

A STUDY ON EXPERIENCE OF SUBJECTS ATTENDING ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS GROUP

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Abstract

Background: Participating in AA subgroup helps people to abstain from their addictive behaviour, hence we have undertaken this study to understand this perceived experience of subjects. The present study aimed to understand the subjective experience of individuals attending the Alcoholic Anonymous group. **Materials and Methods:** It is a cross sectional study conducted in KEM deaddiction treatment centre where Alcoholic Anonymous group meetings take place regularly on every Sunday over the period of 2 months in 40 subjects. Subjects between the age group of 18- 60 years diagnosed as alcohol use disorder were included in study. All the subjects were explained about the nature of the study and its implications and written informed consent was taken. The patients fulfilling the inclusion and the exclusion criteria were taken for the study. Socio-demographic details were taken first, after which Alcoholic Anonymous Involvement Scale was applied. The scale is validated and Cronbach alpha for the total AAI scale was found to be 0.85. **Results:** Maximum subjects were in the age group of 31-40 years which included all male subjects. Most of the subjects belonged to Hindu religion, were married, lived in urban areas and spoke Marathi as the primary language. Most of the subjects were graduate, were engaged in skilled type of work, and the annual family income was between 3-6 lakh rupees. **Conclusion:** Alcoholics Anonymous is a self-help group, which helps patients to abstain from alcohol by helping them follow a spiritual path. They believe that there is a power higher than them. It was seen in this study that with high involvement in AA group, there was a spiritual awakening in the subjects, which helped them to cure their illness. The sponsors helped the subjects by encouraging them and supporting them emotionally and remaining in regular contact with them.

INTRODUCTION

The one- month prevalence of Alcohol use is about 21.4%.^[1] Research has illustrated the limited effectiveness of traditional inpatient and outpatient alcohol treatments.^[2] There is currently a rising interest in mutual-help groups and self-help influenced treatments that offer an alternative to professional treatment and aftercare.^[3] Unlike traditional treatment programs, self-help or mutual-help groups are free, voluntarily-attended gatherings characterized by working together on a common problem, self-directed leadership, and the sharing of experiences.^[4] In general, self-help therapy has been reported to be more effective and less expensive than traditional therapy led by professionals. The best-known example of this mutual-help group approach to support abstinence is Alcoholics

Anonymous. Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) was formed in 1935 by Bill & Bob as a self-help group for individuals in alcohol recovery to maintain sobriety through its emphasis on spirituality, social support, and its progressive 12-steps.^[4] Worldwide membership is estimated at over 2,000,000 in 150 countries.^[5] Unlike conventional alcohol treatments, AA is not time-limited and only involves individuals wanting to give up alcohol addiction, although AA can often be used in conjunction with other treatments involving professionals. The only membership prerequisite is a desire to stop drinking and AA charges no dues or fees from the members.^[6]

Rationale of the Study

Participating in AA subgroup helps people to abstain from their addictive behaviour, hence we

have undertaken this study to understand this perceived experience of subject.

Aims & Objectives

Aim

To understand subjective experience of subjects attending the Alcoholic Anonymous group.

Objectives

- To study socio-demographic profile of people attending Alcoholic Anonymous group.
- To understand their subjective experience after attending the Alcoholic Anonymous meeting.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Design: It is a cross sectional study

Study Site: The study was conducted in KEM deaddiction treatment center where Alcoholic Anonymous groups takes place regularly on every Sunday.

Duration of the study: 2 months

Sample Size: 40

Inclusion Criteria

1. Subjects attending the alcoholic anonymous group meetings
2. Subjects between the age group of 18- 60 years diagnosed as alcohol use disorder

Exclusion Criteria

1. Patients not consenting for the study
2. Patients with language incompatibility
3. Patients having other mental disorders, cognitive disorders and intellectual disability.

Study Procedure: The ethical clearance from the Institutional Ethics Committee was taken before beginning the study. All the subjects were explained about the nature of study and its implications and

written informed consent was taken. The patients fulfilling the inclusion and the exclusion criteria were taken for the study. Socio-demographic details were taken first, after which Alcoholic Anonymous Involvement Scale was applied.

Duration of the interview: The interview took around 30 min.

Study materials:

Structured proforma

A. Socio-demographic details

B. Scale

Alcohol Anonymous involvement Scale:

Developed and validated by J. Scott Tonigan et al. in 1996, this scale is a 13-item self-report inventory that measures lifetime and recent attendance and involvement in AA. The scale is validated and Cronbachalpha for the total AAI scale was found to be 0.85. This scale is available freely and doesn't require any permissions.

Narrative of experience of subjects after attending the Alcoholic Anonymous Group meetings.

Statistics: Data was analyzed using SPSS22 and descriptive statistics was used to analyze socio-demographic details.

RESULTS

Socio-demographic Details: Maximum subjects were in the age group of 31-40 All male subjects Most of the subjects belonged to Hindu religion, were married, lived in urban areas and spoke Marathi as the primary language. Most of the subjects were graduate, were engaged in skilled type of work, and the annual family income was between 3-6 lakh rupees.

Table 1: Have you ever attended an AA meeting?

Yes	No
40(100%)	0(0%)

Table 2: Have you attended an AA meeting in the last year?

Yes	No
29 (72.5%)	11 (27.5%)

Table 3: Have you ever considered yourself to be a member of AA?

Yes	No
37 (92.5%)	3 (7.5%)

Table 4: Have you ever gone to 90 AA meetings in 90 days?

Yes	No
32 (80%)	8 (20%)

Table 5: Have you ever celebrated an AA sobriety birthday?

Yes	No
28 (70%)	12 (30%)

Table 6: Have you ever had an AA sponsor?

Yes	No
26 (65%)	14 (35%)

Table 7: Have you ever been an AA sponsor?

Yes	No
15 (37.5%)	25 (62.5%)

Table 8: If you have been in an alcohol treatment program (inpatient or outpatient), did they require that you "work" any of the AA steps?

Yes	No
23 (57.5%)	17 (42.5%)

Table 9: What steps did you complete when you were in alcohol treatment?

Steps	No. of Subjects
1	13 (32.5%)
2	4 (10%)
3	6 (15%)
-	17 (42.5%)

Table 10: Regardless of whether you have or have not been to alcohol treatment, which of the 12 steps of AA have you "worked"?

Steps	No. of Subjects
1	7 (17.5%)
2	4 (10%)
3	11 (27.5%)
4	2 (5%)
5	1 (2.5%)
6	2 (5%)
7	4 (10%)
9	1 (2.5%)
12	8 (20%)

Table 11: How many AA meetings have you attended in the last year?

No. of Meetings	No. of Subjects
0-50	16 (40%)
51-100	1 (2.5%)
101-150	4 (10%)
151-200	4 (10%)
201-250	4 (10%)
251-300	10 (25%)
300-350	1 (2.5%)

Table 12: What is the total number of AA meetings that you have ever attended?

Total No. of AA Meetings	No. of Subjects
0-1000	28 (70%)
1001-2000	6 (15%)
2001-3000	1 (2.5%)
3001-4000	0
4001-5000	0
5001-6000	5 (12.5%)

Table 13: Have you ever had a spiritual awakening or conversion experience since your involvement in AA?

Yes	No
32 (80%)	8 (20%)

How does AA help you in abstaining from alcohol?

Responses

Helped to understand that alcoholism is an illness and not just a habit and also helped us to understand the losses in life due to alcoholism. The evening time when we used to start drinking is now gone in attending the meeting. Sponsors have helped in times of craving or other crises which would again lead us to start alcohol. Also, they encouraged us to work through AA steps and supported us by remaining in regular contact with us.

Experience sharing; when we found ourselves in the same situation which he had heard in meetings and could lead to start of alcohol, we chose a different

path and remained sober. The concept of one day at a time. Step by step program of AA, hence easy to understand and follow.

Strengthened will power, after seeing other persons who have abstained from alcohol for years, we thought "if they can, we can". After we started attending meetings and remained sober for sometime, a lot of support came from the family members too, regarding attending the meetings regularly and the family members started trusting us again. The big book of AA has helped me a lot, also the fellowship program has helped me in

understanding the illness and more about AA, that on what it is based on.

Showed us a spiritual path, as the message of AA if a message from god, and god himself wants us to get better, thus an awakening, that we have to leave this path of addiction and choose a new path and a sober life for ourselves.

DISCUSSION

All the subjects were male in our study, this may be due to the fact that there is still a stigma associated with female alcoholism in our community, due to which female alcoholics open up less with their problems and avoid attending AA meetings.

Maximum subjects were Hindu and Marathi speaking, this can be co-related with the population of Mumbai, where 70% residents belong to Hindu religion and the local language is Marathi, thus the most spoken one.

11 were new-comers while 29 were continuing members of AA. It was found that continuing members had more involvement in AA and 28 members out of 29, had celebrated at-least one sobriety birthday; 26 had an AA sponsor and 15 were themselves sponsor.

In our study, 32 out of 40 subjects reported spiritual awakening after attending AA meetings. The findings of our study are in concordance with the findings of Krentzman et al.^[7]

The reason for spiritual awakening may be positive religious coping, that is, viewing God as compassionate in times of stress. This is relevant to AA's 3rd step, which emphasizes trust in a benevolent higher power. AA is an environment in which learning about spirituality takes place, either by the modelling of other members, actual prayer and meditation practices within meetings, or instructions in program literature. Research suggests sponsorship represents an important aspect of AA affiliation

This relationship has been documented in studies of AA involvement (Bond et al.; Major et al.; Subbaraman et al.).^[8,9,10] and the relationship with future drug and alcohol usage (Cloud et al.; Kingree et al.; Tonigan et al.; Witbrodt et al.).^[11,12,13]

In addition, having a sponsor significantly reduced the likelihood of an individual dropping out (Kelly et al.).^[14]

Further role of sponsors was found to be

1. Encouraging sponsees to work the programme of AA (doing the 12 steps and engaging in AA activity)
2. Support (regular contact, emotional support and practical support) The above findings were corroborated by study done by Whelan PJ et al.^[16]

CONCLUSION

Alcoholics Anonymous is a self-help group, which help patients to abstain from alcohol by helping them follow a spiritual path. They believe that there is a power higher than them. It was seen in this study that with high involvement in AA group, there was a spiritual awakening in the subjects, which helped them to cure their illness. The sponsors helped the subjects by encouraging them and supporting them emotionally and remaining in regular contact with the sponsees.

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