

## The Role of Depression in Alcoholics and In People Who Are Occasional Drinkers

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### ABSTRACT

The study was conducted to find out the role of Depression in Alcoholics and in people who are Occasional Drinkers. The sample population chosen for this study was, 100 adults aged 20-50 years (50 for each group). The tools of assessment used was Beck Depression Inventory- II (BDI) (Aaron T. Beck, Robert A. Steer, Gregory K. Brown, 1996). The statistical tool used for the study was t-test. The statistical analysis was carried out using MS-Excel operation. It was found that alcoholics scored higher on the variable of Depression as compared to Occasional Drinkers.

**Keywords:** *Depression, Alcoholics*

Alcoholism, also known as alcohol use disorder (AUD), is a broad term applied for any drinking of alcohol that results in problems. (DSM-5, 2013) According to the American Medical Association, “alcoholism is an illness characterized by significant impairment that is directly associated with persistent and excessive use of alcohol. Impairment may involve physiological, psychological or social dysfunction.” Psychologically speaking, alcoholism has less to do with “how much” someone is drinking, and more to do with what happens when they drink. In a medical context, alcoholism is said to exist when two or more of the following conditions is present: a person drinks large amounts over a long time period, has difficulty cutting down, acquiring and drinking alcohol takes up a great deal of time, alcohol is strongly desired, usage results in not fulfilling responsibilities, in social problems, in health problems. Withdrawal occurs when stopping, and alcohol tolerance increases over a period of time with use. Generally, women are more sensitive to alcohol's harmful physical and mental effects than men. Both environmental factors and genetics are associated with alcoholism with about half the risk attributed to each. Long-term misuse of alcohol can cause a wide range of mental health problems. (NIAAA, 2007).

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Received: February 8, 2018; Revision Received: March 18, 2018; Accepted: March 25, 2018

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Occasional drinking refers to casual drinking in a social setting without an intent to get drunk. Good news is often celebrated by a group of people having a few drinks. The frequency of drinking is very low as compared to those of alcoholics. (Kloner & Rezkalla, 2007). They are relatively problem free and do not face the same health issues as the alcoholics. People tend to feel more relaxed after a drink or two and a bit less self-conscious. The effects of alcohol make it easier for people to shake off responsibilities a few hours. Researchers have found that drinking alcohol regularly, in small amounts, reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease—the most common cause of death in the industrialized world. Moderate alcohol intake also helps reduce the risk of some other disorders, including type 2 diabetes (Koppes L.L. et al., 2005) (Solomon C.G., et al., 2000), gallstones and peripheral artery disease— perhaps even dementia. Alcohol reduces blood clotting—a transient effect that persists for about a day. When consumed regularly, alcohol also raises levels of HDL (“good”) cholesterol over the long term; HDL removes cholesterol from arterial walls and helps prevent atherosclerosis and causing heart diseases.(Muntwyler J et al., 1998).

Depression is a state of low mood and aversion to activity that can affect a person's thoughts, behavior, feelings and sense of well-being. People with a depressed mood can feel sad, anxious, empty, hopeless, helpless, worthless, guilty, irritable, angry, ashamed or restless. (DSM-5, 2013). They may lose interest in activities that were once pleasurable, experience loss of appetite or overeating, have problems concentrating, remembering details or making decisions, experience relationship difficulties and may contemplate, attempt or commit suicide. (Beck, A. T. 1967). Insomnia, excessive sleeping, fatigue, aches, pains, digestive problems or reduced energy may also be present. (Beck, A. T. 1967) (Beck, A. T., Epstein, N., & Harrison, R. 1983). Depressed mood is a feature of some psychiatric syndromes such as major depressive disorder, but it may also be a normal reaction, as long as it does not persist long term, to life events such as bereavement, a symptom of some bodily ailments or a side effect of some drugs and medical treatments. (Bibring, E. 1953). A DSM diagnosis distinguishes an episode of depression (State) from the habitual depressive symptoms (Trait) which someone can experience as a part of personality. (DSM-5, 2013).

Depression are known to have some effect in the process of developing an addiction. Recent times have seen a rapid growth of interest in the study of the relationship between alcohol consumption and depression. However, the conclusions derived about the causality is debatable and often mixed.

Bahorik A.L., Amy Leibowitz A., Weisner C., Satre D. (2016) conducted a study on, “The role of hazardous drinking reductions in predicting depression and anxiety symptom improvement among psychiatry patients: A longitudinal study”. The study showed that continued hazardous drinking led to slower anxiety and depressive symptom improvement; reductions in hazardous drinking led to faster anxiety and depressive symptom improvement. Pedrelli P., Borsari B., (2016), conducted a study on, “Gender Differences in the Relationships among Major Depressive Disorder, Heavy Alcohol Use, and Mental Health Treatment Engagement among College Students”. The presence of an association between

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MDD and heavy alcohol use suggests the need for systematic screenings of both conditions. Low rates of treatment engagement in college students with MDD and heavy alcohol use calls for the development of strategies to engage this high-risk group in treatment. Bell S., Britton A. and colleagues (2014) conducted a research on, “Drinking Pattern, Abstention and Problem Drinking as Risk Factors for Depressive Symptoms: Evidence from Three Urban Eastern European Populations”. The results of the research showed that, Problem drinking was consistently associated with approximately a 2-fold increase in odds of depressive symptoms across all countries and in both sexes. Brière F. N., Rohde P., Seeley J., Klein D., Lewinsohn P. (2014) carried out a study on, “Comorbidity between major depression and alcohol use disorder from adolescence to adulthood”. The study depicted that the Lifetime rates of comorbid MDD along with AUD were considerably higher than in cross-sectional studies.

The purpose of the study was to investigate the role of Depression in people who are Alcoholics and in people who are Occasional Drinkers. There has been a growing interest in the study of the shape of the relationship between alcohol consumption and psychological well-being in recent years. Overall, evidence is however still mixed and debated. The present study focuses on the difference between alcoholics and occasional drinkers in terms of the level of depression.

### ***It was proposed that:***

Depression is higher in alcoholics as compared to occasional drinkers.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### ***Participants***

A convenience sample of 100 (50 alcoholics and 50 occasional drinkers) participants was selected for the study. Participants were both males and females. The age range of the participants was between 20 to 50 years. All participants had at least five years of formal education.

### ***Sample inclusion criterion***

Only diagnosed alcoholics, who have not undergone any therapy or who aren't on any medication at present were included in the pathological group. Occasional drinkers included were those people who consume alcohol at least once a month to a maximum of 5 times.

### ***Sample exclusion criterion***

Participants with co-morbidity of depression, schizophrenia or any other disorder or who are under any medications were excluded. A brief interview was conducted with probing questions regarding any other psychiatric illnesses, visits to a psychiatry set-up as inpatients or outpatients. All the participants who reported negatively for these questions were selected for the study.

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### Measures

#### 1. Beck Depression Inventory (BDI-II)

The Beck Depression Inventory (BDI-II), created by Aaron T. Beck, is a 21-question multiple-choice self-report inventory, one of the most widely used psychometric tests for measuring the severity of depression. The BDI test includes a 21 item self-report using a four-point scale which ranges from 0 (symptom not present) to 3 (symptom very intense).

The test takes approximately 5 to 10 minutes to complete. The BDI test is widely known and has been tested for content, concurrent, and construct validity. The BDI has also showed high construct validity with the medical symptoms it measures. Beck's study reported a coefficient alpha rating of .92 for outpatients and .93 for college student samples. The BDI-II positively correlated with the Hamilton Depression Rating Scale,  $r = 0.71$ , had a one-week test-retest reliability of  $r = 0.93$  and an internal consistency  $\alpha = 0.91$ .

### Procedure

The participants were contacted individually. Rapport was established with them. After the brief interview to rule out the co-morbidity, the participants who met the inclusion criterion were requested to participate in the study. The purpose of the study was explained to them and written informed consent was taken from each participant. The participants were assured of confidentiality of data. They also had the freedom to leave the study if they desired to do so. The questionnaire was then administered explaining the instructions for answering them. Any queries or doubts of the respondents were answered by the researchers. Although there was no time limit, the respondents were requested to respond with the first response that comes to their mind. It took approximately 10 to 15 minutes for each respondent to fill all the measures. After making sure that no statement was left unanswered, the participants were debriefed and thanked for their participation in the study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this study it was proposed that, Depression is higher in alcoholics as compared to occasional drinkers.

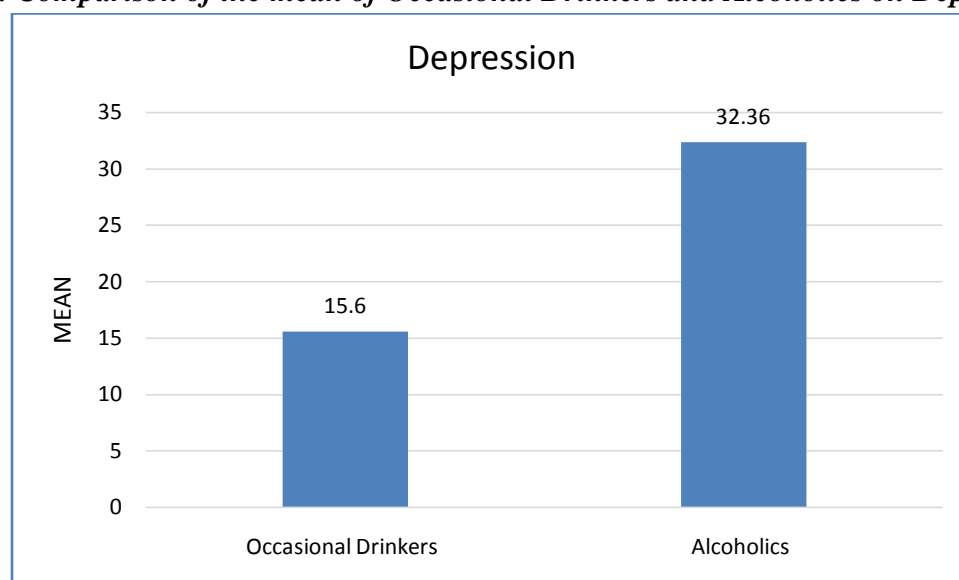
*Table 1: Mean and SD of Depression of the occasional drinker group and alcoholic group*

Depression	Occasional Drinkers	Alcoholics
Mean	15.6	32.36
Standard Deviation	13.1	11.54

*t- 6.713, df-98, sig.0.05*

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**Graph 1: Comparison of the mean of Occasional Drinkers and Alcoholics on Depression.**



The results show that the mean scores of the occasional drinkers on Depression scale was 15.6 (13.1) as compared to alcoholics 32.36 (11.54). Therefore occasional drinkers have lower depression than the alcoholics. This is in line with proposed hypothesis.

A study was conducted by Bahorik A.L., and his colleagues (2016) to identify the role of hazardous drinking reductions in predicting depression. This study was done on alcoholics with comorbid depression. The study showed that continued hazardous drinking led to slower depressive symptom improvement; reductions in hazardous drinking led to faster depressive symptom improvement, which in turn meant that there was a higher rate of depression amongst people with hazardous drinking which supports our present hypothesis. A study carried out Pedrelli P. and Borsari B., (2016), suggested the presence of an association between Major Depressive Disorder and heavy alcohol use. This study was carried out on relatively asymptomatic college students. Caetano R., Vaeth P., Mills B. and Canino G. (2016) conducted a research on, "Employment Status, Depression, Drinking, and Alcohol Use Disorder in Puerto Rico". This was a study conducted on office workers which depicted that there was a higher rate of Depression (up to 5 times) amongst those employees who had Alcohol Use Disorder, also the employment status played a role in the alcohol use. The evidence provided by this study supports our findings for the hypothesis. A clinical study published by Bell S., Britton A. and colleagues, (2014) on Drinking Pattern, Abstinence and Problem Drinking as Risk Factors for Depressive Symptoms was based on evidence from three Urban Eastern European Populations. The results of the research showed that, Problem drinking was consistently associated with approximately a 2-fold increase in odds of depressive symptoms across all countries and in both sexes which provides support for the hypothesis. Another study undertaken by Monahan K., Oesterle S., Rhew I. and Hawkins D. (2014) indicate that risk and protective factors for alcohol use are associated with depressive symptoms, both concurrently and longitudinally which is in support of the hypothesis. Another evidence in support of the present hypothesis was provided by a study carried out by Brière F. N., Rohde P., Seeley J., Klein D., Lewinsohn P. (2014) on Comorbidity between

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major depression and alcohol use disorder from adolescence to adulthood. This study was carried out on non-clinical population, which depicted that the lifetime rates of comorbid MDD along with AUD were considerably higher than in cross-sectional studies which provides an evidence for the present hypothesis. Saraceno L., Heron J., Munafò M. and Craddock N., (2012) conducted a study on, the relationship between childhood depressive symptoms and problem alcohol use in early adolescence. This was a large longitudinal population-based study. This study indicated that childhood depressive symptoms were associated with increased risk of problematic alcohol use in early adolescence especially in girls. The findings provide evidence for the hypothesis.

Therefore, it can be observed that the association of depression with alcoholism followed a similar trend with people diagnosed with alcohol dependence and with people who do not have alcoholism, across both genders, and across all age groups. The studies mentioned above substantiate and provide support for the findings obtained in the present study to validate the proposed hypothesis.

### ***Significance of the Study***

The findings of this study will redound to the benefit of the society considering that degree of Depression present in an individual plays an important role in combatting addictions. Literature indicates that persons that use alcohol to relieve depressive symptoms may require treatment of depression to achieve full remission after alcohol use disorder treatment. Secondly, it is possible that continued use of alcohol by these participants may have sustained the depression. Research indicates that the more a person drinks the more they are likely to develop major depression, and presence of either AUD or major depression is associated with a double risk. The greater demand for psychologists to come up with new and effective therapeutic techniques justifies the need of incorporating the component of depression into the formulation of novel approaches towards rehabilitation of the individuals suffering from chronic addictions such as alcoholism. In the present study, it was seen that occasional drinkers have a lower score profile in terms of Depression as compared to Alcoholics. The working assumption is that people who do not consume alcohol at all, tend to have the most superior profiles (that is lower depression), however, even if complete abstinence from alcohol is not achievable, it was observed that the parameters were much better for occasional drinkers as compared to alcoholics. It is also reported that alcoholics who enter complete abstinence programs, most often than not, have relapses as they are unable to keep up with the strict rules of complete abstinence. Therefore, programs like Moderation Management (MM), an alternative to Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), a form of support group for people who would like to reduce their alcohol consumption, are rising popularity and success rate. Incorporating methods which help the individual deal with their mood symptoms along with combatting addiction could lead to a superior outcome. The findings of the study, therefore, would be helpful for the enhancement of the Quality of Life of the people who suffer from alcoholism whilst they are in recovery. Thus, a new methodology of holistic rehabilitation for alcoholics can be attained. The present study also opens up a gateway to a whole new domain of studies which might be explored in future.

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### *Limitations*

The present study involves a comparison between two sets of populous, namely the clinical group consisting of Alcoholics and a non-clinical group consisting of occasional drinkers on the variable of depression.

The topic at hand is multifaceted and because of this, there tends to be certain limitations to the study. A limitation of the present study could be that matching of gender across the two groups of participants could not be achieved. Also, the small sample size of the two groups of populations involved in the study which is not a representative of the total population.

The geographic location was restricted to Western and Southern parts the city of Mumbai which may not a representative of the other regions of Mumbai City. The socio-economic level of the participants in the occasional drinking group could be kept relatively stable across the group, however there are disparities in the socio-economic levels of participants in the Alcoholic group which could also serve as a limitation for the study.

The current study did not investigate the cause of association between depression and alcohol dependence. The finding of a high prevalence rate of depression among the study participants calls for the need to evaluate persons for depression before and after alcohol dependence treatment.

### **CONCLUSION**

The results of the study found that **Depression** was significantly higher in Alcoholics compared to occasional drinkers. Depression is a state of low mood and aversion to activity that can affect a person's thoughts, behavior, feelings and sense of well-being.

### *Acknowledgments*

The author appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

*Conflict of Interests:* The author declared no conflict of interests.

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**How to cite this article:** Dordi M & Purandare M (2018). The Role of Depression in Alcoholics and In People Who Are Occasional Drinkers. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, Vol. 6, (1), DIP: 18.01.090/20180601, DOI: 10.25215/0601.090