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## **In the circle of loneliness and addiction – based on an example of alcoholism**

### SUMMARY

Alcoholism is a chronic, incurable disease. Its essence is the psychophysical dependence on the psychoactive substance constituted by alcohol. This article discusses the problem of loneliness experienced by young adults diagnosed with alcoholism. The aim of the study was to estimate the levels of global loneliness as well as emotional, psychological and existential loneliness in a group of young adults struggling with alcohol dependence, and the subject of the study was to carry out an analysis of the phenomenon of loneliness in a group of young adults (men and women) who are addicted to alcohol.

**Key words:** alcoholism, addiction, loneliness, young adults.

### **Introduction**

Nowadays, nobody denies the fact that loneliness constitutes a common, insidious phenomenon, which is even more destructive than stress. Currently, in times of war taking place beyond our eastern border and the pandemic related to COVID-19 virus, this phenomenon is becoming particularly important. As the authors of the Introduction to the monograph entitled “Social and Personal Spaces of Loneliness” (edited by M. Gajewski and Z. Dołęga)<sup>1</sup> emphasize, loneliness may affect people of all ages, regardless of their education, gender or financial status.

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<sup>1</sup> *Społeczne i osobiste przestrzenie samotności*, red. M. Gajewski, Z. Dołęga, Wydawnictwo Centrum Profilaktyki Społecznej – Oficyna Wydawnicza von Velke, Warszawa–Milanówek, 2018, s. 21–23.

Each of us has probably encountered people suffering from loneliness, both young and elderly, who live alone or in long-term relationships. As the aforementioned authors<sup>2</sup>, the problem of loneliness affects from 25 to 30% of the population – and, what is most disturbing – it is becoming more and more serious. The importance of this problem, its character and scope (which is undoubtedly global), is confirmed by the appointment of a government plenipotentiary for the fight against the phenomenon of loneliness<sup>3</sup> in Great Britain in 2018. Attention should also be paid to the increasingly frequent complaints made not only by adults, but also by children and adolescents, who feel not only a deficit of closeness, intimacy and belonging to a particular community, but also disappointment and a loss of trust.

### An analysis of the phenomenon of loneliness and addiction

Nowadays, it is more and more difficult to understand other people, to think about them and their problems, but also about ourselves. As mentioned above, loneliness is a particularly acute reminder of its presence in situations of crisis (which are not rare in the modern era), in the face of occurrences which are usually beyond an individual's control. It is in such situations that having our loved ones, in whom we can confide without the fear of ridicule or rejection, we can understand the meaning of the surrounding reality. Genuine interpersonal bonds and the support received, not only emotional, allow us to face sadness and apathy, which are not exclusively a reaction to the actual loss of someone nearest and dearest. It is also constant anxiety, irritation, and ultimately loss of self-esteem. More and more often we are witnessing the clash of negative emotions experienced by individuals – with the media pressure on being happy and cool, resulting in emotional and cognitive dissonance, which, in the long run, may lead to a decrease in immunological resistance and the level of mental well-being<sup>4</sup>. The consequence may also be an increased incidence of psychosomatic diseases, as well as a longer and more difficult period of recovery from physical and psychical illnesses, with regard to the fact that loneliness also means more and more frequently occurring affective disorders – including depression – which ruin mental health.

More than 20 years ago, M. Seligman [1997] considered the increase in the incidence of depression to be an epidemic of our times. Unfortunately, as Z. Dołęga<sup>5</sup> emphasizes, there is no indication that this disturbing trend is going to be reversed. Andrzej Zwoliński<sup>6</sup>, in turn, points out that 28% of Polish ten-year-olds, 25% of Polish thirteen-year-olds and 35,5% of all high school girls have experienced sadness and a sense of hopelessness for a period longer than two weeks. The respondents' answers seem important, emphasizing that the most common cause of loneliness experienced by them (emotional loneliness) is the lack of time devoted to children and adolescents by their parents.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>3</sup> Ibidem, s. 21.

<sup>4</sup> Z. Dołęga, *Samotność jako kategoria psychologiczna w odniesieniu do dzieci i młodzieży* [w:] *Spoleczne i osobiste przestrzenie samotności...*, s. 67–74.

<sup>5</sup> Z. Dołęga, *Biedy i bogactwa samotności. Studium psychologiczne*. Wydawnictwo Difin, Warszawa, 2020, s. 191.

<sup>6</sup> A. Zwoliński, *Pozostawieni samym sobie. Spoleczne konteksty samotności* [w:] *Spoleczne i osobiste przestrzenie samotności...*, s. 28.

The sense of loneliness experienced by adolescents and its various correlates are also illustrated by numerous and extensive studies of this phenomenon, especially among adolescents, in publications by M. Borczykowska-Rzepka and B. Skwarek<sup>7</sup>. So where is a sad, dysthymic and hungry for feelings teenager going to look for support, a sense of security and self-esteem? As research clearly shows, in as many as 93% of cases, they tend to treat their parents, mostly mothers, as a rock. Researchers into the field stress that adolescents who find support in their parents fail to engage in sexual intercourse early in life<sup>8</sup>. Similar results pointing to the important role of the feeling of loneliness in taking the decision about engaging in sexual intercourse early in life were obtained by Z. Dołęga, E. Kędra and M. Borczykowska-Rzepka<sup>9</sup>. The respondents try to compensate for this “hunger” for love, intimacy and belonging by taking the decision to engage in sexual intercourse early in life.

The considerations presented above lead to the conclusion that the phenomenon of loneliness is no longer a substantive novelty, but its consequences reflected in sociological, philosophical or psychological studies – motivate us to undertake further, even broader and deeper, cognitive penetration<sup>10</sup> of this issue.

The growing number of studies devoted to the social contexts of loneliness (with particular emphasis on loneliness in the family, the illusory authority of idols and transformations on the scale of values) or personal ones, is not an unnecessary waste of time<sup>11</sup>. Let us remember that leaving the youngest individuals alone, struggling with relational disorders in the form of discontinuity and distortion of bonds, results, although seemingly, in the lack of clear emotional deficits, emotional coldness and lack of remorse. These young individuals, characterized by intellectual norms and even outstanding intelligence, handle all difficult situations in a “reliable” and “task-oriented” manner. This extremely interesting group has been collectively called alexithymics, which clearly shows what emotional “devastation”

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<sup>7</sup> M. Borczykowska-Rzepka, B. Skwarek, *Samotność – istotnym zagrożeniem dla młodzieży gimnazjalnej* [w:] S. Shchudlo (red.), *Молодіжна по, літика: проблеми та перспективи*, Państwowy Uniwersytet Pedagogiczny im. Iwana Franka w Drohobyczu, Państwowa Wyższa Szkoła. Wschodnioeuropejska w Przemyślu. Drohobycz – Przemyśl 2013, s. 146–152; M. Borczykowska-Rzepka, B. Skwarek, *Poczucie samotności u młodzieży gimnazjalnej z małżeństw rozwiedzionych – w świetle badań empirycznych* [w:] M. Jędrzejko, J.A. Malinowski (red.), *Młode pokolenie w zderzeniu cywilizacyjnym. Studia – Badania – Praktyka*. Wydawnictwo Edukacyjne „Akapit”, Toruń, 2014, s. 267–278; M. Borczykowska-Rzepka, B. Skwarek, *Poczucie samotności jako potencjalny czynnik zachowań agresywnych wśród młodzieży gimnazjalnej* [w:] S. Shchudlo, P. Długosz (red.), *Молодіжна політика: проблеми та перспективи*, Państwowy Uniwersytet Pedagogiczny im. Iwana Franka w Drohobyczu. Drohobycz – Rzeszów, 2016, s. 109–118.

<sup>8</sup> A. Zwoliński, *Pozostawieni samym sobie...*, s. 21; H. Kocjan, *Emocjonalne aspekty funkcjonowania młodzieży z różnych systemów rodzinnych a wczesna aktywność i seksualna*, niepublikowana praca magisterska napisana pod kierunkiem Zofii Dołęgi, Archiwum Biblioteki Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 2010.

<sup>9</sup> E. Kędra, Z. Dołęga, M. Borczykowska-Rzepka, *Intrapsychiczne aspekty funkcjonowania młodzieży różnych systemów rodzinnych a wczesna aktywność seksualna*, „Eukrasia” Vol. 20, „Media – Silesia”, Katowice 2014, s. 65–75.

<sup>10</sup> Z. Dołęga, *Samotność jako kategoria psychologiczna w odniesieniu do dzieci i młodzieży* [w:] M. Gajewski, Z. Dołęga (red.), *Spoleczne i osobiste przestrzenie samotności...*, s. 53.

<sup>11</sup> Z. Dołęga, *Biedy i bogactwa samotności...*, op. cit.; Z. Dołęga, *Samotność jako kategoria psychologiczna...*, 2018, op. cit.; A. Zwoliński, *Pozostawieni samym sobie...*, s. 25–40.

occurs when a child becomes an emotional orphan, a lonely child<sup>12</sup>. Let us remember that the cognitive exploration of the issue of loneliness focuses not only on the group of children and adolescents, but also covers the spectrum of issues related to loneliness in marriage, as well as loneliness in romantic relationships of adults. A number of interesting studies point to a close relationship between loneliness and mood disorders, and more importantly, with depression. Particularly disturbing is the clear upward trend in affective disorders among young and very young people<sup>13</sup>. What is disturbing is the fact that the reasons for the increasingly frequent diagnosis of depression do not seem obvious. Perhaps the unstable political situation, the cruelty of war so close to our borders, the tense global situation, the unclear problem of the pandemic and many other stressors requiring quick adaptation to new situations result in individuals at different developmental stages becoming characterised by permanent sadness, low self-esteem, sense of helplessness, anhedonia and sense of uselessness<sup>14</sup>.

Theoretical considerations regarding loneliness and its consequences for the psychosocial functioning of children, adolescents and adults cannot be completed without emphasizing the significant substantive contribution of Z. Dołęga to the overall considerations regarding the phenomenon of loneliness<sup>15</sup>. This tireless researcher emphasizes that analyzing the phenomenon of loneliness we cannot “rest on our laurels” and the number of publications is not synonymous with cognitive satisfaction<sup>16</sup> – on the contrary – it should encourage further research<sup>17</sup>. The author’s three-factor concept of the phenomenon of loneliness developed by Z. Dołęga<sup>18</sup> assumes its global dimension, which consists of three factors: the emotional, social and existential ones. It is also worth remembering that loneliness may be transient (episodic) or chronic, disturbing an individual’s well-being. Attention should be paid to the fact that the episodic form concerning the currently occurring events does not evoke severe clinical disorders, although it certainly causes problems in interpersonal relationships. What may cause concern is the other increasingly common clinical form which lasts much longer and results in affective disorders – including depression.

Due to the various health, emotional and social consequences involved in the case of an individual’s global loneliness and each of its three aspects (factors) mentioned above – they deserve to be recalled briefly.

Research into the phenomenon of loneliness clearly shows that its emotional aspect

<sup>12</sup> Z. Dołęga, *Samotność jako kategoria psychologiczna...*, s. 53–80; Z. Dołęga, *Biedy i bogactwa samotności...*, s. 114–150; A. Zwoliński, *Pozostawieni samym sobie...*, s. 25–40; M. Jędrzejko, K. Kasprzak, *Samotność dziecka w rodzinie z problemem alkoholowym* [w:] Z. Dołęga, M. Gajewski (red.), *Spoleczne i osobiste przestrzenie samotności...*, s. 165–180.

<sup>13</sup> Z. Dołęga, *Biedy i bogactwa samotności...*, s. 190–200.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, s. 191.

<sup>15</sup> Z. Dołęga, *Samotność dorastających w ich relacjach społecznych* [w:] I. Heszen-Niejodek (red.), *Doświadczenie kryzysu – szansa czy ryzyko zaburzeń?* Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice, 1995; Z. Dołęga, *Samotność młodzieży – analiza teoretyczna i studia empiryczne*. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 2003; Z. Dołęga, *Samotność jako stan psychiczny – samotność jako cecha psychologiczna* [w:] P. Domeracki, W. Tyburski (red.), *Zrozumieć samotność. Studium interdyscyplinarne*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, Toruń, 2006, s. 253–276; Z. Dołęga, *Biedy i bogactwa samotności...*

<sup>16</sup> Z. Dołęga, *Samotność jako kategoria psychologiczna...*, s. 53.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>18</sup> Z. Dołęga, *Samotność młodzieży – analiza teoretyczna i studia empiryczne...*

constitutes an element which is most closely related to the period of early and middle childhood, when the fear of separation was repressed without being worked through (the use of defence mechanisms). This particular aspect of loneliness becomes the building block of the social and existential loneliness in the course of the individual's further development<sup>19</sup>. Emotional loneliness, often resulting from the loss of a loved one, constitutes an experience which leaves indelible emotional "traces"<sup>20</sup>. The prolonged mental and physical discomfort associated with the loss of a sense of security disturbs the well-being of the individual, demonstrating the existence of a deficit in the area of emotional support and so much-needed closeness<sup>21</sup>. The subject-related bond, characterized by a lack of open communication enabling accurate recognition of emotions in oneself and others, begins to prevail in interpersonal relationships – especially within the family<sup>22</sup>. On the other hand, social loneliness, based on social anxiety, is characterized by the feeling of isolation and marginalization<sup>23</sup>, as well as deprivation of social needs. This deficit shows loneliness as a consequence of a serious communication problem. Also, there appear difficulties in identifying one's social role and place in a group. The research conducted in 1984, quoted by Z. Dołęga<sup>24</sup>, proves that it is not emotional loneliness, but social loneliness, that is closely linked to depression. Loneliness based on primary fear related to the horror of existence constitutes the third, but not the least important aspect of loneliness. Hence, existential loneliness is characterized by a lack of sense of meaning in life and the inability to achieve one's own life goals<sup>25</sup>. Numerous studies draw our attention to the fact that experiencing separation and social anxiety for a long period of time may lead to the development of pathological forms of the so-called slow-moving anxiety manifested by persistent anxiety, emotional tension and constant cognitive vigilance [DSM-V, 2014]. The awareness of the different health-related consequences (both mental and physical) of experiencing these three aspects of loneliness plays an important role in psychotherapeutic activities, as it allows for optimal management and selection of forms of psychological assistance whenever it is necessary.

The above theoretical considerations regarding the phenomenon of loneliness allow us to claim that loneliness, regardless of the stage of human development, is becoming a common and universal problem<sup>26</sup>. The number and variety of difficult, even traumatic, situations we are faced with nowadays allow us to conclude that the scope of the analysed phenom-

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<sup>19</sup> Ibidem; Z. Dołęga, A. Borucka-Iwańska, *Próba adaptacji programu terapeutycznego dla dzieci doświadczających traumatycznej lub powiklanej żałoby*, „Czasopismo Psychologiczne – Psychological Journal”, 22, 2, 2016, s. 307–315.

<sup>20</sup> Z. Dołęga, *Skala Poczucia Samotności (SBS-C) do badania dzieci – doniesienie wstępne*, „Psychologia Rozwojowa”, 2017, 22(1), s. 93–111.

<sup>21</sup> Z. Dołęga, *Samotność młodzieży – analiza teoretyczna i studia empiryczne...*, op. cit.; Z. Dołęga, *Samotność jako kategoria psychologiczna...*; Z. Dołęga, *Biedy i bogactwa samotności...*

<sup>22</sup> Z. Dołęga, A. Borucka-Iwańska, *Próba adaptacji programu terapeutycznego dla dzieci doświadczających traumatycznej lub powiklanej żałoby...*, s. 307–315.

<sup>23</sup> K. Słabik, *Egzystencjalne i podmiotowe korelaty poczucia samotności u osób dializowanych*, niepublikowana praca magisterska napisana pod kierunkiem prof. dr hab. Zofii Dołęgi, SWPS Uniwersytet Humanistyczno-Społeczny, Katowice 2018.

<sup>24</sup> Z. Dołęga, *Samotność jako kategoria psychologiczna...*, s. 65.

<sup>25</sup> Z. Dołęga, *Samotność jako stan psychiczny – samotność jako cecha psychologiczna...*, s. 253–276.

<sup>26</sup> Z. Dołęga, *Samotność jako kategoria psychologiczna...*; Z. Dołęga, *Biedy i bogactwa samotności...*

enon still seems to be underestimated<sup>27</sup>, which is not the case exclusively among children and adolescents.

The analysis of publications regarding the phenomenon in question allows us to conclude that the period of life which is somehow neglected is undoubtedly young adulthood, as interesting and developmentally important as the period of early, middle and late childhood or adolescence. It is enough to consider a wide range of developmental tasks awaiting a young adult, which can be reduced to the following:

- becoming independent from one's family in emotional, economic and spatial terms, which manifests itself in taking up a job and creating an independent household;

- having a mature concept of life and the ability to navigate in today's extremely changeable world and set life goals. The ability to define oneself and a sense of one's own identity constitute an important competence at this developmental stage. This period also constitutes a crucial moment in life, as it exemplifies a peculiar bridge between personal values and the expectations of the environment<sup>28</sup>. The aforementioned developmental stage most often closes between the age of 20 and 40<sup>29</sup>, with the individual having a crystalized concept of oneself and adapting to the expectations of the environment in terms of lifestyle, goals and the roles performed, which include the ones of a spouse, employee and parent<sup>30</sup>. As E. Levinson<sup>31</sup> emphasizes, the ability to solve the dilemma between isolation and intimacy, which results in the ability to create relationships which are stable, as well as full of warmth and positive emotions, constitutes a basic developmental task.

Numerous studies<sup>32</sup> show that children, and later adolescents, deprived of a stable bond which gives them a sense of security (secure attachment) become adults with emotional deficits, the previously mentioned alexithymic individuals with deficits in social competence. The lack of crucial social competence, such as assertiveness, prosociality or communication skills<sup>33</sup>, leads directly to the feeling of loneliness, which frequently results in suffering from which individuals try to protect themselves at all costs.

Negative emotions related to the experience of emotional, social and existential loneliness, persisting for a long time, may constitute the above mentioned cause of the development of pathological forms of slow-flowing anxiety [DSM-V, 2013], which manifests itself in persistent unfounded anxiety and emotional tension, as well as constant cognitive vigilance, resulting in too many suicide attempts, self-harm or escaping in various forms of addiction in order to eliminate painful emotional tension. In the modern era, the afore-

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<sup>27</sup> Z. Dołęga, *Samotność jako kategoria psychologiczna...*, s. 62.

<sup>28</sup> J. Turner, S. Helmes, *Psychologia rozwoju człowieka*. WSiP, Warszawa 1999, s. 411.

<sup>29</sup> D. Boyd, H. Bee, *Psychologia rozwoju człowieka*. Wydawnictwo Zysk i S-ka, Poznań 2008, s. 402.

<sup>30</sup> B.M. Faba, *Poczucie samotności u młodych dorosłych z chorobą alkoholową*, niepublikowana praca magisterska napisana a pod kierunkiem dr n. med. Marii Borczykowskiej-Rzepki. SWPS, Katowice 2017. s. 11.

<sup>31</sup> Cyt. za D. Boyd, H. Bee, *Psychologia...*, s. 433.

<sup>32</sup> Z. Dołęga, *O relacji przywiązania* [w:] B. Jodłowska (red.), *Dziecko w kręgu wychowania*. Oficyna Wydawnicza Impuls Kraków 2002, s. 79–98; Z. Dołęga, *Wsparcie społeczne a samotność w okresie dorastania*, „Psychologia Rozwojowa” 2002, 7,1, s. 67–77.

<sup>33</sup> I. Obuchowska, *Dziecko niepełnosprawne w rodzinie*. Cz. 1 i 2, Wydawnictwo WSiP, Warszawa, 1991; A. Paździorek, *Samotność a kompetencje społeczne w okresie dorastania*, niepublikowana praca magisterska napisana pod kierunkiem Zofii Dołęgi, Archiwum Biblioteki Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 2007.



mentioned decline in mental well-being and the emergence or intensification of the feeling of loneliness is considered to be a greater threat for the functioning of the individual and the quality of life than stress<sup>34</sup> because it triggers self-destructive tendencies, and above all, it accompanies a wide spectrum of behavioural addictions which belong to the group of habit disorders and impulses (ICD-10,F63).

In one of her earlier publications, M. Borczykowska-Rzepka<sup>35</sup> emphasized that the analysis of the functioning of modern man shows that individuals are facing more and more difficulties in keeping up with the constantly increasing requirements of the surrounding reality. As M. Jędrzejko and J.A. Malinowski clearly emphasize, we are dealing with a peculiar race, which, unfortunately, more and more often concludes with individuals' loss due to the imbalance between the requirements of the surrounding reality and their own capabilities<sup>36</sup>. The loss itself would not constitute an announcement of "a drama". Its consequences appear to be more dangerous since they often lead to serious social or health problems. As M. Jędrzejko and J.A. Malinowski<sup>37</sup>, cited above, emphasize, the danger lurks in the rapid development of all "isms", creating a wide spectrum of addictions, in the form of workaholism, cyberaholism or alcoholism – still remaining at the forefront of all addictions.

There is a lot of truth in the saying that, in fact, you can become addicted to anything<sup>38</sup>, however, some addictions (psychoactive substances) constitute social pathologies which are legally prosecuted, while others, e.g. alcoholism, do not. We can also focus our attention on digital or nicotine addiction. These days, no one doubts that, in the era of digitalization, Internet addiction has become an extremely serious threat, which is difficult to fight in the era of the pandemic, increasing isolation and a sense of threat which the individual is experiencing. Stressors, rush, communication problems are all factors which confront the individual with "a wall of loneliness", resulting frequently from disturbed intra-family relationships and the lack of time for the loved ones. I. Bielecka-Palenga<sup>39</sup> discusses the link between intra-family relationships and Internet addiction in a very interesting way, emphasizing that the presence of children, adolescents and adults in cyberspace is associated with emotional emptiness and the lack of proper relationships in the family system. One of the conclusions summarizing the research seems to be vital: it is not only the awareness of the threat posed by the madness of modern technology or the vigilance of caregivers that matter, but, above all, their love, acceptance and time devoted to the loved ones<sup>40</sup>.

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<sup>34</sup> A. Zwoliński, *Pozostawieni samym sobie...*, s. 22.

<sup>35</sup> M. Borczykowska-Rzepka, *Psychologia a dobrostan społeczny w dobie postępu cywilizacyjnego* [w:] M. Majczyna (red.), *Rozświetlenia. Wyzwania psychologiczne w czasie przełomu*, Cz. I: *Stres i jakość życia*, Oficyna Wydawnicza AFM, Kraków 2021, s. 233.

<sup>36</sup> M. Jędrzejko, J.A. Malinowski, *Zderzenie cywilizacyjno-kulturowe z perspektywy pokoleń – wprowadzenie w problematykę*, W.M. Jędrzejko, J.A. Malinowski (red.), *Młode pokolenie w zderzeniu cywilizacyjnym: studia, badania, praktyka*, Wydawnictwo Edukacyjne Akapit, Toruń, 2014, s. 14.

<sup>37</sup> M. Borczykowska-Rzepka, *Psychologia a dobrostan społeczny w dobie postępu cywilizacyjnego...*, op. cit., s. 233.

<sup>38</sup> Z. Dołęga, *Biedy i bogactwa samotności...*, s. 202.

<sup>39</sup> I. Bielecka-Palenga, *Relacje wewnątrzrodzinne w percepcji nastolatka a ryzyko uzależnienia od Internetu*, niepublikowana praca magisterska napisana pod kierunkiem prof. dr hab. Zofii Dołęgi SWPS Uniwersytet Humanistyczno-Społeczny, Katowice 2018, s. 80–81.

<sup>40</sup> Ibidem; M. Borczykowska-Rzepka, *Psychologia a dobrostan społeczny w dobie postępu cywilizacyjnego...*, s. 231–253.

Without downplaying Internet addiction, which is so important in the post-modern era, it is sometimes worth returning to an addiction which has been known for years, but is still not fully understood, which is alcoholism or the threat posed by it. Alcohol addiction constitutes one of the main causes of suffering for countless young and elderly people. At the very beginning of our considerations, we emphasized that any new results which turn out to be risk factors for loneliness or alcoholism, and which may prove useful in prevention, seem worth checking and considering. Obviously, attempts to examine the links between alcoholism and loneliness are not entirely new. Z. Dołęga, who has already been quoted on numerous occasions, presents information regarding the relationship between drinking alcohol and self-esteem, the assessment of social relationships, general dissatisfaction with life and low motivation to introduce any changes to it<sup>41</sup>. However, taking into account the seriousness of developmental tasks occurring during young adulthood, it should be pointed out that the number of studies on the feeling of loneliness and the connection between the feeling of loneliness and alcoholism among young adults, i.e. the individuals who actually begin their mature lives, taking responsibility not only for themselves, but also for their partners and offspring, is very small.

Here, we should mention the interesting results of extensive research conducted by B.M. Fabę<sup>42</sup> on a group of 81 respondents aged 17-33, with diagnosed alcoholism (F.10.2) or mixed addiction (F.19.2.), which is a term used in reference to addiction to alcohol or other psychoactive substances, according to the ICD-10 classification. The advantage of the group was gender equality, with a slight predominance of men. The research group consisted of patients from addiction treatment facilities in Upper Silesia. The study, whose aim was to estimate the scope of the phenomenon of loneliness – global, emotional, existential and social one – in a group of young adults addicted to alcohol, was conducted with the use of a survey developed by B. Faba as well as a shortened version of the Loneliness Screening Scale: SBS-AD developed by Z. Dołęga<sup>43</sup>. The aforementioned Scale contains three subscales corresponding to three aspects of loneliness and a global score constituting an operational measure of the sense of this phenomenon. The results of the study were supposed to provide the answer to a major question: Does, and to what extent, the feeling of loneliness constitute a serious personal problem in the group of young adults affected by alcoholism? This question allowed us to identify further issues relating to the social, emotional and existential aspects of loneliness.

Some brief characteristics of selected intervening variables, such as: gender, education, marital status, living conditions and place of residence, professional activity, age at which the disease was first diagnosed and the duration of addiction are provided below. And so: – 37 women and 44 men took part in the study. None of the participants were university graduates. Most respondents had vocational education and the smallest number of them had primary education. When it comes to their place of residence, the vast majority of them lived in small towns. Their living conditions were rather modest, as most of them rented apartments from their families or friends. Moreover, some respondents (17%) had apartments of their own and 27% – cooperative ones. It also seems important to mention the character of their professional activity. Unfortunately, the majority of them did not work, while the second largest group of participants only worked occasionally and illegally. The smallest number of them had an employment contract.

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<sup>41</sup> Z. Dołęga, *Biedy i bogactwa samotności...*, s. 202–203.

<sup>42</sup> B.M. Fabę, *Poczucie samotności u młodych dorosłych z chorobą alkoholową...*

<sup>43</sup> Z. Dołęga, *Samotność młodzieży – analiza teoretyczna i studia empiryczne...*



As mentioned previously, the age at which the addiction was first diagnosed is also of much importance: 33% of the respondents in the research group were diagnosed with an addiction when they were younger than 18, while the remaining patients were 19 to 25 years old at that time. Obviously, the information concerning the duration of addiction was very important. Three ranges were taken into account: from 2 to 5 years, from 6 to 10 years and over 10 years. The research showed that the largest number of respondents had been struggling with addiction for 2 to 5 years, followed by those who had been affected by it for 6 to 10 years, and the fewest of them had been suffering from addiction for over 11 years.

Without performing a more detailed statistical analysis, it is worth presenting the results obtained on the SBS-AD Scale in combination with selected sociodemographic factors, specified above. The statistical analysis enabling the verification of the hypotheses was performed with the use of version 24 of the IBMSPSS STATISTICS program. The table below illustrates the basic descriptive statistics along with the result of the Kolmogorow-Smirnow test.

Table 1. Basic descriptive statistics and the result of the Kolmogorow-Smirnow test

	<b>M</b>	<b>Me</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Min.</b>	<b>Maks.</b>	<b>Sk.</b>	<b>Kurt.</b>	<b>K-S</b>	<b>p</b>
age	25,80	27,00	4,65	17,00	33,00	-0,42	-1,15	0,18	<0,001
SBS									
Loneliness	81,84	86,00	14,84	51,00	108,00	-0,20	-0,97	0,18	<0,001
Social loneliness	25,88	26,00	6,29	11,00	37,00	-0,14	-0,80	0,13	0,003
Emotional loneliness	29,28	30,00	4,63	21,00	41,00	0,06	-0,32	0,22	<0,001
Existential loneliness	26,68	29,00	5,18	16,00	34,00	-0,50	-0,81	0,23	<0,001

**M** – average; **Me** – median; **SD** – standard deviation; **Min.** – minimum; **Maks.** – maximum; **Sk.** – skewness; **Kurt.** – kurtosis; **K-S** – Kolmogorow-Smirnow test result; **p** – significance of the normality of distribution test.

Source: B.M. Faba, *The feeling of loneliness in young adults affected by alcoholism*. An unpublished master’s thesis written under the supervision of Maria Borezykowska-Rzepka, Doctor of Medical Sciences. SWPS, Katowice 2017. Adapted with permission from the author.

It is also necessary to present the data illustrating the role of gender in experiencing loneliness by individuals (Table 2). Another factor worth considering was the duration of addiction and its connection with the phenomenon of loneliness (Table 3).

Table 2. Differences in experiencing loneliness by addicted women and men

	<b>Woman (n=37)</b>		<b>Man (n=44)</b>		<b>t</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>95% CI</b>		<b>Cohen d</b>
	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>			<b>LL</b>	<b>UL</b>	
Loneliness	77,30	16,80	85,66	11,86	-2,54	0,014	-14,94	-1,79	0,58
Social loneliness	24,08	7,20	27,39	5,02	-2,35	0,022	-6,11	-0,50	0,54
Emotional loneliness	28,11	4,90	30,27	4,18	-2,12	0,038	-4,21	-0,12	0,48
Existential loneliness	25,11	6,10	28,00	3,86	-2,50	0,015	-5,21	-0,57	0,58

**M** – average; **SD** – standard deviation; **t** – Student’s test result; **p** – statistical significance; **LL** – lower limit of 95% confidence interval; **UL** – upper limit of 95% confidence interval; **d** – measure of the strength of the Cohen d effect.

Source: B.M. Faba, *The feeling of loneliness...*, op. cit. Adapted with permission from the author.

Table 3. Differences in the sense of loneliness depending on the duration of addiction

	<b>Duration of addiction</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>p</b>	$\eta^2$
Loneliness	2-5 years	79,73	2,23	44			
	6-10 years	85,32	2,65	31	1,40	0,253	0,03
	over 11 years	79,33	6,03	6			
Social loneliness	2-5 years	24,57	0,93	44			
	6-10 years	27,81	1,11	31	2,51	0,088	0,06
	over 11 years	25,50	2,52	6			
Emotional loneliness	2-5 years	28,73	0,70	44			
	6-10 years	29,94	0,83	31	0,69	0,503	0,02
	over 11 years	30,00	1,90	6			
Existential loneliness	2-5 years	26,43	0,78	44			
	6-10 years	27,58	0,93	31	1,44	0,243	0,04
	over 11 years	23,83	2,10	6			

M—average; SE—statistical error; N—group size; F—Fisher test result; p—significance;  $\eta^2$ —effect size.

Source: B.M. Faba, *The feeling of loneliness...*, op. cit. Adapted with permission from the author.

It seems that a more detailed description of individual steps important in statistical analysis is unnecessary. It turns out that both in the case of global loneliness and in all three subscales of the SBS-AD questionnaire, the results differ significantly depending on the sex of the respondents. Lower values were observed for women on each scale, which indicates that the intensity of loneliness experienced by them is greater. It is an interesting observation that in the case of emotional loneliness the difference between women and men is much smaller than in the case of global, social or existential loneliness. Therefore, addicted women feel more isolated and suffer more from a lack of closeness and belonging.

An interesting and important observation is the link between the feeling of emotional loneliness and the age of the research participants. (significance 0,014, the Pearson Correlation Coefficient 0,01). Similarly to other sociodemographic factors, there exists a significant correlation between age and the sense of loneliness, which, however, is relatively strong exclusively in the case of emotional loneliness. The results of the research investigating the aforementioned correlation allow us to conclude that with age the respondents feel less lonely as well as receiving more support from others and experiencing more closeness to them, which makes them realise that they deserve to be close to others and even to be loved by them.

Apparently, the duration of addiction proved to be an equally important factor influencing the feeling of loneliness. Here, the differences turned out to be statistically insignificant, except for social loneliness, which clearly differentiated the group of addicts who have been affected by the addiction for 2 to 5 years and from 6 to 10 years. The obtained results allow us to conclude that individuals who have been struggling with addiction for a longer period of time feel less lonely from a social point of view, which may mean that they are less socially isolated. This quite surprising conclusion can be interpreted in various ways. Long-term addiction results in the respondents becoming accustomed

and adapting themselves to their alcohol addiction, which decreases their levels of loneliness, often accompanying people at the early stages of alcoholism. It can also be assumed that individuals who have been addicted to alcohol for a long time managed to develop a more effective support network than those, who have been affected by alcoholism for a short time (from 2 to 5 years).

Although not all the factors selected for the analysis of their connection with the feeling of loneliness have been discussed here, it seems that even this very limited spectrum allows us to draw some conclusions regarding the role which sociodemographic factors may play in both prevention and treatment of addictions in young adults diagnosed with an addiction. Here, it should be stressed that individuals staying in hospital feel more lonely than those treated in Addiction Treatment Clinics, Detoxification and Therapeutic Centers, AA Communities, etc.

### Summary

In this report, in addition to conducting an analysis of the literature discussing the issues of loneliness and addictions, only a part of an extensive study was discussed, whose main purpose was to provide answers to the questions of whether at all, and to what extent, the feeling of loneliness experienced by individuals addicted to alcohol constitutes a major personal problem for them. The results were also supposed to provide answers to the questions of whether at all and which particular sociodemographic and socioeconomic factors differentiate the feelings of social, emotional and existential loneliness in the target group. The verification of the hypotheses allowed us to conclude that the sense of loneliness, both in global terms and in its three aspects, constitutes a major problem for young adults struggling with alcoholism. Addicts are more likely to be exposed to social ostracism due to the difficulties in fulfilling the social roles assigned to them at particular stages of development. The results show clearly that adaptation problems are perceived differently by women and men. The former tend to be more sensitive to social rejection as well as lack of acceptance and belonging. Although, as they grow older, addicts appear to be less lonely and receive more support, they still fail to consider themselves as part of any community. As the aforementioned research demonstrates, loneliness is strongly connected with the duration of addiction. Here, it should be pointed out that the sense of loneliness (social loneliness) decreases with the increasing duration of addiction, which leads to a situation where individuals struggling with alcoholism for 2 to 5 years feel less lonely and isolated than those who have been addicted to alcohol for a longer time. This fact can be explained by a

In this report, in addition to conducting an analysis of the literature discussing the issues of loneliness and addictions, only a part of an extensive study was discussed, whose main purpose was to provide answers to the questions of whether at all, and to what extent, the feeling of loneliness experienced by individuals addicted to alcohol constitutes a major personal problem for them. The results were also supposed to provide answers to the questions of whether at all and which particular sociodemographic and socioeconomic factors differentiate the feelings of social, emotional and existential loneliness in the target group. The verification of the hypotheses allowed us to conclude that the sense of loneliness, both in global terms and in its three aspects, constitutes a major problem for young adults struggling with alcoholism. This fact can be explained by a

The analysed demographic and economic factors, as well as

the obtained results, largely coincide with the results other studies carried out<sup>44</sup> and they indicate that factors such as the family structure, information resources and forms of obtaining help are particularly important. These factors may be considered individually, but also they may be treated collectively as social support. However, the paradox of support lies in the fact that too much social support increases external control, whereas too little support contributes to the feeling of loneliness, rejection and isolation – which, paradoxically, may again enhance the desire to forget.

Despite the apparent superficiality of the presented considerations, and the impression that some of the issues have already been discussed, for preventive and therapeutic purposes, it seems reasonable to reflect again upon the factor which may constitute both a major cause and permanent consequence of addiction.

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## STRESZCZENIE

Maria Borczykowska-Rzepka, Beata Skwarek

### **W kręgu samotności i uzależnienia na przykładzie choroby alkoholowej**

Alkoholizm jest chorobą chroniczną, nieuleczalną. Jej istotę stanowi uzależnienie psychofizyczne od substancji psychoaktywnej, jaką stanowi alkohol. Niniejszy artykuł przybliży problematykę samotności odczuwanej przez młodych dorosłych, u których zdiagnozowano chorobę alkoholową. Celem przeprowadzonych badań ustanowiono oszacowanie samotności globalnej oraz emocjonalnej, psychicznej i egzystencjalnej w grupie młodych dorosłych zmagających się z uzależnieniem od alkoholu, a za przedmiot badań obrano analizę zjawiska samotności w grupie młodych dorosłych (mężczyzn i kobiet) uzależnionych od alkoholu.

**Słowa kluczowe:** alkoholizm, uzależnienie, samotność, młodzi dorośli.

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