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# Summary

## Adulthood of Persons Brought Up in Alcoholic Families Social Support Expected and Received

The issue of how adult children of alcoholics function has been broadly discussed in the professional literature in this field with reference to the challenges these persons face, but also more recently and more frequently with regard to their positive adjustment, in other words, their resilience, despite the unfavourable conditions of the environment in which they were brought up. Many researchers focus their analysis on the traumatic experiences of those brought up in an alcoholic family system and the impact these have on the way that the individual functions in later periods of their development. This monograph, i.e. *Adulthood of Persons Brought up in Alcoholic Families* is based on a Phd dissertation research project *Biographies of Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACA): Social Support Expected and Received*, which was tutored by Prof. Magdalena Piorunek and an assistant tutor, Agnieszka Skowrońska-Pućka, PhD. It was written at the Social Counselling Unit, Faculty of Educational Studies, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. The monograph deals with adult children of alcoholics, and issues related to the potential challenges they face, their resources and their need for social support.

To be able to understand better the extent to which growing up in an alcoholic family can have an impact on the way an individual functions in later life, it is important to first focus on what alcoholism is and the mechanisms steering an alcoholic. Therefore, in this monograph, I present an overview of the diagnostic criteria for alcohol addiction in the ICD-10 and DSM-5 classifications, highlighting the differences between them, especially in the case of the latter classification, where the term 'addicted' is not used at all. I describe the characteristics of the way an alcoholic functions, drawing from the mechanisms of addiction identified by Jerzy Mellibruda, which deal with both the reasons for intoxication and also the reasons for the difficulty in curbing the addiction.

A person addicted to alcohol functions in several social networks, of which the family is the most important, and therefore also the relationship with the partner who is referred to in professional literature as co-dependent. This is why the subsequent chapters of this book discuss the relevant terminology related to the co-dependent person, with a particular focus on the various psychological approaches that aim at explaining the root of the problem. It is then followed by an explanation of the main notions, such as the family

system, and especially the alcoholic family system, based on Peter Steinglass' theory. In his approach, Steinglass provides a detailed analysis of the mechanisms operating in a dysfunctional family system and identifies the stages of its development.

In the life-cycle of each family, and especially one that wrestles with the problem of alcohol addiction in one of its members, there are several crises whose constructive solution makes it possible to move on to the next stage of development. The subsequent chapters discuss the terminological approaches to the notion of crisis and stress in the family and the social support for the family and each of its members, i.e. the alcoholic and the co-dependent person.

The last theoretical chapter presents an overview of the state of the art in research on the adult children of alcoholics and the variety of definitions that explain the notion in question, i.e. ACA. My reflections focus on the issue of the difficulties that an individual faces in intimate relations and the concept of resilience, whose main assumptions are more and more frequently discussed in the literature with reference to individuals who function in a dysfunctional family system. Bearing in mind that persons brought up in alcoholic families very often require social support, the last theoretical chapter is devoted to the possible forms of support for such people, both for individuals and groups.

In the methodology chapter, I point to the choice of qualitative strategy for my research. I have applied the biographical method, because "the common feature of all research within the biographical approach, also referred to as biographical research, is their object of analysis, i.e. the life of a particular individual in the form of a narrative. It can be therefore concluded that biographical research is a scholarly analysis of people's life stories or the process of creating such a story" (Bednarz-Łuczewska, Łuczewski, 2012: 91). It is also a kind of technique, i.e. the narrative interview. I also determine the problem areas in my own research together with its aim and a description of the research sample.

The final chapter, *Adulthood of Persons with an Alcoholic Family Background: Research Findings*, discusses the results of my own piece of research with a focus on the way the people from the group selected for the analysis cope. My respondents referred to their resources, but also the challenges they face, being aware of the potential reasons for such difficulties. They highlight the visible problems in their intimate relations, either those they are still struggling with or those they have managed to find a solution to. Their current relationships with the parents were of particular interest to me, as this issue has received little attention in the literature (the specialist focus mainly on the period of childhood and adolescence of persons from alcoholic families). I describe the extent to which my respondents copy the mechanisms from their family home in their present adulthood and the way they evaluate their relationship with the addicted parent and the non-addicted one. I point to an important field of analysis related to the support that adult children of alcoholics expect to receive and which they actually receive, which helps to identify the main difficulties these people still face, what they would like to work on, and the kind of support networks (institutional and non-institutional) playing the most important role in their life. My respondents evaluate the support they receive and point to those areas where it was not efficient enough, and they also identify the factors that would have to come in place for the support to be more efficient. The latter part of the analysis seems to be particularly useful for the specialist practitioners who provide the support.

*Translated by Rob Pagett*