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Pedagogika Rodziny 5/1, 91-101

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2015

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DE GRUYTER  
OPEN

Pedagogika Rodziny. Family Pedagogy  
nr 5(1)/2015, ss. 91–101  
DOI: 10.1515/fampe-2015-0008

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## Emotional and Social Functioning of Families With a Person Addicted to Alcohol

**Abstract:** Functioning of the family of a person addicted to alcohol brings many unwanted situations at home. Such family environment is endangered in many spheres of emotional and social life. Emotional ties grow weak, the dialogue between members of the family and the person addicted distinguishes. Many families, and especially children in them suffer mentally because of the lack of meeting emotional and social needs and disturbed relationships in the family. The structure and social roles of the members of the family with alcohol problem are also endangered.

**Key words:** family, alcoholism, addiction, social risks, relationships within the family, emotional disturbances.

### Introduction

The family is an important social, emotional, biological and cultural environment for the community and its members. In this social group children learn and develop personal features, while adults can improve or change their features according to the conditions of functioning of the internal elements of family system. Moreover, the family environment naturally should foster their members, especially children, in meeting mental, social, material needs, fulfilling parental functions, achieving educational, social and life goals, supporting interests and motivation.

However, many families don't fulfill properly their parental functions. There's a disorganization of family environment there. These families are in various degrees dysfunctional. It touches crucial spheres of life: emotional, social, economic, caring and educational.

Dysfunctionality in various spheres of home life takes place also in families with alcohol problems. Alcoholism of parents, mostly fathers, brings many

negative situations to the rest of the members of the family, who have to function with the person addicted. There are interpersonal conflicts, elimination of basic functions, reducing the material, social and emotional needs in such families.

In alcoholic family, the parent who brings the dysfunction (father or mother), addicted to alcohol, whose nuisance behavior degrades and destroys his or her own personality, is simultaneously a threat to fulfill functions and needs of the members of the family and interferes with the existing organization, system and structure of family life.

The alcoholic problem touches contemporary a lot of families. Closest relations (father, mother, children) are systematically harmed by an alcoholic parent. In everyday life, there are many difficult or even critical situations that touches people addicted as well as other members of the family. Everyday struggling of the family with alcoholic problems of father or mother, the lack of ability to deal with domestic difficulties, helplessness parent – an alcoholic and his family members to the conflict and difficult situations, abnormal emotional ties and structure of the family system becomes an important problem in the functioning of the family addicted to alcohol.

### **Alcoholism of the parent and its negative influence on functioning of the family**

Alcoholism causes severe disturbance to the functioning of an addict, members of his family as well as society as a whole. It is a significant cause of negative problems, especially in a family environment, such as domestic violence, aggression, conduct disorder, family breakdown, conflict, emotional indifference, weakness and even breaking the social and emotional bonds between family members. The perpetrators of acts of aggression, violence, family conflicts are usually people who are under the influence of alcohol, which abuse inevitably leads to alcohol addiction. Hence, an alcohol problem does not only affect the addict, or someone who excessively uses alcohol but also members of the family functioning with this person. A person addicted to alcohol makes his closest suffering financial, social and emotional difficulties.

Living in a family with alcohol problems is very difficult, because it does not function properly. In such a family constant personal development of its members is not possible, it is closed for contacts with the environment, the relationship between the members is not based on the principles of honesty and reciprocity. For this reason, these families are called dysfunctional and even pathological, and addiction is treated as a disease of the whole family, not just the drinker.

Dysfunctional family is a family of incorrect feelings. In this family there is a disorder of structures, communication and relationship, violence, disorder of home atmosphere, notorious conflicts, non-social norms, disturbance of parental

functions, education of children is deprived of rational methods and forms of interaction, the needs of family members are limited (particularly for material psychological and social needs), there is emotional isolation of both children and other family members, they feel discomfort in the functioning of home. Parents in an alcoholic family does not support the children, ignore them or behave towards them in an aggressive manner. The consequences of these aggressive actions are visible parental conflict, aggression, violence, these children expressed relative to peers from the local community or school.

Toxic atmosphere in families with alcohol problems is not conducive to the formation of the positive qualities of the child's personality. The child grows and is brought up in the atmosphere full of conflict, aggression, malice and internal indifference. Such a negative climate in alcoholic family with emotional dysfunction causes the most damage and suffering of the child causing disorder, inhibition, emotional lability and disturbance of mental balance in his feelings. Often such a child cannot survive certain feelings, not to mention their expressions and keeping them in order. Emotional stiffness, indifference, withdrawal is accompanied by excessive and uncontrolled explosions of positive or negative feelings [Żyrakowska 2005].

There's often a crisis in family with alcohol problem that consist of role-playing, addiction to various things. Addiction of family members is the most common disease called – pathology. Both parents and children often acting out creating defense mechanisms, such as the suppression of feelings, denial to what happens, flip rage on other people, disconnecting their value from the value adopted in the family environment [Jarosz 2001].

Family in which the father or mother is engaged in continuous abuse of alcohol can be characterized by a lack of intimacy, the internal arrangements, lack of trust, limiting the dialogue, affection and love. These negative elements disrupts the functioning of the family social needs, psychological and material of its members. Is also disturbed family environment internal communication system that expresses the conflict, anger and even depression.

Among many disruptions of family functions (emotional, social, care, educational, material) there should be mentioned also biological sphere of life of family with alcohol problem.

Children in such family are often unwanted and rejected. There are situations in which parents dump the responsibility of bringing up children to state by giving up parental rights (completely or partially).

It must be pointed out that excessive drinking in many cases leads to the breaking of the marriage bond. The course of family conflicts caused by alcohol abuse is often dramatic and involves the use of force not only physical, but also mental. Perpetrators of domestic violence are usually people who are under the

influence of alcohol, but not necessarily being alcoholics, and the vast majority of the victims is also under the influence of alcohol at the time of the act of aggression. Many authors treat the connection between drinking alcohol and violence as a cause-effect relation in which aggressive acting is direct effect of using alcohol, and drinkers are increasing aggressiveness [Gaś 1992].

Families with alcohol problem are exposed to breaking marriage bonds. Research shows that 38% of divorces and breaking ups are caused by alcoholism of one of the parents, mostly the father [Cudak 2010]. Alcohol addiction in the family makes increasing of pathology and disorganization of family environment more likely, it is also a cause for improper care, education, socialization of children, it can deepen educational problems.

Alcoholism of one or both parents is often the cause of social or emotional orphanhood of children. This is due to the lack of security, care, respect and love of a parent abusing alcohol in relation to the child.

Alcohol abuser provide the other members of the family life problems of financial, emotional and other kind, hence the whole family is affected by alcohol problem in wide perspective. Those who live with the family, depend on it financially, socially and emotionally, suffer mostly. Living with an addict is very difficult because the family does not function properly. Personal development of its members is not possible. Usually it is closed for contacts with the social environment outside the family due to disturbances of relationships inside the family.

According to W. Sztander [2000], the development of dysfunctionality of the family with alcohol problem occurs in three steps. In the first stage, both the family and the alcoholic parent denies the existence of the problem. What is evident is the acceptance of alcoholic behavior. Family members try to protect the person drinking excessively. The second stage is to try to get rid of the problem of alcoholism in drinkers. Family creates a defense system against criticism of the social environment, hence the limitation occurs neighborhood and local contacts. The third phase of the functioning of a family with alcohol problems is the loss of hope for a positive solution to the problem, and therefore it is necessary to accept this situation.

Behavior of family members (father or mother) who abuse alcohol or alcoholic is difficult to predict, but most often exposes other family members to different risks. In a family with alcohol problems mostly children suffer, because they act with a sense of constant danger, shame, aggression, intrafamilial violence, mental and even physical feeling of helplessness and loneliness of his closest family.

## Methodology

The task of the family as an educational environment is to implement the basic functions of the parent to meet the needs of its members, optimize the multilateral development of various spheres of the personality of children and adolescents.

However, not all family communities are functional and beneficial for life, education, socialization and parental care. Many of today's families are dysfunctional. One of the major causes of dysfunction disorder is alcohol problem one or both parents. Members of these families have a codependency. Difficulties of life in a dysfunctional family with alcohol problems also apply to people who do not drink, but operate in a home with an alcoholic father or mother.

The aim of this study is to diagnose the functioning of the family members of a person addicted to alcohol.

The research process is directed through the formulated research problems.

1. What is the level of aggression and domestic conflict in families with alcohol problems?
2. What is the level of meeting the psychosocial needs of family members functioning with a person addicted to alcohol?
3. What are the emotional and social relationships of adolescents functioning with addicted family member?

The basic research method used in the test procedure was diagnostic survey. Tadeusz Pilch describes this method as a „way of gathering knowledge about the characteristics of the structural and functional dynamics of social phenomena, institutionally not localized, and have educational value, of the opinions and views of selected communities, intensity and direction of the development of these phenomena on the basis of the selected group representative of the general population, in which the phenomenon occurs” [Pilch, Bauman 2001, s. 56]. In the area of this method the technique of questionnaire and the unfinished sentences test are used.

In the questionnaire there are categorized and problematic questions. Thanks to such construction of the research tool, it was possible to gain deepen knowledge regarding family environment of subjects and their opinion in psycho-educational functioning of the family with person addicted. Complementary diagnosis was obtained on the basis of sociometric test used as a test of unfinished sentences.

The research was conducted in the second half of 2014 year of deliberately selected students (mostly junior high school third graders) from the city and county of Piotrków. Subjects are under the supervision of a teacher or school psychologist and living in a family with alcohol problems. Deliberately selected group consisted of 126 respondents. Of this group, 72 came from the urban environment, the other 54 came from the rural environment. Gender of

respondents had little varied, as 68 respondents were girls, and 58 subjects were boys. The structure of the surveyed families were as follows: a family full – 47 environments, cohabiting – 42, single-parent families – 37.

Some research (72 respondents) was conducted in person or in interaction with the teacher or school psychologist. Other (54 respondents) was conducted by educators and school psychologists.

### The research analysis

Contemporary the problem of alcohol abuse increases in various social environments. People with alcohol problems often make the family environment dysfunctional and cause lack of meeting the needs of psychosocial and material nature of the members of the family, especially the children, and thus contribute in traumatic home atmosphere, show negative parental attitudes, apply strict parental style. Family coaddict lives in constant nervous tension, insecurity, mutual indifference, indicates disorganization of family life.

Excessive alcohol consumption causes primarily degradation of the personality of an addict, a sense of loss of self-identity, indifference to the problems of family life, emotional lability, and conflict in human societies, mainly in the family. However, those who suffer most in an alcoholic family are children. Common phenomenon at home are violence, aggression, nervousness, lack of learning conditions, lack of love and support of family, all these causes a feeling of low value and emotional isolation of the child in his own family.

What was interesting in research procedure was the problem of aggression and home fights caused by behavior of an addict.

Results of research on domestic violence and expression of the fights in families with alcohol problems are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Aggression and fights at home in a family with alcohol problem.**

N – women =68

N – men =58

N – overall = 126

No	Frequency of aggression and fights at home	Women		Men		Overall	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
1.	Very often	21	30,9	19	32,8	40	31,8
2.	Often	26	38,2	22	37,9	48	38,1
3.	Occasionally	14	20,6	13	22,4	27	21,4
4.	Takes no place	7	10,3	4	6,9	11	8,7
5.	Overall	68	100,0	58	100,0	126	100,0

Source: own study.

The results presented in Table 1 indicate negative social and emotional

phenomena in family environments in which there is the problem of alcohol of one or both parents. Excessive alcohol consumption by the father or mother mostly disrupts in home atmosphere causing verbal abuse, conflicts that turn into fights often powerfully emotional. In most of the surveyed families often or very often (69.9%), there was, according to the respondents, the aggression and fighting in the family after addicted person returns home (usually the father) under the influence of alcohol. Respondents more often male (70.7%) expressed a negative view that alcohol abuse causes an atmosphere full of conflicts and fights at home. However, in the opinion of the surveyed women (69.1%) often and very often the aggression and domestic quarrels in the family environment was exhibited as a result of the abuse of alcohol by a drunk person.

More than in one of fifth surveyed families (21.4%) there were occasional acts of aggression, fights under the influence of alcohol by an addicted member of the family.

Worrying is the state of the climate of living in families with alcohol problems, as only 8.7% of respondents declare that in their family environments there is no aggression, severe conflicts and quarrels.

Respondents' answers regarding aggression and home fights testify of emotional abuse caused by alcoholic parents (father or mother) in a family environment:

„My father under the influence of alcohol is very aggressive and causes fights at home”,

„We often have to run away from home, because the father-alcoholic drink is very nervous, aggressive and reaches up to violence”,

„My mom drinks and is very aggressive, shouting, arguing and even beats us”,

„My parents often drink, are probably dependent on alcohol when they are drunk often argue and even beat”.

People with alcohol problems in a high proportion of surveyed families provoke aggression, conflict and even physical violence. In these families, there is no internal control of behavior, emotional balance, respect for the dignity of the family members.

Another aspect in the research procedure was to diagnose the degree of psychosocial needs of family members (especially children, functioning with a person addicted to alcohol).

The results of research on the level of satisfaction of psychological and social needs of children and other family members with alcohol problems are presented in Table 2

**Table 2. The level of satisfaction of psychological and social needs of children and other family members with alcohol problems**

N – women = 68

N – men = 58

N – overall = 126

No.	Fulfilling psychosocial needs	Women		Men		Overall	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
1.	Yes – they are fulfilled	7	10,3	8	13,8	15	11,9
2.	Mostly yes	16	23,5	17	29,3	33	26,2
3.	Mostly no	24	35,3	21	36,2	45	35,7
4.	They are not fulfilled	21	30,9	12	20,7	33	26,2
5.	Overall	68	100,0	59	100,0	126	100,0

Source: own study.

In families with alcohol problems life is centered around the searching for a variety of situations related to alcohol consumption. Family members are focused on this problem and also dependent on the addict. What is disturbing phenomenon of social and emotional development in these families, it is the fact of skipping and a lacking of meeting the necessary security, physical and mental needs, that should take the form of interest in dialogue, love, affection, kindness, help and support in difficult family situations or at school. The lack or deficiency of fulfilling psychological needs of family members, especially children in the family functioning with a person addicted to alcohol provide results included in Table 2.

As many as 26.2% of respondents expressed the opinion that they are not satisfied in their families with material, mental and social needs. Children and other family members do not feel safe at home, live in constant fear. Emotional tension in a family with alcohol problems, failure to meet the needs, especially those of emotional nature causes disruption in interpersonal relations with an addict. Failure to meet the needs of psychosocial nature are more common to girls (30.9%) than boys surveyed (20.7%). This difference is statistically significant, as  $\chi^2 = 23.72$ ,  $df = 6$  p.i. 0.05.

Girls, especially in adolescence and older, are very sensitive to negative emotional and social situations functioning at home. They are experiencing a lack of sympathetic dialogue with addicted parent, a disorder in verbal and non-verbal interactions, psychological isolation of family in such components as: scarcity of parental love, affection, understanding, emotional support and even ordinary conversation and hugging.

Traumatic, hectic home atmosphere caused by alcohol abuse by one of parents contributes mostly to disregard and ignore the needs of family members.

Youth statements confirm the results of the research on the risks in terms of psycho-social needs of the family:

“I don’t feel love from my father alcoholic”,

“At home there is no positive contact nor dialogue with parents because there are often quarrels”,

“I feel loneliness in my family as there are no social or emotional relationships”,

“There’s no care in our family about meeting social or psychological needs”.

The largest proportion of young people from families with alcohol problems (35.7%) is of the opinion that they are generally not satisfied with meeting mental and social needs in their homes. In a slightly greater extent (36.2%) male respondents assessed the risk in comparison with the girls (35.3%). The difference in these results are not statistically significant, since the calculation chi - square  $\chi^2 = 2.01$ ,  $df = 7$ ,  $p.i. \neq ni$ .

In this group of families surveyed some of the psycho-physical needs were fulfilled, particularly in relation to children. Parents, especially the non-drinking mother, feeling hard emotional situation at home (conflicts, aggression, violence, nervousness), try to isolate the child from the traumatic, often critical family events. Then a willingness to talk with the children, learning support, and even kindness and material rewards were showed. Positive impulses in the sphere of parental attempts to satisfy some social or psychological needs of children in a family with alcohol problems are too sporadic and often in circumstances unfavorable for the expression of emotions, feelings and social relationships in a family environment. Therefore, members of the family functioning with an addict feel a security risk, lack of mutual kindness, love and understanding. In these families interpersonal communication system, psychological support, social and verbal and non-verbal contact are disturbed in the family community.

Few respondents from surveyed families with alcohol problems (11.9%) is of the opinion that parents fulfill their social, material and psychological needs. This group of respondents, despite the fact that the father or the mother creates disadvantages in a family environment, assesses their parents positively.

They regard the alcohol problem of mother or father as a case of illness, which should be eliminated by any means. Mostly members of the family can be helpful with that. In this part of family surveyed home atmosphere is kind, children feel safe, loved and accepted. There’s dialogue, mutual help and support in many social situations in these families.

Fulfilling psychological and social needs of the members of the family, especially children, is directly or indirectly connected with emotional relationships between surveyed with addicted in family environment.

Both adult member of the family, as well as children in the family can take a variety of social roles. However, their functioning in the family is mostly dependent on the relationship and the relationship that they share with a person addicted to alcohol.

Research was also conducted on emotional and social relations of respondents with addicted family member. The results of these tests shown in the table 3.

**Table 3. Relationships of surveyed youth with addicted member of the family**

N – women = 68

N – men = 58

N – overall = 126

No.	Relationships with addicted in the family	Women		Men		Overall	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
1.	Very good	8	11,8	7	12,1	15	11,9
2.	Good	13	19,1	9	15,5	22	17,5
3.	Neutral	21	30,9	16	27,6	37	29,4
4.	Negative (large distance to an addicted)	15	22,0	14	24,1	29	23,0
5.	No relationships or contacts	11	16,2	12	20,7	23	18,2
6.	Overall	68	100,0	58	100,0	126	100,0

Source:own study.

The results of the survey that are presented in Table 3 show that the majority (29.4) has the neutral emotional relationships and social functioning in the family with a person addicted to alcohol.

What is bothering, it is the fact that a small percentage of the respondents expressed an opinion on the good (17.5%) and very good (11.9%), relationship of family members with an addict in the home environment. All others respondents (41.2%) negatively evaluate the relationships occurring emotional and interpersonal relationships of the family with an addict. Among this group of respondents up to 23% demonstrated high emotional distance, anger and even hatred expressed in varying degrees, depending on the situation and behavior, to a person addicted to alcohol.

Between the surveyed group of men and women, although there are some slight differences in the percentage of respondents in favor of the female, there are not statistically significant differences.

Abbreviated quantitative analysis of the results in the present emotional and social relationships in the family of an addict domestic environment characteristic interviewees confirm the statements of surveyed:

„I feel an emotional aversion to my father, who under the influence of alcohol manifest aggression against us”,

„In relation to my father I feel anger and lack of understanding, because it often causes quarrels”,

„Binge drinking by parents has led to a complete absence of any emotional relationship with them”,

„In our family, there is a lack of dialogue, understanding and emotional relationship with his alcoholic father”.

Disorder of social and emotional relationships in a family with alcohol problems is often due to aggression, physical and psychological violence, conflicts, absences from home, causing stress and nervousness by addicts functioning in the family environment.

### Final remarks

Properly functioning family community is an important component of social, emotional development for its members, particularly for children acting in this environment. However, much of today's families are dysfunctional. Disturbances in the parental functions are due to different reasons. One of them, and perhaps the most important is the abuse of alcohol by one or both parents. Functioning of the family of a person addicted to alcohol causes in many cases, the various risks of axiological, emotional and day-care nature. The durability and structure of the family is disturbed. Social roles of its members are marginalized and are reordering, in which a person addicted to alcohol plays an important role. Internal communication and dialogue are poor, because they are disturbed by socially adverse behavior of a drinker.

Emotional sphere of family life with an addict is one of the most vulnerable components of the operation of the home environment. The constant family conflicts lead to weakening or rupture of emotional ties with a person addicted to alcohol. Members of the family, especially children, do not fulfill psychological and social needs. Sense of security, understanding, kindness, acceptance and mutual support in the home environment is threatened. Father or mother addicted to alcohol exhibit for their members of the family disorganization of domestic life, aggression and physical and mental violence, conflict, state of emergency, nervousness in family life.

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