expectations of alcoholics (AA group members) towards their families.

The survey was carried out among alcoholics - members of AA movement in Lublin. 7 out of 29 groups were randomly chosen. Altogether, the survey comprised 70 alcoholics.

The analysis of the age of the subjects shows that 17.1% of the alcoholics were under 30. Slightly more, i.e. 28.6% of the subjects were between 31 and 40. The remaining 10% were above 51. The majority of AA group members were men - 75.7%.

The surveyed alcoholics, in most cases, had technical education (41.3%). People with university education constituted 24.3% of the group and AA group members with elementary education constituted 7.2%.

As far as the marital status of the subjects is concerned, 60% of them were married. People who were divorced constitute a significant group of 23%. Widows constitute 4% of the group and singles - 13%.

The analysis of the financial status of the subject showed that it is was rather good as 41.4% of them claimed. 22.9% of the subjects described their financial status as low.

RESULTS

The analysis of the alcoholics' opinions concerning their families' reactions to the fact of their excessive drinking showed that most of the people under examination were confirmed in a conviction that they should feel guilty or useless. This kind of reaction was presented by 52.8% of the families. The smallest group (15.7%) were alcoholics whose families isolated them from the environment. The subjects took an opportunity of giving types of reactions different from the ones included in the questionnaire. The percentage of these answers was 5.7% and they concerned divorce as the spouse's reaction to the subject's alcoholism.

The analysis concerning the influence of subject's alcoholism on their family lives showed that the feeling of guilt (67.2%), a sense of wrong (55.7%) and regret (51.4%) were predominant among them. None of the subjects claimed that his or her alcoholism had no influence on their families.

The majority of the subjects, as many as 70% indicated the existence of obstacles in communication between them and their family members. The highest percentage of surveyed alcoholics i.e. 59.2% saw the cause of a lack of communication in moralising and imposing on them types of behaviours that "should" be followed.

The least numerous group (16.3%) were alcoholics for whom the source of ill communication in their family was consolation and showing sympathy.

The results of the analysis show that a large majority of the surveyed alcoholics i.e. 72.8% expect their families to be able to treat a recovering alcoholic in a proper way. The subjects who require, first of all, knowledge about addiction development from their families constitute 67.2% of the whole. The lowest percentage of subjects i.e. 44.3% expect their families to be familiar with disaccustoming institutions (detox).

From among various methods of maintaining total abstinence presented in the questionnaire the highest number of the subjects - 55.7% indicated changes in their family lifestyle. These changes include spending spare time together, collective work etc. The lowest percentage, only 20%, expected their family members to control them and maintain discipline.

Only 2.8% of the surveyed alcoholics mentioned the methods of maintaining total abstinence different from those presented in the questionnaire. People who suggested their own answers usually expected their families to be indifferent to their struggle with addiction.

From among a number of options the subjects chose trust (38.6%) as the most significant factor in strengthening family ties whereas 32.7% of the alcoholics admitted that family ties should be built by means of manifesting one's feelings within the family. The lowest percentage of the subjects (17.1%) mentioned the ability to reach compromises in family relations.

In subjects' opinion the approaches that should be applied by family members in order to help an alcoholic maintain total abstinence focused on forgiving all the wrong that

was done because of one's alcoholism (44.3%). The lowest percentage of the surveyed alcoholics (14.3%) mentioned patience and changes in their approach to the problem.

CONCLUSIONS

1. A family whose member is an alcoholic trying to give up his addiction may form the system of emotional support and contribute to his recovery.

2. The most frequent obstacles that set back the progress of recovery are: moralising and imposing types of behaviours that should be followed.

3. Members of the family to which an alcoholic belongs are able to advance the progress of his recovery by means of changing their attitudes and approaches towards an alcoholic problem.

4. Expectations of a recovering alcoholic towards his family members are concerned with forgiving all the wrong he did when he was under the influence of alcohol, respecting his autonomy limits and open communication (about the most essential life problems).

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STRESZCZENIE

Obecnie według danych WHO ponad 100 mln ludzi na świecie cierpi na alkoholizm jako chorobę kliniczną. W Polsce liczba osób uzależnionych od alkoholu i nadmiernie pijących sięga 4-5 mln, a osób wymagających leczenia od 1 mln do 12 mln osób.

Badanie kwestionariuszem ankiety przeprowadzono z 70 alkoholikami spotykającymi się na mityngach w 7 losowo wybranych grupach „AA” w Lublinie. Uwzględniono następujące tematy: przebieg rozwoju uzależnienia, opinie alkoholików na temat ich rodzin, oczekiwania zdrowiejących alkoholików na temat ich rodzin.

