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## Rodzice uzależnieni od alkoholu wobec edukacji swoich dzieci

## The attitude of alcohol-addicted parents towards further education of their children

### Streszczenie

**Wstęp.** W dobie zmian jakich jesteśmy świadkami zmienia się również spojrzenie na wykształcenie. Większość ludzi dąży do osiągnięcia jak najwyższych kwalifikacji poprzez zdobywanie wiedzy na wielu poziomach. Rodzice dopingują swoje dzieci do nauki przekonując, że jest to szansa na lepszą ofertę pracy i szansa na niezależność. W rodzinach wspierających dzieci i będących dla nich przykładem, w takich, w których dzieci czują się szczęśliwe z pewnością cel ten będzie łatwiej osiągnąć.

**Cel.** Celem pracy jest zaprezentowanie spojrzenia leczących się alkoholików na dalszą edukację ich dzieci po ukończeniu gimnazjum oraz wpływ alkoholizmu na funkcjonowanie dzieci w rodzinach.

**Material i metody.** Badaniami objęto leczących się na Oddziale Leczenia Uzależnienia od Alkoholizmu i Oddziale Leczenia Alkoholowych Zespołów Abstynencyjnych w Nowym Targu. Narzędziem badawczym był kwestionariusz CAGE oraz autorski kwestionariusz ankiety, adresowany do uzależnionych od alkoholu rodziców. Uzyskano zgodę na przeprowadzenie badań od ordynatora w/w oddziałów i dyrektora szpitala w Nowym Targu, a także wszyscy ankietowani wyrazili zgodę na badanie.

**Wyniki i wnioski.** Wszystkie badane osoby są świadome swojego uzależnienia od alkoholu. Rodzice uzależnieni od alkoholu chcą, aby ich dzieci kontynuowały naukę po ukończeniu gimnazjum, ponieważ uważają, że wykształcenie jest ważne w życiu każdego człowieka. Alkoholizm rodziców w opinii badanych wpływa negatywnie na ambicje dzieci. Większość badanych uważa, że dzieci alkoholików nie są szczęśliwe, czego nie potwierdzają mówiąc o swoich dzieciach, które według nich, są bezpieczne i szczęśliwe. Wykształcenie w opinii badanych nie ma wpływu na ilość spożywanego alkoholu oraz na świadomość jego szkodliwości.

### Abstract

**Introduction.** As the world is changing, the attitude towards further education is changing as well. Most people aim at getting good qualifications and acquire knowledge at different levels. Parents motivate their children by convincing them that good education may create a chance for having a better job or being independent. Children from supportive families where parents are role models for them are much happier, and this educational aim is easier to achieve.

**Aim.** The aim of the study is to present the attitude of alcohol-addicted parents, who are under treatment, towards further education of their lower secondary school children. What is more, the thesis is going to show what influence alcoholism in families has on the children.

**Material and methods.** The research was done among the people who are patients in Alcohol Addiction Treatment and Withdrawal Symptoms Departments in Nowy Targ. The tool used for the research was a CAGE survey and an author-designed questionnaire addressed to alcohol-addicted parents. The head of the departments, the manager of the hospital in Nowy Targ, as well as the patients, agreed to the research.

**Results and conclusions.** All the respondents are aware of their addiction to alcohol. Alcohol addicted parents want their children to continue education after the lower secondary school because, in their opinion, education is important in everybody's life. According to the respondents, alcoholism of parents exerts a negative influence on ambitions of children. The majority of the respondents think that children of alcohol-addicted people are unhappy, however, they do not confirm this opinion speaking about their own children and claim that they are safe and happy. According to the respondents, the level of education does not affect the quantity of alcohol intake and the awareness of harmfulness of this addiction.

**Słowa kluczowe:** alkoholizm, rodzina, dzieci, edukacja.

**Key words:** alcoholism, family, children, education.

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Nowadays parents spend more and more money on education of their children, extra lessons and language courses. Also, they often choose the so-called prestigious schools. Trying to convince teenagers to spend more time studying, we emphasize that education makes you independent and gives the opportunity of using various prospects and offers [1].

According to CBOS research, a great majority (93%) of the Polish population believes it is worthwhile to acquire knowledge, with 70% holding this opinion strongly. At present only one adult Pole in twenty (5%) perceives learning as unimportant and insignificant. To compare, in early 1990's this opinion was shared by a quarter of the respondents. People who do not value education are usually the unemployed, unqualified workers, and the youngest respondents (surprisingly, they are students themselves). The respondents were also asked what the most desirable educational level for their children was. Most of them want their children to graduate from a university, and 14% would like them to achieve at least a PhD degree. No respondents declare the primary or lower secondary school level [1].

There are specific behavior patterns observed in children whose relatives happen to be addicted to alcohol. It is due to traumatic experiences and unwritten, cruel rules present in those families' lives [2].

Research conducted on the children from alcoholic families, from many different countries and over a few decades, always leads to the same conclusions, namely:

- The children are usually hyperactive and concentrate with a lot of difficulty.
- We can observe anxiety and depression among the children.
- They have problems with fulfilling the school curriculum because of cognitive deficits and prolonged physical tiredness.
- The vocabulary they have obtained is significantly limited in comparison to their peers living in "standard" families.
- They achieve lower results in intelligence tests.
- They are subject to somatic and psychosomatic diseases.
- They have extremely low self-esteem [3].

It is widely known that early school years are decisive in creating the attitude towards learning. Children who enter the educational system with serious deficits are prone to failure particularly in this period. Children brought up in dysfunctional families face numerous threats resulting from detrimental growth conditions. The main disadvantages that can influence the learning ability include:

- Injuries in the prenatal and perinatal periods (it can cause FAS – Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and other development defects).
- Neglect that may cause developmental retardation.
- Traumatic experiences that entail conduct disorder (they may appear in a family as well as at school) [4].

The children who, due to their abnormal family situation, concentrate only on survival do not find gaining "academic" knowledge attractive and useful, as they cannot see how it may be put in practice in their daily lives. Their learning motivation will depend on whether they are able to perceive:

- The aim of learning and its usefulness.
- Any chances to succeed in assimilating knowledge (aims and tasks have to be adequate to their mental abilities).
- Their progress and the feeling of satisfaction [5].

A child whose intellectual development has been stopped and who lacks motivation needs the so-called corrective experiences. However, making a schoolchild do his/her homework will be insufficient. The process of learning needs to be initiated by breaking the plight of failures and making children self-confident by letting them experience their intellectual abilities themselves. We have to bear in mind, however, that learning is not the same as doing the assigned homework or becoming familiar with a part of the curriculum. To learn means to develop one's personal potential. Its clear indicator is the pupil's progress and satisfaction with results of his/her activities. Planning help to such a disadvantaged child requires taking into account factors that can influence the process of generating motivation. It is essential to overcome the child's aversion to learning and his/her lack of self-assurance [4].

It is very important to give support to any action taken on the pupil's own initiative. Such a young person is often criticized at home by a drunken parent and left without an opportunity to be independent. In dysfunctional families standard life elements, e.g. celebrating holidays, finding and fostering a hobby, spending time together or even giving pocket money, are usually absent. For that reason, children gradually lose courage and the need to show independence. Even if they can cope quite well, they hold back their achievements. In really extreme cases, where the family situation is especially difficult, children do not even feel like thinking about their life and future [3].

## AIM OF THE STUDY

The chief aim of this paper is to present opinions of alcoholics in treatment not only on their offspring's education but also on the influence of alcoholism on the children's functioning in the family.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study group consisted of 53 patients of the Alcohol Addiction Treatment and Withdrawal Symptoms Departments of the hospital in Nowy Targ. All of them are parents of lower secondary school students (aged 13-15). The research tools were the CAGE questionnaire [6] and the questionnaire designed by the author of this paper. The latter aimed at analyzing further education (after graduating from lower secondary school) of the addicts' children and their existence in the pathological family. The heads of the aforementioned departments and the director of the hospital, as well as all the respondents gave their consent to the research.

The study group included 16 women and 37 men (31.2% and 69.8%, respectively). They were 25-60 years old; the average age was  $42.6 \pm 7.6$  (median 42 years old, min. 25 years old, max. 60 years old).

The majority of the respondents live in the country (32 people – 60%), the remaining 21 (40%) live in cities differing in size; the majority of the respondents live in a city with the population of over 20,000 (21%) (Figure 1).

As far as the respondents' education (Figure 2) is concerned, 23% of the parents graduated from secondary school.

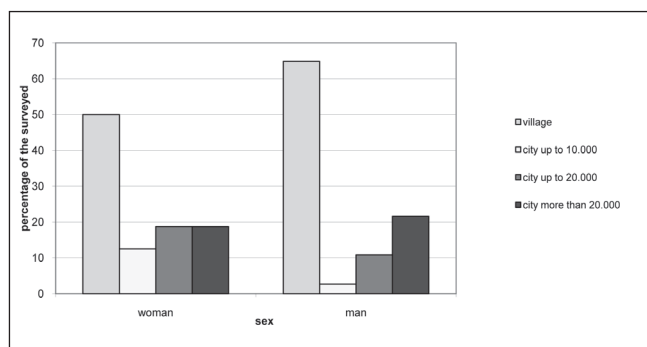


FIGURE 1. The place of residence of the respondents (regarding groups).

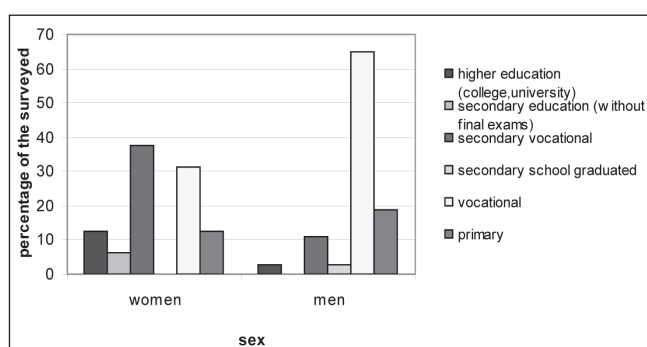


FIGURE 2. Parents' education (regarding groups).

The majority (55%) have vocational education and only 6% have a degree of university or college, whereas as much as 17% finished their education after the primary school. There is a great difference between men and women regarding education. In comparison to males, more females have secondary education.

Spouse's education

46% of the parents have a vocational background, a similar number (41%) graduated from the secondary school. Only 9% have higher education while 4% are vocationally educated. No statistically significant difference regarding gender has been observed in the case of the respondents' spouses. A dominant source of income of the respondents is a job contract (29%), 16% benefit from the disability pension, and as much as 8% claim they have no income. The remaining answers are presented in Figure 3.

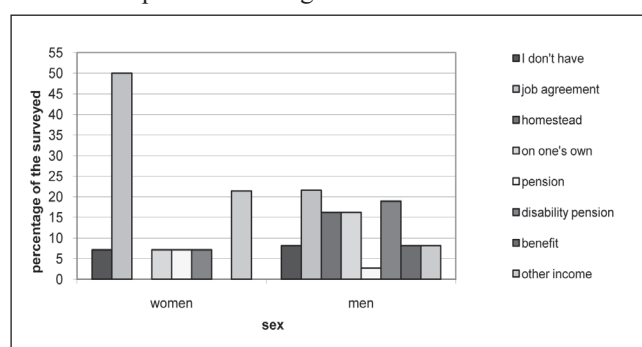


FIGURE 3. The main source of parents' income (regarding groups).

TABLE 1. Answers from the CAGE questionnaire.

| Answers  | I believe that I should limit drinking alcohol. |      |        |      |          |      |
|--|---|------|--------|------|----------|------|
|  | Respondents                                     |      |        |      |          |      |
|  | Woman   |      | Man    |      | Together |      |
|  | n = 16  | %    | n = 37 | %    | n = 53   | %    |
| Yes  | 16  |      | 37     |      | 53       | 100  |
| No   | -   | -    | -      | -    | -        | -    |
| Total  | 16  | 100  | 37     | 100  | 53       | 100  |
| I am irritated by critical remarks about my drinking.                                    |   |      |        |      |          |      |
| Yes  | 16  | 100  | 31     | 83.8 | 47       | 88.7 |
| No   | 0   | -    | 6      | 16.2 | 6        | 11.3 |
| Total  | 16  | 100  | 37     | 100  | 53       | 100  |
| I felt bad and I felt remorseful about my drinking.                                      |   |      |        |      |          |      |
| Yes  | 16  | 100  | 37     | 100  | 53       | 100  |
| No   | -   | -    | -      | -    | -        | -    |
| Total  | 16  | 100  | 37     | 100  | 53       | 100  |
| I happened to start my day from drinking alcohol to soothe my nerves and to feel better. |   |      |        |      |          |      |
| Yes  | 15  | 93.8 | 36     | 97.3 | 51       | 96.2 |
| No   | 1   | 6.2  | 1      | 2.7  | 2        | 3.8  |
| Total  | 16  | 100  | 37     | 100  | 53       | 100  |
| Total number of respondents  | 16  | 30.1 | 37     | 69.8 | 53       | 100  |

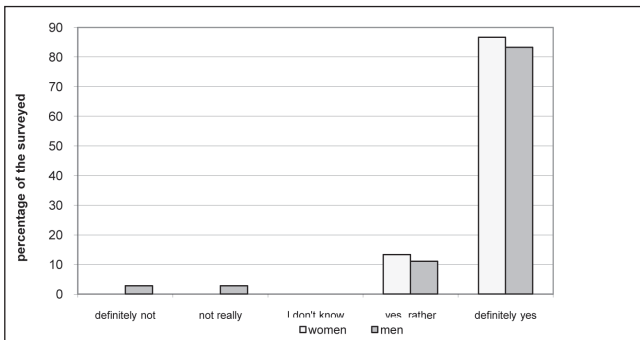
Spouse's income (n=42)

Again, the majority of the respondents work on a job contract (38%), run their own farm (17%), while 12% do not earn money. The remaining consorts have different sources of income. The number of children raised by the respondents is  $2.8 \pm 1.9$  on average (min. 1 child, max. 10 children, median 2 children). In the families studied, apart from the children attending a lower secondary school, there also children who already work (23% of the families). Some of them study at a university (9% of the families), upper secondary school or secondary vocational school (17% of the families), attend a vocational school (9% of the families) and a primary school (34%); small children stay at home (4% of the families) (Table 1).

**RESULTS**

As Table 1 shows, every respondent answered: "Yes" to at least two questions. The data indicate that those people are very likely to be addicted to alcohol. 6 men claimed not to be irritated by critical remarks about drinking, whereas 2 people denied drinking alcohol in the morning.

It has been found that the great majority (96.1%) agrees that education is essential in our lives, whereof 84.3% answered: "Definitely yes". Only 4% are opposed to that opinion; all of them are men. According to the respondents' answers, 98% of the children can continue education after the lower secondary school level. 2% said: "I don't know" while the "No" reply was not recorded (Figure 4).



**FIGURE 4. Is education important in humans' life?**

89.4% of the respondents claim their children will continue education after graduating from a lower secondary school. Other opinions were the following: "Not really" – 4.3% and "I don't know" – 6.4%. No answer: "Definitely not" was recorded, however, 4.3% said: "Not really", and they were all men.

Asked if they give help to their children while learning, 90.8% of the female respondents and 51.5% of the male ones declared: "Yes". It can be assumed that women engage more in supporting their children's learning than men. However, 5 women and 4 men did not answer this question.

There were 89.4% affirmative answers to the question concerning support given to the child in difficult situations, while 5 people said: "No", and 6 respondents (11.8%) did not answer.

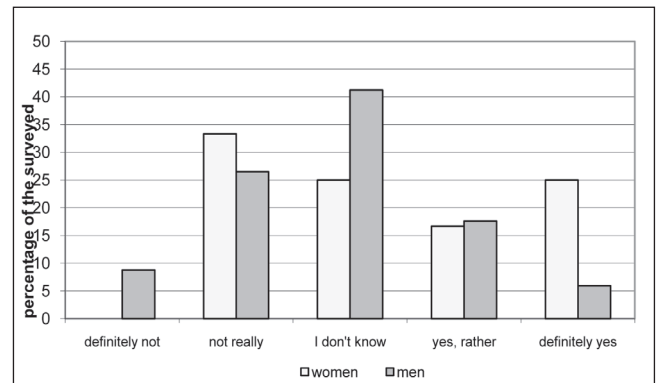
Young people are encouraged to continue education by 91% of the studied parents. Respectively, 6.8% do not support their children in acquiring knowledge – this group consisted of men only.

To the question: "Do children feel happy in your family?" – 80.8% parents answered: "Yes" while 2.1% gave a negative reply. Eight people (17%) are not sure if the family situation makes their children happy. Six respondents did not answer.

Answering to the next question, 82.6% of respondents state their children feel safe in their families. Although there was no "Definitely not" answer, 6.5% chose: the "Not really" option. The fact that 10.9% are not sure of their children's feelings is worth considering.

The data gathered on the basis of the next question indicate that 42.5% of the parents (53.9% females) are afraid that their family is threatened by alcoholism. 25.5% cannot say it is so. In the case of men, 35.3% think their family is immune to this addiction.

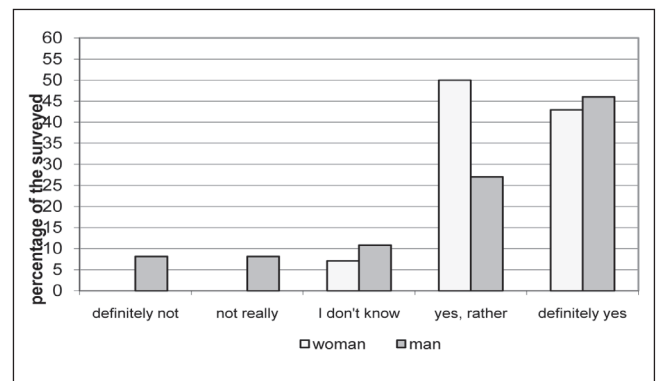
Seventeen respondents (37.0%) were not sure if they are the role models for their children or not. 34.8% (4 women and 12 men) definitely denied to set a good example, while, surprisingly, only 13 respondents (28.3%) answered: "Yes". Seven people did not answer. It appears that the majority of the respondents do not want their children to follow their example (Figure 5).



**FIGURE 5. Do I set an example to my children?**

It is worth noticing that 20 respondents drink alcohol to soothe their nerves and to feel better, 24 people deny it, and 5 do not know. Moreover, 4 respondents gave no answer. It is interesting that most of the men (29) gave negative replies or had no opinion.

As it is shown in Figure 6, 78.4% of the respondents admit that the parents' drinking problems weaken the children's ambitions and motivation. However, 11.8% say it is not so; there is no woman in this group. 92.9% of the females agree that kids raised in dysfunctional families are disadvantaged and less ambitious.



**FIGURE 6. Does alcoholism of parents weaken childrens' ambition?**

“Is alcohol addiction a problem to be ashamed of?” - Asked this question, 78.8% answered: “Yes”, 93.4% of this group being women. What is more, 3.8% of the respondents had no opinion, while 17.3% denied that drinking problems make them feel ashamed.

The great majority of the respondents (76.5%) state that children of alcohol-addicted parents are not happy. Only 5.9% have the contrary opinion, but there were no women in this group. 17.6% have no opinion on this matter (Figure 7).

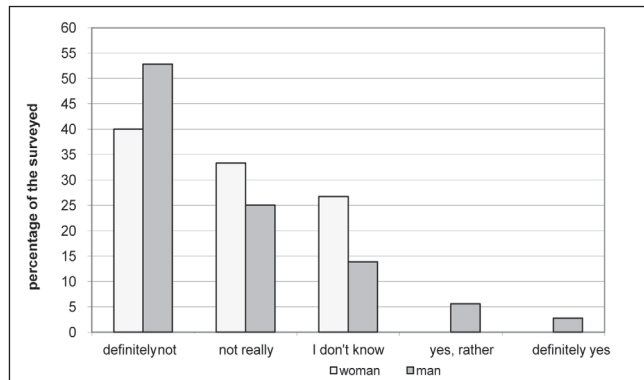


FIGURE 7. Are children of alcohol-addicted parents happy?

There were 51.9% of the parents who claimed that the amount of consumed alcohol does not depend on the level of education and 15.4% of the responses were: “Not really” while 23.1% confirm the influence of education on drinking. The last question was answered by 47.1% of the respondents that education does not increase one’s awareness of a destructive effect of alcohol, where 35.3% of the answers are: “Definitely not” and 33.4% of the recorded answers were affirmative (Figure 8).

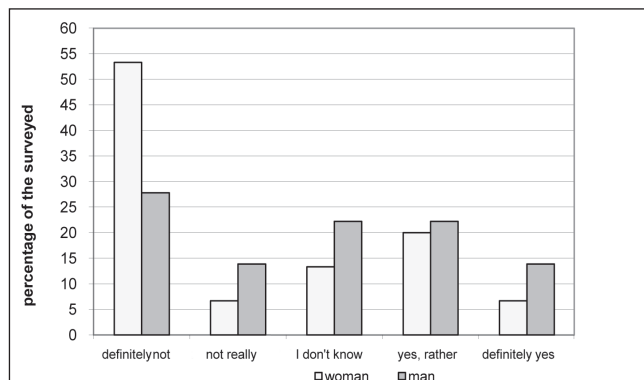


FIGURE 8. Does education increase one’s awareness of the destructive effect of alcohol?

## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

1. All the respondents are aware of their addiction to alcohol.
2. Alcohol-addicted parents want their children to continue education after the lower secondary school because, in their opinion, education is important in everybody’s life.
3. According to the respondents, alcoholism of parents exerts a negative influence on ambitions of children.
4. The majority of the respondents think that children of alcohol-addicted people are unhappy, however, they do not confirm this opinion speaking about their own children and claim that they are safe and happy.

5. According to the respondents, the level of education does not affect the quantity of alcohol intake and the awareness of harmfulness of this addiction.

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