

Personality traits among alcoholics

■ Bhavya Singhal and Babita Prusty

Amity University, NOIDA (U.P.) INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The findings of the study indicate that non-alcoholics and social drinkers differ on four personality traits, non-alcoholics and non-alcoholics differ on three personality traits and alcoholics and social drinkers differ on three personality traits on the sixteen personality factor test. As the normal population alcoholics are also seen as varying in their personality. There has not been much evidence on showing a predisposed personality type of an alcoholic.

INTRODUCTION

It has been observed from a long time that alcoholics have a dependent personality. Personality as defined by many renowned psychologists could be referred to as "a person's projection of inner self". The most widely accepted definition was given by G.W. Allport. Personality traits explain a more detailed parameter around which these projections are viewed. Our personality reflects our characteristics, our coping skills and emotional stability.

Anxiety in alcohol-dependent individuals varies in intensity and fluctuates over time. Sources of anxiety are low level of self-esteem, fear of disapproval from significant people, loss of position, prestige, stature or self-esteem. In personality the person's self-structure plays an important role. For example, Skinner (1982) found a *sociopathic* variety of alcoholic. One typology of alcoholics related to anxiety has been offered by Petrie (1967), who claimed alcoholics were driven to drink in order to modulate the intensity of stimuli. Alcoholics require this modulation, Petrie's research shows, because their natural tendency is to augment external stimuli which then strike them

as too intense. Without alcohol, these stimuli would be too painful or anxiety-provoking for them to tolerate.

Addict's thinking, perception, and judgment were considered to be seriously impaired (Miller and Rollnick, 1991). Thus, we have not found a scientific basis for a common personality type predisposed to alcoholism. Alcohol and personality are quite interrelated as deviant drinking behavior may lead to conflict personal and social misery, person's general adjustment, lack of impulse control. Excessive drinking is perceived as a problem that causes aggression, sadistic personality, insecurity, poor health. Alcoholics are observed undergoing insomnia themselves and the people around them are adversely affected also. As we see alcoholics being aggressive, dominant or anti-social is said to be due to there years of drinking and not due to there personalities.

Mc Cord and Mc Cord (1960) viewed alcoholics as being highly dependent. Goldstein and Linden (1969) view alcoholics as having poor anger management skills and low control in frustrating situations; Craig (1980) observed male alcoholics as high on having anti-social personality traits and light extroversion was concluded. Craig *et al.* (1985) conducted a

study on alcoholics and addicts and found that alcoholics were more avoidant, aggressive and schizotypal.

More than fifty years of research (Hester and Miller, 1995; Graham and Strenger, 1988; Vaillant, 1995) has failed to reveal a consistent "alcoholic personality." Miller (1995) observed: "Attempts to derive a set of alcoholic psychometric personality subtypes have yielded profiles similar to those found when subtyping a general population (Loberg and Miller, 1986). That is, alcoholics appear to be as variable in personality as are nonalcoholics".

Knorrning *et al.* (1987) compared Type I and II alcoholics on stable personality patterns and found that both the types were high on somatic anxiety and verbal aggression. Guilt was seen as high and socialization was low. Graham *et al.* (1988) conducted the MMPI on alcoholics and reported that no single personality trait is characteristic of alcoholics, the six cluster types occur with consistency; Ciarrocchi *et al.* (1991) reported personality dimensions of male pathological gamblers, alcoholics and dually addicted gamblers; Howard *et al.* (1996) suggested tridimensional personality traits of sons of alcoholic and non-alcoholic fathers. Bergman *et al.* (1998) reported about Swedish women's personality characteristics revealing serious underlying psychopathology.

Moreover, the alcoholic uses alcohol to blunt his or her anxiety and attempt to control what he or she perceives as painful reality Corey (1991). Schaef (1986) adds that alcoholics tend to be co-dependent, whether or not they are male or female. Several studies in the Brennan *et al.* (1986a) review also documented that heavier drinkers consistently endorsed attitudes that were permissive of heavy drinking. Camatta and Nagoshi (1995) reported a positive correlation between stress, depression, "irrational" beliefs (thought to be a hallmark of depression) and alcohol-related problems.

Bhargava and Bhargava (1991) observed the six personality dimensions and the perceived loneliness among narcotic drug abusers using the Awareness of Drug Abuse and Alcohol Abuse Scale, Dimensional Personality Inventory and Perceived Loneliness Scale. It was observed that sensation seeking combined with impulsivity were the most prominent as compared to anxiety traits and neuroticism. Grange (2007) suggested a study of personality correlates of alcohol consumption and aggression. In the Brennan *et al.* (1986) review, five studies documented a relationship between frequency and problems of drinking and lower self-esteem. Brown (2006) found alcoholics to be more extreme than social drinkers.

The present study describes the personality traits among alcoholic, social drinker and non-alcoholic groups. It was found that alcoholics were significantly higher on the personality trait-Guilt as compared to non-alcoholic and social drinker group. It was also reported that females were seen to be high on personality dimension like Guilt as compared with males.

Whereas males were seen to be low on Social Warmth, Innovation, Competition and Adaptability traits. Alcoholics are unable to meet the environmental demands, are aggressive and extremely direct when interacting with others. Female alcoholics are said to be more depressed, insecure and having sleep disturbances. It was observed that loneliness seemed to be higher in social drinkers and non-alcoholic (female) as compared with alcoholic groups. Overall the study aims at reporting the correlation among alcoholic, social drinker and non-alcoholic groups, determining how alcohol affects our personality in various ways. Further, social drinkers were shown to expect social enhancement from alcohol, whereas problem drinkers were more likely to expect tension reduction from alcohol.

The main objective of the study was:

- There will be a significant difference on personality traits (16PF) between the non-alcoholic and social drinker group.
- There will be significant difference on personality traits (16PF) between the non-alcoholic and alcoholic group.
- There will be significant difference on personality traits (16PF) between the social drinker and alcoholic group.

METHODS

Sample:

The main objective of the study was to determine the personality traits among alcoholics. It was compared with social drinkers and non-alcoholics. A simple factorial research design was undertaken to determine a significant difference between personality traits among the three groups. The total sample was 150. Social drinker and non-alcoholic group subjects were taken from the general population and alcoholic group subjects were taken from various rehabilitation centres.

Measures:

The tests used to conduct the study were: (i) 16 Personality factor questionnaire- this test has personality traits like cool vs warm, shy vs bold, practical vs imaginative, a total of 16 scales. The concept validity ranges from 0.53-0.94 (ii) Multi-dimensional assessment of personality- this test consists of 20 scales namely, social warmth, suspiciousness, mental health and many more. The reliability ranges from 0.61-0.74 (iii) Perceived loneliness scale- it measures the level of social interaction of subjects. It is a five point Likert scale, the reliabilities are found to be 0.84 and 0.82.

OBSERVATIONS AND ANALYSIS

Table 1, it is evident that difference exists between personality dimensions among the non-alcoholic and social drinker group.

Table 1 : Difference exists between personality dimensions among the non-alcoholic and social drinker group

Factors	Group	N	Mean	SD
A	Non-alcoholic	50	9.8200	2.3096
	Social drinker	50	8.6000	3.7471
E	Non-alcoholic	50	12.2200	3.5358
	Social drinker	50	13.9600	3.4698
F	Non-alcoholic	50	14.1800	4.1191
	Social drinker	50	16.6000	4.3189
G	Non-alcoholic	50	9.4600	2.8227
	Social drinker	50	10.6800	3.5077

The two groups differ at 0.01 level on the following trait- Factor E- Submissive vs Dominant.

The two groups differ at 0.05 level on the following traits-

Factor A-Cool vs Warm, Factor F- Sober vs Enthusiastic, Factor G-Expedient vs Conscientious. The factors on which the two groups are not significantly different are Factor B,C,H,I,L,M,N,O,Q1,Q2,Q3,Q4. Social drinkers are considered to be more cheerful, carefree and rule-bound. Traits like assertive, competitive, humble, they like to work with others and don't avoid compromises of viewpoints.

Table 2, it shows no significant difference between the non-alcoholic and alcoholic group. On factors like Factor A, B and O it was observed that alcoholics score a higher SD indicative of warm, abstract-thinking and apprehensive personality traits.

Table 2 : Difference exists between personality dimensions among the non-alcoholic and social drinker group

Factors	Group	N	Mean	SD
A	Non-alcoholic	50	9.8200	2.3096
	Alcoholic	50	8.8000	3.1816
B	Non-alcoholic	50	7.0600	2.2352
	Alcoholic	50	7.4200	1.9597
O	Non-alcoholic	50	10.0000	3.9435
	Alcoholic	50	10.6000	4.1650

Table 3, it is evident that difference exists between personality dimensions among the social drinker and alcoholic group.

Table 3 : Difference exists between personality dimensions among the social drinker and alcoholic group

Factors	Group	N	Mean	SD
E	Social drinker	50	13.9600	3.4698
	Alcoholic	50	11.8800	3.2239
F	Social drinker	50	16.6000	4.3189
	Alcoholic	50	14.8000	4.6948
Q2	Social drinker	50	7.9800	2.8247
	Alcoholic	50	9.3600	2.8697

The two groups differ at 0.01 level on the following trait- Factor E- Submissive vs Dominant.

Factor Q2-Group-oriented vs Self-sufficient.

On Factor F- Sober vs Enthusiastic it is reported that alcoholics as spontaneous and have an expressive personality. The factors on which the two groups are not significantly different are Factor A,B,C,G,H,I,L,M,N,O,Q1,Q3,Q4. Alcoholics are considered to be more assertive, aggressive and bossy. Traits like resourceful, humble, temperamentally independent and listen to others.

It has been reported through these findings that social drinkers have traits like cool, dominant, enthusiastic and conscientious as compared with non-alcoholics. Non-alcoholic individuals are less impulsive as reported by Ketzenberger and Forrest (2000). On Factor A non-alcoholics have a higher mean indicative of a good-natured, easy going and attentive to people personality. Whereas on Factor E social drinkers score a higher mean reporting there assertive an independent mind. Hoffman *et al.* (1974) and Loper *et al.* (1973) compared the MMPI score of college students who later became alcoholics with those who did not. It was found that social drinkers have common traits like anti-social impulsiveness, higher sociopathy and defiance of authority.

According to this study no significant difference was observed in the sixteen personality factors between alcoholics and non-alcoholics. Researchers also found that no significant difference occurs between the children of alcoholics and children of non-alcoholics in state anxiety, mood (Clair and Genest, 1978, 1992), personality traits of alienation, defensiveness (Havey and Dodd, 1993), or depression (Reich *et al.*, 1993). On Factor A alcoholics score slightly lower than non-alcoholics indicating avoiding compromises of viewpoints, inattentive, like things rather than people. Factor O explains that alcoholics have an unruffled and an unshakeable nerve personality. It further goes to explaining that though alcoholics and non-alcoholics do not have significant but, as we have seen alcoholics are seen to be more assertive, venturesome, moody, depressed and tense as said by Mathew and BabyJ. (1998). Research throws light on facts which explain that alcoholics score slightly higher on alexithymia traits than non-alcoholics. Alexithymia refers to lack of expression of emotion. Chaudhary *et al.* (2006) conclude that alcoholics are high on neuroticism, anxiety, stressful life events as compared to non-alcoholics.

In the study it was also observed that social drinkers scored almost equal on all the sixteen personality traits as compared with alcoholics. Factor E denotes Submissive vs Dominant. Social drinkers are seen to be more independent-minded, assertive and self-assured. Replogue *et al* reported : An alcoholic may become totally abstinent while at the same time manifesting poor social functioning or a psychotic condition. In his study it was determined the profiles of

alcoholics and social drinkers are significantly different. Sobell and Sobell demonstrated that some individual alcoholics have resumed various types of non-problematic moderate drinking patterns. On Factor F Sober vs Enthusiastic social drinkers indicative of having cheerful, active, talkative, carefree personalities. On Factor Q2 alcoholics score higher which refers to Group-Oriented vs Self-Sufficient. This further explains that alcoholics are temperamentally independent and take action on their own. Tiebout (1942) characterized alcoholics as egocentric, rebellious against restrictions, preoccupied with a search for pleasure, feeling entitled, feelings of omnipotence, inability to accept frustration, displaying a faulty logic and being markedly irresponsible and immature.

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