



Social dimension of alcohol problem among women

Description and institutional reactions in an urban environment

Summary

The experiences of women with alcohol problems presented in this monograph constitute an interesting and important subject from the scientific point of view.

It is estimated that between 10 and 20% of Poland's population are affected by excessive alcohol consumption (of whom between 3 and 5% are individuals who can be described as addicted to alcohol). This growing tendency includes alcohol use among women. Over the last few years, the pattern of alcohol use and misuse among women has changed, with a marked increase in the number of women drinking alcohol at hazardous or dangerous levels and women exhibiting complete addiction to alcohol.

Although alcohol addiction in women does not constitute a separate type, its origins and development do differ from those in men, as does the way women deal with it. The specific nature of female alcohol problems justifies the need (or rather the absolute necessity) for in-depth studies on its specific nature, causal factors, course and attempts made by women to free themselves from alcohol problems.

The analysis of the problem here combines individual and societal perspectives, and is an approach typical for the social sciences. Individual experiences are rooted in the social dimensions of alcohol problems, just as these determine the individual fate of those involved, including women.

This article is primarily based in social pedagogy, although it does draw on work from different fields of sciences in which explanations and interpretations of this subject are undertaken. Such a point of view focuses the researcher's attention on the environment, which, in line with the principles of social pedagogy, exerts a powerful influence on life situations, experiences, values and aims of individuals affected by alcohol problems.

Alcohol problems are placed in the theoretical context of social problems. Chapter 1 presents and discusses the manifestation and consequences of alcohol problems in their social dimension, with additional description from the individual perspective.

Since the thematic axis is alcohol problems among women, the next chapter deals with the specific nature of women's use, misuse and addiction to alcohol (distinguishing their biological, psychological and socio-cultural aspects), as well as the consequences of these

problems, which imply the need for social reaction. Action taken by the state in this field are also discussed, including acts of law and institutional measures related to alcohol problems (not only among women).

The next part of the publication presents the methodological basis of the author's original research. This study sought to diagnose and verify, and its research goal was to produce a socio-pedagogical description of selected aspects of alcohol problems affecting women in Poznań and its surrounding areas. It also sought to describe attempts made by this city's institutions to solve these problems. This was made possible through use of the environmental monograph method to describe alcohol problems among women in a large urban area (Poznań), which emerged during the research.

In line with the social and pedagogical principles of its conception, the factual part of the monograph comprises a description of Poznań as a large city in which the alcohol problems of women exist, and also attempts to tackle these problems. The results of this analysis are presented in Chapter 4.

At the same time, there is a diagnosis of the situation of alcohol-addicted women who underwent and completed therapy, which seeks to answer in particular the question of whether a selected category of women experienced alcohol problems due to the environmental context at different stages (from alcohol initiation, through gradual dependence and prolonged addiction, to attempts at abstaining and therapy). The results of exploring this research area are presented in Chapter 5.

The last part of this article describes the forms of action taken to deal with women's alcohol problems, and more precisely to support them in the process of overcoming their addiction. It reveals aspects of Polish reality in this regard and chances of their optimisation.

The social and pedagogical perspective adopted in this discussion leads us to conclude that a rational and effective response to alcohol problems should take place in the local community. It is worth emphasising the directive to establish networks of entities, coalitions and cooperation to help those in support professions solve alcohol problems and their consequences.

Translated by Rob Pagett