

Article: 0510

Topic: EPW24 - e-Poster Walk Session 24: Addictive Behaviours part 2

Physical Pain in Alcohol-dependent Patients Entering Treatment in Poland – Prevalence and Correlates

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Objective: Chronic pain and problematic alcohol use commonly co-exist, as the use of alcohol is commonly considered a useful pain self-management strategy. The purpose of this study was to characterize pain and pain-related problems in a group of primary alcohol-dependent individuals entering alcohol treatment facilities.

Method: A sample of 366 (73.5% men and 26.5% women) alcohol-dependent subjects was recruited in alcohol treatment centers in Warsaw, Poland. Information was obtained about demographics, social functioning, sexual and physical abuse during childhood, severity of alcohol and sleep problems as well as level of impulsivity and general psychopathology. The study group was divided into a 'mild or no pain" group and a 'moderate or greater pain" group.

Results: Among the study group, 34.4% of individuals reported moderate or greater physical pain during last 4 weeks. The statistical analysis revealed that the experience of physical pain was significantly associated with lower level of education, unemployment, experience of sexual abuse before 18 years of age, and also with severity of alcohol dependence as well as other potential predictors of relapse (global impulsivity, sleep problems, general psychopathology). When entered into logistic regression analysis with other dependent variables the level of general psychopathology, severity of sleep problems, age and education were all significantly associated with pain severity.

Conclusion: Physical pain is a prevalent and potentially-impairing experience in adults seeking treatment for alcohol dependence. Therapeutic interventions aimed at reducing pain in alcohol-dependent individuals should be studied to evaluate their impact on improving overall treatment outcomes.