

ATTITUDES OF REGULAR ALCOHOL DRINKING ADOLESCENTS TO INTERSUBJECTIVE RELATIONS AND EVERYDAY LIFE

Georgi M. Sarov

*Department of Pathophysiology,
Medical Faculty, Trakia University,
Stara Zagora, Bulgaria*

Summary

It is well known that some psychological features of adolescents as extraversion, risk-taking and impulsivity positively associate with substance abuse. The aim of the study was a description of psychological features of adolescents associated with regular alcohol drinking. We conducted a survey using an original questionnaire, classifying alcohol drinking as regular, social (incidental) and abstinence. The adolescents were asked to evaluate their own patterns of drinking. Of the 903 investigated students (aged 15-19), 169 identified themselves as regular alcohol drinkers (RDA), and 279 – as abstainers (NDA). These two groups were compared statistically in terms of a wide range of self-described psychological features. It was found that RDA were more likely to strive for dominant positioning in intersubjective relations (OR 1.8, 95%CI 1.22-2.65), more likely to avoid academic obligations (OR 1.61, 95%CI 1.08-2.39), and more likely to postpone their duties in everyday life (OR 1.81, 95%CI 1.23-2.67). It seems that regular drinking positively associates with egocentric personality traits and help is needed in personality development that could have a positive secondary effect on alcohol prevention.

Key words: significant others, attitudes, alcohol,

Introduction

Adolescence is a developmental period that interferes with forming an identity. It is also characterized by onset and escalation of alcohol use [1]. The links between psyche, personality and drinking are important in searching determinants of risky behavior, but this task is complicated mainly because of fundamental reasons.

Personality is a questionable matter in psychology and basic psychological theories are not primarily designed to test alcohol use. According to structural model introduced by Freud [2, 3] the psyche is centered upon sexuality and personality is primarily driven by ego (instinctivism). Lots of data confirm the link between alcohol use and consequent sexual risk behaviors [4-7], but less attention is paid to sexual needs as a motive for drinking, perhaps because instinctivism itself cannot explain alcohol use, as the need of alcohol is not an

Corresponding author:

Georgi M. Sarov
Medical Faculty
Trakia University
11, Armeiska Str
Stara Zagora, 6003
Bulgaria
e-mail: sarov@yahoo.com

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inborn drive.

According to dispositional strategy, personality is an individual combination of psychological traits that predispose specific way of reaction to environmental stimuli [8, 9]. Investigations on alcohol use have indeed confirmed that introversion associates with delayed onset of beer/wine use in adolescence [10] and impulsivity (a tendency to react rapidly or in unplanned ways to stimuli without proper regard for negative consequences or inherent risks [11]) are often associated with drinking [12-16] and alcohol use disorders (AUDs) [17-20].

According to phenomenology the central category of personality is self-concept [21], and human behavior is motivated by a hierarchy of human motivations [22] and self-categorization [23]. Self-esteem and self-control were also found to associate positively with alcohol use [24].

Behaviorism (theory of social learning and social control) see drinking as a behavioral model learned in social interactions, and many researches have proved that significant others are really able to introduce drinking behavior in adolescence [25,26].

Research on drinking is theoretically supported by many authors but still no uniform theory about risky behavior exists. In this study we explored a vision about a three-dimensional psyche that consists of organism (parallel to Freudian ego), individual (parallel to id) and personality (parallel to super-ego). *Organism* is biologic by nature, sensitive as a method of awareness and impulsive as a method of action, driven by needs – expectation of something lacking (I want). The role of organism in behavior is theoretically closest to dispositional strategy and instinctivism. *Individuality* is mainly a matter of interaction, driven by perceptions, resulting from interaction with the objective and social world (I consider). Individual actions are mainly conditional and theoretically closest to behaviorism. *Personality* is mainly about conscious matters driven by transcendental motives about self-positioning in the objective world (I must). This notion is theoretically closest to phenomenology. Thus, in the three-dimensional model we have a psychoanalytical structure that incorporates dispositional, behavioral and phenomenological strategies in a theoretical whole.

The three dimensions exist in every person but in different combinations and subordinations. One dimension dominates in every person, so

three kinds of personality could be distinguished: intuitive (ego-centered), adaptive (successive and sociable, dialogically centered), and transcendental (conscious, idea-centered). The aim of this article was to find how these personality types fit to regular drinking and abstaining in adolescence.

Patients and Methods

Conception

In a three-dimensional world we consider three modes of consciousness and personality – egocentric, conformist and idealist.

The *ego* is a fundamental conception that places a person in the central position, with all the rest in the world - around and dependent on the ego. *Egocentrics* are driven mainly by their own needs, strive for dominance in social interactions and possession of material things, ignoring transcendental motives like truth, correctness and goodness when they contradict with the interest of the ego.

Conformists favor dialectic matter. In conformist thinking, ego satisfaction is understood as dependent on objective and subjective interactions and an individual is expected to comply with others in order to receive from them, or should consider the nature of things in order to succeed. Conformism easily makes compromises with the ego and transcendence in searching the possible rather than needed or ideal achievements.

Idealists favor transcendence and prefer thinking transcendently. They easily ignore needs and negotiations when determining what is true, correct and good, and follow these three dogmas as main motivators of their behavior.

As risky behavior is attractive for sensitivity and is transcendently nonsense, we suppose that regular drinking would associate with egoistic traits while abstaining with idealistic traits.

Measurements

We developed a self-reported questionnaire for self-evaluation by adjective techniques and techniques of preferred statements. Three main attitudes were studied: egocentric, dialectic and transcendental.

Ego drive was indicated by statements and adjectives confirming the leading role of the ego in the form of hedonism (I like pleasant experiences, delicious food and the pleasures of

life) and impulsivity (I am an impulsive and emotional person; I easily change my desires; I easily change my mood; I am disorganized, scattered, unmotivated).

Conformism (dialectic drive) was indicated as conventionality (I am a religious, sincere believer; I am a conventional, predictable, uniform person) and sociability (extraversion/introversion) (I cannot bear to be alone, I like parties and merriment; I am a reclusive, strange person, I prefer to be alone).

Idealism was indicated as rationality (I am smart, clever, an erudite; I am calm, reasonable, thoughtful; I persevere in the pursuit of goals; I insist on my goals; I abide by my goals), commitment (ambitious, hardworking, exhausted; When I achieve one goal, I switch to another), academic detachment (School is so annoying; School does not satisfy my need for knowledge and I read additionally; School does not allow me to implement my abilities), academic commitment (High scores at school are (not) necessary for my self-esteem), academic investments (It takes me a long time to prepare for classes; Sometimes I do not go to class in order to avoid testing; I pay more attention to extracurricular activities and sports).

Additionally, several statements and adjectives were introduced to reveal contradictions between three concepts: transcendental rejection (One of my rules is: Pleasure first, then necessity); authoritative attitudes (I prefer to lead; I prefer to obey; I prefer to be autonomous and independent); social control-providing adjectives (I am handsome, charming, sexy; I am glamorous; I am pleasant, friendly, cheerful; I am original and intriguing; I am convincing); moral adjectives (I do not tolerate refusal or objections, being defeated or underestimated; I am selfish, stubborn, unyielding; I am unjust, unfair, grumpy; I am a person of principles, fair; I am good, caring, generous).

In order to reveal which concept is most successful, some adjectives and statements about effectiveness of behavior were introduced: self-efficacy (I am a successful, prosperous person; I am uncertain about my abilities); self-esteem (I am a vital, energetic, motivated person; I am a nervous, irritable, aggressive person; I am a depressed or desperate person); academic satisfaction (My school performance is not good enough for me; My school performance is quite enough for me). The need for conceptual change

(identity crisis) was indicated by four statements about the need of self-actualization (I want to be different and interesting; I want to improve myself; I want to be exactly who I am; I want to be different, but I do not know exactly who I want to be).

Study design

All students from 9th to 12th grade (aged 15-19) in three secondary schools of Stara Zagora, Bulgaria were invited to participate in a survey. The study protocol was approved by the Ethics Committee for Clinical Research of the Medical Faculty, Trakia University, Stara Zagora, Bulgaria and the Regional Inspectorate of the Ministry of Education of Bulgaria. To increase the response rate, the survey was conducted in class hours in cooperation with the school authorities. Students were placed in a large room, situated at sufficient distance from each other to provide independent and anonymous answers to the questions. To provide maximum reliability of the data, the responses were collected in a sealed urn and each student was free to refuse to participate.

Participants

A total of 1077 students were invited to participate in this study. Of these, 1051 agreed to participate and 903 filled in the questionnaire correctly (response rate: 83.8%). According to their answers, 169 students (18.72%) were identified as regular alcohol drinkers (RDA) and 279 (30.9%) – as abstainers (NDA).

Data analysis

We applied descriptive statistics, Chi-square test and logistic regression for statistical comparison between RDA and NDA groups. The data were calculated by means of statistic software product SPSS.

Results

The significant differences between RDA and NDA are shown in Table 1. RDAs were more likely to describe themselves as impulsive persons (disorganized, scattered, unmotivated – OR=2.05, nervous, irritable, aggressive - OR=2.51) and extroverts (cannot bear to be alone – OR=1.99) but less likely to be transcendently oriented persons (they were less likely to describe themselves as persons of principle (OR=0.57) and sacrificing time to prepare for school (OR=0.40) but more likely to neglect academic

Table 1. Significant differences in RDA/NDA comparison

	RDA (n=169) % (SE)	NDA (n=279) % (SE)	p<	OR	95%CI
<i>Impulsiveness</i>					
I am a disorganized, scattered, unmotivated	26.63±3.40	15.05±2.14	0.010	2.05	1.28-3.29
I am a nervous, irritable, aggressive person	33.14±3.62	16.49±2.22	0.001	2.51	1.60-3.94
<i>Sociability (extroversion)</i>					
I cannot bear to be alone. I like parties and merriment.	68.64±3.57	52.33±2.99	0.001	1.99	1.34-2.98
<i>Transcendentalism</i>					
I am a principled, fair person	30.18±3.53	43.01±2.96	0.010	0.57	0.38-0.86
<i>Academic commitment</i>					
High scores at school are not necessary for my self-esteem	20.12±3.08	12.19±1.96	0.050	1.81	1.08-3.05
<i>Academic attitudes</i>					
School is so annoying	35.50±3.68	22.22±2.49	0.010	1.93	1.26-2.94
I pay more attention to extracurricular activities and sports	34.32±3.65	17.56±2.28	0.001	2.45	1.58-3.82
<i>Academic investments</i>					
It takes me a long time to prepare for classes	17.16±2.90	34.05±2.84	0.001	0.40	0.25-0.64
Sometimes I do not go to class in order to avoid testing	42.60±3.80	31.54±2.78	0.050	1.61	1.08-2.39
<i>Controversies</i>					
<i>Authoritative attitudes</i>					
I prefer to lead	48.52±3.84	34.41±2.84	0.010	1.80	1.22-2.65
I prefer to obey	7.69±2.05	16.85±2.24	0.010	0.41	0.22-0.79
<i>Control-providing adjectives</i>					
I am an original and intriguing person	43.20±3.81	30.82±2.76	0.010	1.71	1.15-2.54
I am a convincing person	49.11±3.85	39.07±2.92	0.050	1.51	1.02-2.21
<i>Impulsivity vs. transcendentalism</i>					
One of my rules is: „Pleasure first, necessity next”	51.48±3.84	36.92±2.89	0.010	1.81	1.23-2.67
<i>Self-actualization</i>					
I want to be a different and interesting person	65.68±3.65	53.76±2.98	0.050	1.65	1.11-2.44
I want to be exactly who I am	24.85±3.32	37.99±2.91	0.010	0.54	0.35-0.83

excellence (OR=1.81), to feel unmotivated by academic experience (OR=1.93) and to avoid testing (OR=1.61).

The data about controversies in the three basic personal dimensions revealed that RDAs were more likely to have expectations for leading roles (OR=1.8) and self-perception of being leading persons, based on originality (OR=1.71) and ability to convince others (OR=1.51). RDAs were also more likely to neglect obligations in favor of pleasure (OR=1.81), i.e. to ignore

transcendence in favor of their ego. In addition, RDAs were less likely to perceive themselves as complete persons (OR=0.54), and more ready for self-improvement in order to become more interesting (i.e. influencing) people (OR=1.65).

Discussion

As pointed in the literature, we replicated that alcohol use associated with extroversion and

impulsivity [12-15, 27] but we attribute these findings to elevated significance of personal ego drives without sufficient limitations of the conscious (dialectic and transcendental) considerations. It has been well documented that initiation of alcohol use associates with lower values of academic achievement, lower expectations of academic achievement, lower school motivation, less orientation to hard work, lower levels of bonding to school. Replicated these findings, but consider them as signs of transcendental neglect. Despite these empirical confirmations, we think that descriptive and behavioral explanations of the facts are not good enough and the three-dimensional view on personality is more convincing than personal traits and behavior modeling. We found evidence that RDA were more likely to pretend for social leadership, to perceive themselves as leading persons and to need self-improvement, that will increase the ability to lead others. Therefore, their extraversion is not merely a sociability trait. Rather, it is part of the need for dominance. In addition to the academic indicators, we found a disposition for postponing obligations in favor of pleasure. To sum up, these findings lead us to the conclusion that RDAs were more likely to deny transcendence.

Altogether, these considerations suppose that regular alcohol consumption in adolescence associates with egocentric design of personality, according to the three-dimensional model. The focus of RDA attention seems to be social dominance, but this drive is uncoupled with behavior that has the potential to increase social value of a personality. This contradiction supposes that RDA will be more likely to feel unsatisfied by real life and thus - predisposed to reactive depression and low self-confidence. It is known that alcohol suppresses the activity of the punishment center, thus alleviating depressive experiences [33], and a positive association between alcohol use and depression in adolescence exists [16]. Therefore we hypothesize that an egocentric person is more prone to alcohol use because of chronic reactive depression (psycho-emotional stress), caused by the inevitable findings that life does not confirm personal expectations for dominance.

As this is the first application of the three-dimensional model of personality (3DMP) as regards alcohol consumption, it has some limitations. First, the three-dimensional model is

a new insight in personality theory that needs more profound theoretical explanation. This paper does not reveal the whole content of the theory, although it confirms it empirically. Second, the empirical indicators of the three dimensions of personality are situation-specific and those used here are specific for adolescence against the background of modern Bulgarian society. Other ages and societies will need other indicators and may show other results. So the data and conclusions made here should not be spread uncritically to a general understanding about alcohol consumption.

Conclusions

The present paper is the first empirical confirmation of the validity of 3DMP in explaining alcohol consumption in adolescence. 3DMP integrates all main psychological strategies in one conception and avoids their mutual controversies. On the other hand, this paper brings forth a variety of empirical data into sensible understanding, thus overcoming eclectic explanations given by dispositional and behavioral paradigms on the nature of alcohol consumption in adolescence. Egocentric identity may be the main problem in adolescent identification process and psychological help in overcoming egocentricity might probably decrease alcohol consumption.

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