

Gender differences in the Female Alcoholism Questionnaire (FeA)

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Abstract

The paper presents a brief review of traits and drinking styles of male and female alcoholics as reflected in recent studies, along with statements on differences observed in clinical practice. Then occurrence of differences, as identified during standardization of various psychometric screenings and questionnaires is mentioned, together with related empirical data. Final version of the Female Alcoholism Questionnaire (FeA) was used and the psychometric properties of this questionnaire were evaluated. The analyses of results have indicated different drinking characteristics in female alcoholics and the leading symptoms distinguishing them from males, were: secret drinking, connected with ego weakness, than feelings of guilt, anxiety and depression.

Keywords: alcoholism, drinking styles, female alcoholics, secret drinking

1 Introduction

Overall situation in Slovakia is characterized by profound changes in political, social, economic, health-care realities, which also contribute to recent traits of female alcoholism. There are signals of abusive drinking growth among young and middle-aged women due to life style changes, rich offer of new drinks, because of neglect from too busy husbands, running their businesses started at the beginning of privatization during nineties. There is also growth in numbers of unemployed female alcoholics. All in all, woman as an alcoholic is today more frequent phenomenon as she was twenty or more years before: former rate 10:1 had changed to 3:1, or by some practitioners even to 2:1, in comparison with to men. So it's not surprising, that differences between male and female alcoholics are more frequently mentioned in scientific literature than

before, not to speak about the times of classics of alcoholology, such as Jellinek (1960) with his disease concept of alcoholism, based predominantly on male alcoholism type.

1.1 Overview of findings

The concept of female alcoholism and different traits of alcoholic personality in females were hypothesized (Kubička et al. 1993, Nociar 1990), and also typology and phases of alcohol addiction in male and female alcoholics were investigated in western (Piazza et al. 1989), as well as in our scientific literature (Kunda et al. 1988).

The Alcohol Dependence Scale (ADS) was adapted to investigate alcohol dependence in the middle of eighties (Skinner, Allen 1982; Nociar 1986) and at the same time the Michigan Alcoholism Screening Test (MAST; Selzer 1971) was introduced, together with some measures of psychopathology, taken from the Differential Personality Inventory (Jackson, Messick 1975) and Multi-component-anxiety inventory (Schaling 1978).

The results allowed to standardize and to work out Slovak norms for ADS and MAST and partially for another psychometric screenings, contributed to theoretical validation of the alcohol dependence syndrome, and revealed differences between male and female alcoholism. Data from these studies indicated higher level of anxiety and depression in female than in male patients, and also different weight of factors determining drinking. For example first factors in men and women alcoholics were different, according to factor analyses of ADS samples: in males it was the Loss of control over behaviour and Withdrawal factor, while in females it was the Obsessive-compulsive drinking factor, which predominated (Nociar 1990).

The same was true for factor analyses of MAST, where the first factors were the same as in previous (Skinner 1979) analysis, namely the factor of Alcohol problem recognition, the composition of other factors was different. For example, second factor in males consisted from items tapping signs of physical and psychopathological problems, while in females consisted from items on problems in marital and family relations. The same factor had lowest weight in men, while the fifth factor in women had paralleled the first one in men, i.e. physical and psychopathological problems (Nociar 1991).

2 Material and methods

Sixty items of the Female alcoholism questionnaire (FeA) are scored according to chosen answers (one from three possible). FeA consists from 11 scales. Reliability study and external validation of the FeA were done by simultaneous use of new personality and psychopathology measures (Cattell's Clinical Analysis Questionnaire, and Millon's MCMI), results of which will be reported elsewhere. With respect to main psychometric properties: Item analyses of the 13 FeA subscales, together with estimation of the Cronbach's coefficients were performed by automated testing PSYDO and MDS programs¹.

3 Sample

Sample (n=318) consisted from 160 female and 158 male alcoholics. Certain demographic data were also recorded and then tested for the effects of gender.

No difference was found between both sexes with respect to age (means were 40,44, with SD=8,3 for males; and 40,35, with SD=8,7 for females).

The second variable was family status, where some apparent differences were found ($\chi^2=6,97$; significant at 5% level), with males drinking more while single, but far more females drinking while widowed or divorced:

¹Automated Psychological Questionnaires and MUMPS Discrete Statistics

Status (%)	Males	Females
Single	20,0	10,9
Married	61,6	50,9
Widowed	5,0	10,0
Divorced	13,4	28,2

In the third variable, number of children, no difference was found.

The fourth variable was education, where also some differences were found ($\chi^2=13,45$; significant at 1% level), with females' tendency to attain middle levels more frequently than male alcoholics:

Education (%)	Males	Females
Elementary	43,8	27,6
Secondary	38,7	50,8
University	17,5	21,6

4 Results

Psychometric properties of the FeA are shown in the Table 1:

Table 1. Item analysis of the Female Alcoholism Questionnaire (FeA)

Scale & Items	r - Item-scale α	Scale & Items	r - Item-scale α
1: Secret drinking		2: Impaired control over drinking	
Try to hide and throw empty bottles away	0,71	Drinking longer than originally intended	0,49
Drinks lonely at various pubs & places	0,61	Drinking frequently end-up with ebriety	0,63
Mouth spray or so to hide alcohol smell	0,48	Day after drinking don't remember things	0,60
Hide alcohol nearby (kitchen, bedroom)	0,75	Drinks first 1-2 glasses very quickly	0,38
Have a nip from bottle & add water	0,75 0,852	Letters, phone Nr. blurred while drinking	0,45 0,806
Carry bottle and hide it from partner	0,61	Quick return to drinking after abstention	0,44
Drink to get reward for stereotype work	0,36	Mix-up beverages to get stronger effects	0,50
Drinks solitary and mostly at home	0,59	Strong craving after few nips of alcohol	0,64
Steal out to drink to avoid reproaches	0,51	Does not know his/her own "safe dose"	0,39
3: Withdrawal		4: Tolerance growth	
Do not drink alcohol, except after meals	0,47	1-2 drinks beforehand to get high as others	0,49
After drinking morning hand shakes, etc.	0,63	Gulp 1-2 drinks to return good mood state	0,56
Uneasy dreams, anxiety after drinking	0,52	Felt can't get drunk, gulp 1-2 & passed out	0,55 0,746
Drink to get relief from anger or tension	0,48 0,801	Euphorie after 2-3 drinks ends & needs more	0,50
Guilty about neglect of children & family	0,50	Felt raw alcohol taste not beverages flavour	0,46

<i>After binge drink to avoid uneasy states</i> 0,69	6: Marital problems
<i>Unsuccessfully trying to cut out drinking</i> 0,34	<i>Needs a drink to talk freely with partner</i> 0,39
<i>Awake during night & drink to fall asleep</i> 0,45	<i>Forgetting things after drinking</i> 0,43
5: Weak Ego & rationalization	<i>Erotic adventures while drinking</i> 0,44
<i>Problems and troubles cause other people</i> 0,29	<i>Woke up at strange place with stranger</i> 0,39 0,676
Scale & Items r - Item-scale α	Scale & Items r - Item-scale α
<i>Give up, or scatter when under pressure</i> 0,53	<i>Run away from home for longer time</i> 0,27
<i>Very hard to bear own failure or loss</i> 0,46	<i>Carry bottle and hide it from partner</i> 0,34
<i>Uneasy dreams, anxiety after drinking</i> 0,44	<i>Partner threaten: divorce or separation</i> 0,33
<i>Able to talk on negative traits while sober</i> 0,28 0,742	<i>Steal away & drink to avoid reproaches</i> 0,39
<i>Felt can't bear up all troubles and duties</i> 0,61	8: Pills or tablets
<i>More bad luck in life than other people</i> 0,36	<i>Pills against pains or sleeplessness</i> 0,63
<i>Being settled down by life&losts interests</i> 0,52	<i>Drinks at the same time as taking pills</i> 0,53 0,749
7: Quick return of dependence syndrome	<i>Takes calming pills to settle down</i> 0,57
<i>Drinking longer than originally intended</i> 0,47	9: Obsessive-compulsive drinking
<i>1-2 days on leave while drinking last year</i> 0,36	<i>Before dry days makes stock or drinks a lot</i> 0,60
<i>Felt can't get drunk, gulp 1-2& passed out</i> 0,48	<i>Drinks at the same time as taking pills</i> 0,32
<i>Erotic adventures while drinking</i> 0,45	<i>Drinks alcohol in cleaner, after-shave, etc.</i> 0,36
<i>Drinks at the same time as taking pills</i> 0,260, 687	<i>Quick return to drinking after abstention</i> 0,430, 746
<i>Unable to drink in small doses</i> 0,01	<i>Must borrow money to continue drinking</i> 0,58
<i>Quick return to drinking after abstention</i> 0,38	<i>Felt intensive craving beyond own will</i> 0,48
<i>Short periods of abstinence</i> 0,35	<i>Sometimes extremely needs to get drunk</i> 0,45
<i>Sometimes extremely needs to get drunk</i> 0,54	11: Loss of inhibitions/scruples
10: Loss of hobbies and job problems	<i>Don't remember thinks after drinking</i> 0,48
<i>For months felt work as very exhausting</i> 0,40	<i>Felt great shyness while talking on sex</i> -0,03
<i>Drinking & recovery takes too much time</i> 0,61	<i>Engage in erotic adventures when drunken</i> 0,46
<i>Drinking steal time for recreation and so</i> 0,61	<i>Drinks at the same time as taking pills</i> 0,23
<i>1-2 days on leave while drinking last year</i> 0,46 0,804	<i>Woke up at strange place with stranger</i> 0,410, 713
<i>Drink to forget troubles and problems</i> 0,59	<i>Quick return to drinking after abstention</i> 0,42
Scale & Items r - Item-scale α	Scale & Items r - Item-scale α
<i>Losing his/her former hobbies & interests</i> 0,68	<i>Must borrow money to continue drinking</i> 0,55
<i>Being settled down by life&losts interests</i> 0,43	<i>Belong to a group which regularly drinks</i> 0,41
	<i>Sometimes extremely needs to get drunk</i> 0,57

Differences between males and females are summarized in Table 2:

Table 2. Differences between males and females in FeA scales

FeA scales	Gender	Average	SD	t-test	Signif.
1: Secret drinking	Males	5,39	3,18	9,804	p < 0.001
	Females	9,87	4,27		
2: Impaired control over drinking	Males	9,81	4,15	1,045	0
	Females	9,31	4,31		
3: Withdrawal	Males	8,88	3,79	2,587	p < 0.05
	Females	9,95	3,56		
4: Tolerance growth	Males	4,41	2,68	2,755	p < 0.01
	Females	5,28	2,88		
5: Weak Ego and rationalization	Males	6,93	3,37	5,732	p < 0.001
	Females	9,04	3,18		
6: Marital problems	Males	5,60	3,08	1,036	0
	Females	5,98	3,33		
7: Quick return of dependence syndrome	Males	7,68	3,49	2,023	p < 0.05
	Females	6,89	3,39		
8: Pills or tablets	Males	1,18	1,42	1,088	0
	Females	1,36	1,59		
9: Obsessive-compulsive drinking	Males	4,85	3,27	0,211	0
	Females	4,93	3,21		
10: Loss of hobbies and job problems	Males	7,41	3,74	1,972	p < 0.05
	Females	8,21	3,59		
11: Loss of inhibitions/scruples	Males	8,01	3,60	3,132	p < 0.01
	Females	6,74	3,57		

5. Discussion

The results are perhaps convincing in respect to differences between male and female alcoholics in three scales of the FeA: first one, which reflects secret style of drinking in females; fifth, which reflects Ego weakness; and third with eleventh scales, indicating heavier hangover experiencing in females, with feelings of depression and anxiety.

It might be of some interest to inspect more closely female answers to items in eleventh scale. We have tried to determine effects of age and gender, level of dependency and gender, through multivariate analysis of variance of single items from that scale, but also some others. Worthy of mentioning were following results:

Older and more dependent females needed to drink more often to be able to clarify problems together with their partners and to talk with them more frankly. In males, but not in females, with growing level of dependency there was a tendency to take part in erotic adventures. And also females, more frequently and more deeply than men, had experienced guilty feelings because of neglecting children and family in sequence of their own drinking.

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