The Relationship between Low Self-Esteem and Alcoholism

by Mindy Checkon
Low Self-Esteem Defined:

- A discrepancy between one’s ideal self-concept and actual self-concept
- Esteem: Hold in high regard; to respect, admire, revere oneself (Webster)
Alcoholism Defined:

✧ A disease of continued, excessive and usually uncontrollable use of alcoholic drinks (Webster)
✧ An attempt to self-medicate/remediate self deficits
Previous and Current Research

- Limited research studying self-esteem as a predictor of alcoholism
  - Models of Addiction focus more on antisocial behavior, personality and learning theory
- Alcohol Study at CU; Rosenberg’s (1965) Self-Esteem Scale
  - A widely used measure with demonstrated reliability and validity (Greenberg, p.567)
Instruments used to test Self-Esteem of Abusers

- Adjective checklists
- Q-sorts
- Inventories
- Self-Concept Scales
Tennessee Self-Concept Scale

- Physical Self
- Moral-Ethical Self
- Personal Self
- Family Self
- Social Self
Rosenberg’s Self-Esteem Scale

(Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree)

1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.
   SA  A  D  SD

2. At times I think I am no good at all.
   SA  A  D  SD

3. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.
   SA  A  D  SD
4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.  
   SA  A  D  SD

5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.  
   SA  A  D  SD

6. I certainly feel useless at times.  
   SA  A  D  SD
Rosenberg’s Self-Esteem Scale, cont.

- 7. I feel that I’m a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.
  SA A D SD
- 8. I wish I could have more respect for myself.
  SA A D SD
- 9. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.
  SA A D SD
- 10. I take a positive attitude toward myself.
  SA A D SD
Reduction of Negative Affect and Reduction of Self-Rejection are highly correlated (Saul, p. 311)

S.R. Gold (1980) argued that drug users rely more and more on drugs for feeling good and in control.
- reaffirm their belief that they are powerless to cope without drugs
- drug use escalates as a coping mechanism
- particularly for person lacking social skills and low in self-esteem and self-efficacy
Less Distress When Intoxicated

アウトライン
- Negative personality characteristics of alcoholics are perceived to be lessened when using alcohol, serves as a “time-out”
- Feelings of low self-esteem are consistently prevalent among male and female alcoholics, but especially acute among female alcoholics
  - One explanation for this is that the defensive style of male alcoholics enables them to neutralize their feelings of low self-esteem (Maisto, p.217)
Alcohol, Self-Esteem and Sexual Problems

Many studies have focused on these three factors.

Sexual problems relating to sexual roles, sexual identity and sexual orientation are prevalent among male and female alcoholics.

This suggests that each type of problem exacerbates the other (Maisto, p.217).
Substance Abuse vs. Alcoholic Self-Concepts

- One study specifically compared Heroin Abusers to Alcoholics and found that Alcoholics have more pronounced feelings of low self-worth
  - Addicts tend to react defensively rather than in a “self-effacing” manner (Maisto, p. 218)
  - Although their Self-Concepts were similar, Alcoholics had greater emotional distress and were more passive and compliant than addicts (Maisto, p. 218)
Personality Factors

❖ Locus of Control: Alcoholics who have External Locus of Control tend to have more severe drinking problems (Galizio, p. 230)

❖ Strong sense of adventure and disregard for social mores (Galizio, p. 233)
Findings

- Effect of alcohol on self-awareness and self-esteem; especially for self-conscious
- Married women in social drinking situations vs. married men
- Low self-esteem does not necessarily occur prior to alcoholism, but is associated with alcohol abuse
- Feelings of low self-esteem often become ingrained (Galizio, p. 217)
In Conclusion

- Personality characteristics play an important role in Alcoholism
- Greater stress reduction after consuming alcohol in problem drinkers
- Alcohol Abuse serves to immediately decrease negative characteristics while long term use proves to intensify negative personality characteristics
In Conclusion, cont.

- Alcohol Abusers eventually turn to drinking for medicating effects habitually.
- Longitudinal research and Instruments especially designed for Alcoholics are needed.
References


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