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Personality traits in people addicted to alcohol raised by parents with alcohol dependence

Abstract

Introduction. Alcohol dependence syndrome constitutes a serious social problem not only due to personal and health consequences suffered by addicted individuals but also by their family members and, in particular, by children.

Aim. The aim of the study was to make a comparison of self-image, narcissism, methods of coping with stress and aggression in people addicted to alcohol who were raised by parents addicted and not addicted to alcohol.

Material and methods. 118 individuals addicted to alcohol were examined. There were 53 patients raised by non-addicted parents and 55 by parents addicted to alcohol. The average age of the group was 41.20 (SD=10.85) and the average period of alcohol addiction was 9.03 (SD=6.26) years. We used the following research tools: the Sociodemographic Survey of own construction, Adjective Check List ACL by Gough and Heilbrun, the Questionnaire of Narcissism by Denke, Hilgenstock and Müller, the Coping with Stress Questionnaire by Janke, Erdmann and Boucsein and the Aggression Questionnaire by Buss-Perry.

Results. We found presence of statistically significant differences in respect of traits of self-image, narcissism, methods of coping with stress and severity of aggression in people addicted to alcohol who were raised by parents addicted and not addicted to alcohol.

Conclusions. 1. Alcohol addicted women who were raised by parents with alcohol dependence are characterised by more negative self-image, greater need for getting support, dependence, fear of negative assessment by other people, passive ways of coping with stress and aggression not directly expressed – in comparison to the women raised by not addicted parents. 2. Men raised by alcohol addicted parents are characterised by greater narcissism and more often expressed physical aggression in comparison to men raised by not addicted parents.

Keywords: alcohol addiction, children of alcoholics, personality.

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INTRODUCTION

Alcohol dependence syndrome constitutes a serious social problem not only due to personal and health consequences suffered by addicted individuals but also by their family members and, in particular, by children.

Children raised by alcohol addicted parent are influenced by some destructive biological, psychological and social factors. The greater number of stressors and time of their action, and the weaker developmental predispositions, the greater probability that mental problems appear in children [1-3]. Based on the up to date research three groups of individuals raised by alcohol addicted parents were distinguished:

1. People who well adjust and well cope in life. They do not have problems in personal development, interpersonal relations and do not have any mental disorders. It may be caused by greater potentials and smaller number of stressors in family life.
2. People who have emotional problems, lower self-esteem, difficulties in social relations, especially concerning abilities

to maintain close interpersonal attachments. Addictions are not present in this group.

3. Poorly adapted people who have mental disorders: addictions, neurotic disorders, personality disorders [1,4-6].

Gąsior [1] states that among factors protecting against mental disorders in the adult life of addicted parents' offspring are: child temperament, attitude of non-drinking parent and extended family and broader environment. Based on the studies involving the children of the people addicted to alcohol this author [1] found the presence of significant correlations between the greater index of dysfunctionality in the family of origin and the greater distrust, difficulties in maintaining interpersonal relations, lower ability to derive satisfaction from achievements, lower acceptance of other people, greater pessimism, problems in understanding oneself and other people. However, there were not significant correlations between the level of family dysfunctionality and methods of coping with stress in the studied individuals.

Other researchers also point to personality traits characteristic for people raised by alcohol addicted parents: lower self-esteem,

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[1,7-9], experiencing of the following feelings: anger, aggression, shame, grievance and isolation from the surrounding environment, lack of self-confidence, lack of trust in other people, suspiciousness [8], avoiding of conflict resolving, using physical aggression, intensified sense of guilt and shame, intensified anxiety, fear, self-pity tendency and lack of autonomy [10]. The literature reports also other features present in the people raised by alcohol addicted parents: excessive need to control other people, passive aggressive behaviours [11], imputation of bad intentions to the surrounding environment, which results in aggressive behaviours, anger, hostility during moments of grievance [12]. Ryś and Wódz [13] state that being raised by alcohol addicted parents encourages showing the intensified tendency to negate reality, escaping from stressful situations and self-humiliation in adult life; Pasternak and Schier [14] report the lack of respecting own needs and desires, sense of injustice in women raised by parents addicted to alcohol, due to the role reversal in the family of origin. According to the authors [14], caring of addicted parents and acquisition of the adult person role become a coping strategy for the child. Scharf et al. [11] describe more symptoms of anxiety, somatization disorders, passive aggressive behaviours and addiction to psychoactive substances in individuals raised by alcohol addicted parents.

Numerous studies were devoted to the description of psychosocial functioning of both children and adults raised by alcohol addicted parents, as well as individuals with alcohol dependence. Answering the question: do any differences occur and within the scope of which personality traits are there any differences in some personality traits between people with alcohol dependence who were raised by parents addicted and not addicted to alcohol might bring about some interesting responses.

AIM

The aim of the study was to compare the self-image, narcissism, methods of coping with stress and aggression in people addicted to alcohol who were raised by parents either addicted or not addicted to alcohol.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study group comprised 118 individuals diagnosed with the alcohol dependence syndrome (as classified in ICD-10). They were all patients of the Alcohol Addiction Residential Treatment Department of M. Kaczynski Neuropsychiatric Hospital in Lublin. Out of that group, 63 patients were raised by non-addict parents, 55 individuals (30 men and 25 women) – by parents addicted to alcohol (by father – 25 men and 25 women, by mother – 8 men and 6 women). The average age of the group was 41.19 years (SD=10.85). The average period of addiction was 9.03 (SD=6.26) years. 33% of patients were single, 46% of patients were married, 16% – divorced, 7% – widowed. 15% of the respondents had primary education, 30% – lower vocational education, 42% – secondary, 13% – a university degree. 53% of the individuals were professionally active and 47% were unemployed. All patients were examined upon admission.

The group was examined using the following methods: the Sociodemographic Survey of own construction, Adjective Check List ACL by Gough and Heilbrun [15], the Questionnaire of Narcissism by Denke, Hilgenstock and Müller

in Polish development by Januszewski [16], the Coping with Stress Questionnaire (KRS) by Janke, Erdmann and Boucsein in the Polish development by Januszewska [17] and the Aggression Questionnaire by Buss-Perry [18].

RESULTS

The results of the studied groups achieved in the scales: ACL, Questionnaire N, Questionnaire KRS and Aggression Questionnaire were compared by U Mann Whitney test to determine the differences regarding self-image, narcissism, methods of coping with stress and aggression and its dimensions between the people with alcohol dependence raised by parents addicted to and not addicted to alcohol. Only statistically significant results of at least 0.05 are shown in the tables.

Self-image of the people with alcohol dependence raised by parents with alcohol dependence

In the first stage results of people addicted to alcohol raised by parents addicted and not addicted to alcohol in the ACL (Table 1) were compared with U Mann Whitney test. These results broken down by gender are presented in the Table 2.

TABLE 1. A comparison of self-image in individuals addicted to alcohol raised by parents with and without alcohol dependence.

ACL scales	Offspring of people without alcohol dependence	Offspring of people with alcohol dependence	Z
	Median	Median	
Number of negative adjectives	47	49	-2.11*
Need for change	45	41	2.39*

Statistically significant differences: *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Individuals raised by parents with alcohol dependence are significantly more hostile, rejecting themselves and others, mistrustful, doubting in themselves, obstinate and less spontaneous. They perceive others' success as unearned and unjust more often as compared to the those who were not raised by parents with alcohol dependence.

TABLE 2. A comparison of self-image in women addicted to alcohol raised by parents with and without alcohol dependence.

ACL scales	Offspring of people without alcohol dependence	Offspring of people with alcohol dependence	Z
	Median	Median	
Number of positive adjectives	45	38	2.50**
Number of negative adjectives	43	52	-2.42*
Need for achievement	49.5	44	3.10**
Need for dominance	49	42	2.52**
Need for succorance	53	57	-2.05*
Self-confidence scale	53	40	2.69**
Personal adjustment scale	46	38	2.23*
Ideal self-image scale	54.5	47	2.43*
Leadership scale	46	39	2.31*
Adult scale	49	42	2.17*
Adapted child scale	52	57	-2.20*

Statistically significant differences: *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

The alcohol dependent women who were raised by parents addicted to alcohol attribute to themselves significantly more negative traits and less positive ones as compared to the women whose parents were not addicted. The women raised by alcohol addicted parents are characterized by significantly greater need for succorance, support, care, protection, getting advice, dependence, tendency to assume subordinated children's role, to escape from stress and life challenges into dreams, less self-confidence, worse adjusting abilities, lower responsibility, autonomy, self-discipline and at the same time more severe striving for breaking rules and law.

As regards self-image characteristics, the examined men raised by parents addicted to alcohol do not differ from men whose parents were not addicted to alcohol.

Narcissism in people addicted to alcohol raised by parents with alcohol dependence syndrome

In the further stage of study, the results of the Narcissism Questionnaire in people addicted to alcohol who were raised by parents with or without alcohol dependence were compared by U Mann Whitney test (Table 3). These results broken down by gender are presented in Tables 4 and 5.

TABLE 3. A comparison of narcissism severity in people addicted to alcohol raised by parents with and without alcohol dependence.

Scales of the N Questionnaire	Offspring of people without alcohol dependence	Offspring of people with alcohol dependence	Z
	Median	Median	
Self-humiliation	28	31	-2.18*
Narcissistic anger	24.5	26	-2.12*

Statistically significant differences: *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

People addicted to alcohol who were raised by parents with alcohol dependence are characterised by significantly more intensified fear of negative assessment by other people, experiencing of public humiliation and more intensified aggression and vindictiveness in comparison with individuals raised by parents not addicted to psychoactive agents.

TABLE 4. A comparison of narcissism in women addicted to alcohol raised by parents with and without alcohol dependence.

Scales of the N Questionnaire	Offspring of people without alcohol dependence	Offspring of people with alcohol dependence	Z
	Median	Median	
Basic mood	35.0	32.5	2.05*
Self-humiliation	27.0	33.0	-2.66**
Grandiose ego	32.5	25.0	2.35*
Price of ideal	27.5	24.0	2.13*

Statistically significant differences: *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

The women addicted to alcohol who were raised by parents with alcohol dependence are characterised by significantly more intensified fear of negative evaluation by other people and public humiliation as compared to the women raised by parents without alcohol dependence. The women raised by non-addicted parents have significantly greater feeling of own special uniqueness and conviction they are guided by better moral principles as compared to other people who do not have such features and often – due to the lack of them – cause pain to others by ridiculing and despising them.

TABLE 5. A comparison of narcissism in men addicted to alcohol raised by parents with and without alcohol dependence.

Scales of the N Questionnaire	Offspring of people without alcohol dependence	Offspring of people with alcohol dependence	Z
	Median	Median	
Grandiose ego	26.5	29.0	-2.61**
Narcissistic anger	25.0	27.0	-2.16*

Statistically significant differences: *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

The men raised by parents with alcohol dependence are characterised by greater compensatory conviction about their uniqueness compared to other people, special physical attractiveness, organizational abilities, belief in the special talent and significantly greater revenge toward people by whom they feel to be criticized.

Stress coping methods in people addicted to alcohol raised by parents with alcohol dependence

Afterwards, we compared the results from the scales of the Coping with Stress Questionnaire (KRS) by Janke, Erdmann and Boucsein (Table 6) obtained from individuals addicted to alcohol raised by parents with and without alcohol dependence. These results disaggregated by gender are presented in Table 7.

TABLE 6. A comparison of stress coping methods in people addicted to alcohol raised by parents with and without alcohol dependence.

KRS scales	Offspring of people without alcohol dependence	Offspring of people with alcohol dependence	Z
	Median	Median	
Tendency to escape	12	13	-1.97*
Isolating from other people	9	12	-2.03*
Further dealing in thoughts	12	15	-2.19*
Dependence	7	8	-1.90*

Statistically significant differences: *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Individuals addicted to alcohol who were raised by parents with alcohol dependence significantly more often escape from problems while in a stressful situation, isolate themselves from the other people, concentrate on difficult situation for a long time and consume alcohol.

TABLE 7. A comparison of methods of coping with stress in women addicted to alcohol raised by parents with and without alcohol dependence.

KRS scales	Offspring of people without alcohol dependence	Offspring of people with alcohol dependence	Z
	Median	Median	
Replacement satisfaction	13.0	10.0	2.02*
Isolating themselves from other people	9.0	14.0	-1.95*

Statistically significant differences: *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

The women addicted to alcohol who were raised by parents with alcohol dependence significantly more often, while in a stressful situation, isolate themselves from other people, whereas the women raised by parents without alcohol dependence look for substitute satisfaction, for example do shopping, watch TV.

As regards stress coping methods, the men raised by parents with alcohol dependence do not differ from their peers raised by parents without such a dependence.

Severity of aggression in individuals addicted to alcohol raised by parents with alcohol dependence syndrome

In the final stage of the study, the results of the Aggression Questionnaire by Buss-Perry obtained from people addicted to alcohol raised by parents with and without alcohol dependence were compared by U Mann Whitney test (Table 8). These results broken down by gender are presented in Tables 9 and 10.

TABLE 8. A comparison of aggression severity in individuals addicted to alcohol raised by parents with and without alcohol dependence.

Scales of the Aggression Questionnaire	Offspring of people without alcohol dependence	Offspring of people with alcohol dependence	Z
	Median	Median	
Anger	2.86	3.29	-2.71**
Hostility	3	3.25	-1.99*
General aggression	78	88	-2.29*

Statistically significant differences: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

People addicted to alcohol who were raised by parents with alcohol dependence significantly more often react with aggression, anger, are more suspicious, envious, headstrong and have a greater sense of injustice in comparison to people raised by parents without dependence.

TABLE 9. A comparison of aggression severity in women addicted to alcohol raised by parents with and without alcohol dependence.

Scales of the Aggression Questionnaire	Offspring of people without alcohol dependence	Offspring of people with alcohol dependence	Z
	Median	Median	
Anger	2.785	3.64	-2.30*
Hostility	2.44	3.38	-3.00**
General aggression	76.5	88	-2.71**

Statistically significant differences: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

The women addicted to alcohol who were raised by parents with alcohol dependence significantly more often react with aggression, anger and envy in comparison to the women raised by parents without dependence.

TABLE 10. A comparison of aggression severity in men addicted to alcohol raised by parents with and without alcohol dependence.

Scales of the Aggression Questionnaire	Offspring of people without alcohol dependence	Offspring of people with alcohol dependence	Z
	Median	Median	
Physical aggression	2.4	2.8	-1.98*

Statistically significant differences: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

The men addicted to alcohol who were raised by parents with alcohol dependence significantly more often react with physical aggression as compared to the men raised by parents without dependence.

DISCUSSION

On the basis of the results obtained we found the presence of statistically significant differences as regards self-image, narcissism, stress coping methods and aggression severity in the people addicted to alcohol who were raised by parents with and without alcohol dependence.

The results obtained show that the individuals addicted to alcohol who were raised by parents with alcohol dependence, as compared to the people raised by parents without dependence, are characterised by significantly greater hostility, distrust, sense of injustice, fear of negative evaluation from other people, experiencing of public humiliation, aggression, envy, anger, vindictiveness and, while in a stressful situation, tendency to react with isolation, prolonged concentration on the difficult situation and alcohol consumption.

The examined women addicted to alcohol raised by parents with alcohol dependence are characterised by a more negative self-esteem, greater need to getting support, care, protection, getting advice, dependence, tendency to play subordinate children roles, to escape from stress and life challenges into dreams, striving for breaking the law, less self-confidence, worse adjustment abilities, less responsibility, autonomy and self-discipline, greater fear of negative evaluation from other people and public humiliation, anger, aggression, envy and also tendency to react with isolation in stressful situations as compared to the women raised by parents without dependence.

The examined men raised by parents with alcohol dependence are characterised by a significantly greater physical aggression and greater conviction about their unique physical attractiveness, organizational abilities, talents as compared to the men raised by parents without dependence.

The results obtained in the entire examined group of individuals raised by parents with alcohol dependence and in the group of women fully correspond to the data presented in literature informing about: distrust, difficulties in interpersonal relations, in understanding oneself and of other people, lower ability to get satisfaction from achievements, lower self-esteem and lower acceptance of other people [1], negative self-esteem, dependence [1,7,8], experience of sense of anger, grievance, isolating oneself from the surrounding environment, lack of self-confidence and trust in other people, suspiciousness [8], avoiding problem resolving, use of physical aggression, sense of fear, anxiety and tendency for self-pity [10]. Our results are also consistent with the works by Scharff et al [11], Łukasiewicz [12] and Ryś and Wódz [13], who report the following features as characteristics of individuals raised by parents with alcohol dependence: displaying passive aggressive behaviours, tendency to ascribe bad intentions to others, which results in aggressive behaviours; anger, hostility in grievance situations and also tendency for self-humiliation and reacting with escape in stressful situations.

The characteristics of individuals raised by parents with alcohol dependence presented in literature are only partially consistent with the results obtained by the examined men. The men raised by parents with or without alcohol dependence

did not differ as regards the self-image and methods of coping with stress. However, what makes them different from the men raised by parents not addicted to psychoactive substances is more frequently expressed physical aggression and the sense of their uniqueness and inability to receive criticism, to which they react with aggression. The women raised by parents with alcohol dependence exhibit more intensified features included in the narcissism dimension: “threatened narcissistic ego” combined with low self-esteem, negative self-image, whereas the men have “classic narcissistic ego” characteristics visible in the conviction about their uniqueness. Therefore, the hypothesis can be formulated that being raised by parents with alcohol dependence has a greater influence on the self-image and methods of coping with stress in women than in men as well as on the way of expressed aggression and narcissistic features. These differences between our results and data from literature can partially result from not taking into account the division into the groups of women and men, which frequently happens, and also from the fact that our results were derived from people addicted to alcohol.

It should be also emphasized that the results obtained by the women addicted to alcohol who were raised by parents with alcohol dependence strictly correspond to the features of people with alcohol dependence reported in literature; including inter alia: negative self-image, low self-esteem, worse adaptation skills, higher self-criticism [19-21], less responsibility, lack of self-confidence, fear of establishing interpersonal relations, hostility towards other people, low need for achievement, order, perseverance, domination; understanding of oneself and of other people, greater need for support and subordination [19,20,22,23], greater suspiciousness, tendency to blame oneself and others, lower self-control, greater impulsivity [24-26], reacting in stressful situation with isolation from the surrounding environment [27-30], consumption of alcohol [31] and also greater aggression [32].

The results obtained in the study pointing out that men raised by parents with alcohol dependence are characterized by a greater physical aggression, conviction about having special abilities and increased revenge towards the people by whom they feel to be criticised – are completely contrary to the opinion of Aubry et al [21]. This author thinks that the men addicted to alcohol have a low self-esteem and, as compared to the women, are more open to criticism. The results have not yet confirmed the statement of Bacskai et al [33], who indicate the lack of significant differences as regards general, physical and verbal aggression between men and women with alcohol dependence.

The results obtained on the basis of analyses suggest the need to take into account the differences between genders as well as family factors in the research concerning personality traits of patients with alcohol dependence. The results obtained point to the need for a greater individualization in therapy of individuals with alcohol dependence; not only type of addiction must be taken into account but also differences in the self-image characteristics, methods of coping with stress and aggression as well as narcissistic features between addicted men and women. The adjustment of the therapeutic plan to the psychological needs of the patients, taking into account the family factors that had impact on the development of personality traits in the alcohol dependent individuals will enable, in the opinion of Hauser and Zakrzewska [34], more effective therapy.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The examined women addicted to alcohol who were raised by parents with alcohol dependence are characterized by a more negative self-image, greater need for getting support, dependence, fear of negative assessment by other people, passive methods of coping with stress and aggression expressed indirectly as compared to the women raised by parents without alcohol dependence.
2. The examined men raised by parents with alcohol dependence, as compared to those raised by parents not addicted to psychoactive substances, are characterized by significantly greater narcissism and more often expressed physical aggression.

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