



EXPLORING THE FACTORS THAT HELP AN INDIVIDUAL TO ABSTAIN FROM ALCOHOL FOR A PERIOD OF MORE THAN TEN YEARS

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Abstract

The current study has used qualitative design to understand and explore the helping factors towards long term abstinence from alcohol. Literature review has provided with naming of certain factors that help a person to remain abstinent. But in depth exploration with explanation of dynamics of the factors is done in this study. The study aims to understand and explore the different factors that help in long term abstinence from alcohol and the dynamic nature of these factors in helping a person to attain abstinence. The data was collected from 8 participants who have been abstinent from alcohol for a period of 10 years or more, by focus group discussion followed by in depth interview. The implication of the study is the results itself, that the findings will help in serving as an educative and motivational material for instilling hope in people who are trying to become abstinent.

Key Words: *Abstinence, Alcohol, Helping Factors, Long Period.*

1. Introduction

"Alcoholism, which is also known as "alcohol dependence syndrome," is a disease that is characterized by the following elements of craving, which is a strong need or compulsion to drink; loss of control, which is the frequent inability to stop drinking once a person has begun; physical dependence, which is the occurrence of withdrawal symptoms such as nausea and shakiness when alcohol is stopped after a period of heavy drinking and tolerance which is the need for increasing the amounts of alcohol in order to get "high" (NIAA (2009)). It is very much known that once started on regular basis alcoholism continues with craving, tolerance and dependence. This takes a very vicious pattern of it affecting, not only the individual in many domains, but the also the family and society to a very large extent.

Knowing the statistics that shows the prevalence of alcoholism and the rise of its production gives more clarity to this. There has been an increase in the production of alcohol over the past 15 years. Being a dominant producer of alcohol, India contributes by about 65% of the production in South-East Asia region and a 7% of the imports here. IAPA(2009) THE HINDU(2008). Therefore when reality is looked at, though people are able to take a step towards abstinence, (40-60) % relapse every year Fisher, Harrison, (2005), which means that only another 40% abstain every year, it is only a very small percentage, while the majority of the population never makes an attempt to quit or relapse back to it and the problems due to alcoholism are ever increasing.

Therefore the question arises, in asking about the factors that help in long term abstinence. And so it becomes relevant to explore these many factors that help in abstinence and using it to educate the people who do not know about them. The current study explores the factors that help in long term abstinence. The background of the study too is on the same lines. The questions that arose in the researcher's mind as a result of the very many relapsing people who are not able to make abstinence a reality and the questions which they raised by asking for some tips to practise abstinence, became the driving factor to do this study. There were many people who relapsed more than once and wanted an answer towards abstinence. The only way towards answering this is to study on the factors that help in long term abstinence. Therefore this study examines and tries to explore and understand the factors that help in abstinence for a long period of time, because it is for a practical solution of abstaining from alcohol and preventing its recurrence that, people seek for. Such a study is very much important to face the present need of abstinence from alcohol.

Several studies give a hint on how some personal and environmental elements can help in thinking away from alcoholism. Therefore it is worth looking at them to understand it more. Some of the factors that is found in studies so far are a sense of family reputation and name, religious teachings, peer support and the values that teach the harmful effects of alcohol and the sense of self awareness on this Sauni, Samu, Dunbar, Pulford, Wheeler (2012), specific social support and good therapeutic alliance Pasche, Myers, Adam (2010), personal inventory that helps in the correction of character defects Buddy (2012), and supporting family environment Limsiroratana (2008), positive coping strategies Mattoo, Chakrabarti, Anjaiah (2008). These findings could also be interpreted as need of motivation and positive coping strategies to remain in long term abstinence. Another study shows that the role of spirituality, social affiliation, 12 step adherence, and satisfaction of how life is presently after abstinence is very high in enhancing abstinence. Laudet, Morgen, White (2006). In the recovery process, duration of abstinence is highly correlated with self efficacy, enhanced spiritual support, social support and stable housing Dennis, Foss, Scott (2007). These form the basis of the factors that help in coming out of alcoholism. This information is very much essential to get a basic idea of how the dynamics work.

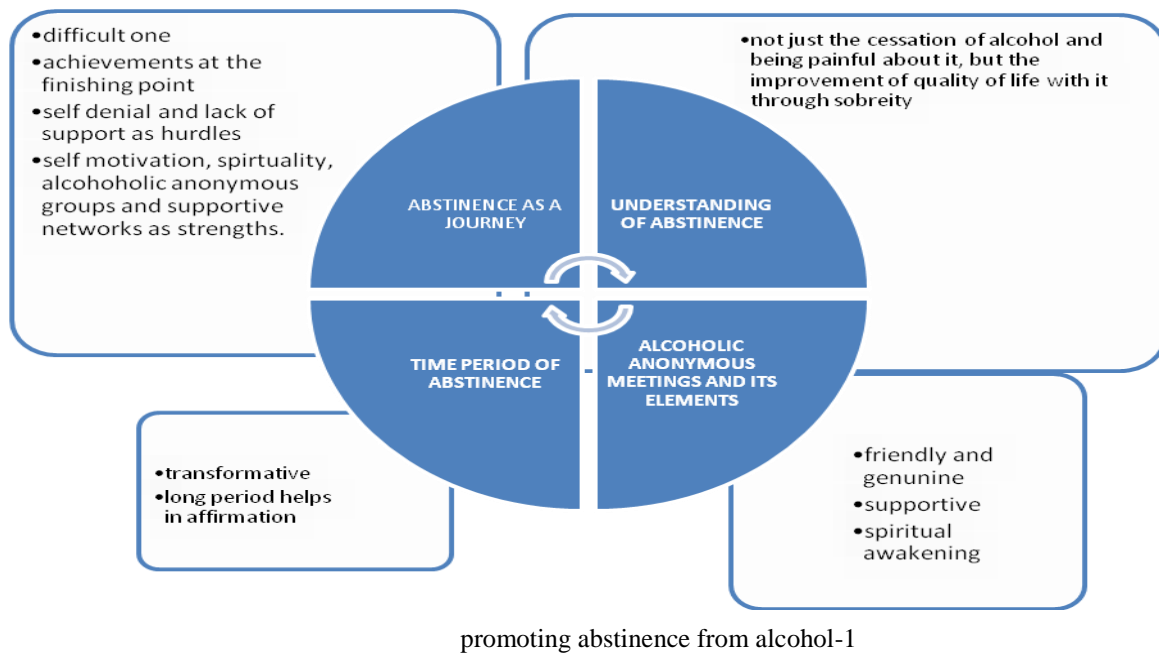


Figure 1:
Factors

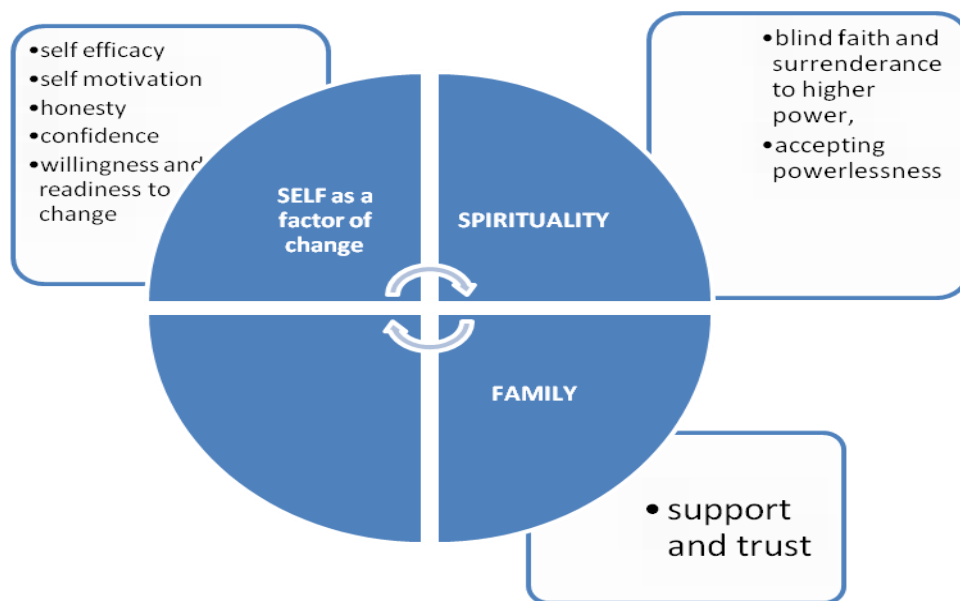


Figure 2:

This study will work by collecting the experience of people who were able to successfully abstain from alcohol. Such information gathered will not only give an idea about the factors, but will also throw light into how these factors can be implemented practically in one’s life, when he is seeking for an answer on how to maintain abstinence. Therefore it becomes relevant through the study that it gives an overall idea on how to maintain abstinence, by knowing the various factors and also on how to apply it in one’s own life from the practical experiences of other people who were successful in attaining it.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research problem

To explore the factors that help individuals in long term abstinence from alcohol.

2.2 Research objectives

- To understand the factors that help in long term abstinence of more than 10 years in an alcoholic.
- To use the information collected to educate the individuals who want to abstain from alcohol.

2.3 Method of study

Qualitative Research Design

Qualitative Research Design is a method of inquiry in which a systematic subjective approach is used to describe the unique life experiences of people. It is based on the proposition that life experiences of each person are different.

In this study, it can be seen that, the method of inquiry mainly revolves around collecting the subjective experiences of people who has been successful in maintaining long term abstinence for more than 10 years in gaining an in-depth understanding into the factors that helped them in long term abstinence. Knowing the experiences of people is given importance here in this study. The participants will be able to communicate the life experiences related to abstinence, which will help in getting a rich data about the stipulated topic.

2.4 Sample

Sample size is 5-8. Purposive sampling is the method of sampling that will be implemented here. Purposive sampling is a method of sampling in which the researcher chooses the samples according to the purpose of the research objectives which is to be met. The same is implemented here because the samples are selected according to the purpose of the research objectives. The samples are purposefully selected according to the time period of abstinence and the success rate in the abstinence period without any relapse.

2.5 Inclusion criteria

The person should be in abstinence for 10 years or more, because of 10 years or more is a solid experience in this phase

Both males and females would be included

2.6 Exclusion criteria

People who have had on and off experiences of abstinence.

2.7 Paradigm framework

The paradigm framework on which the study is based on is Interpretive Phenomenological Approach. Phenomenology explains how the individuals perceive the particular phenomenon in which they are. Interpretivism helps to interpret these experiences in order to elicit themes or main responses that maintain the focus of the study. It involves a detailed examination of the participant world view, and emphasises on the dynamics of the process where the researcher has an active role too. The insider's perspective has been seen to be the main emphasis of this paradigm in research Conrad (1987). It helps to see how people perceive their experience of abstinence which is to be interpreted by the researcher.

2.8 Method of data collection

Focussed group discussion followed by in depth interviewing.

Focussed group discussion is a method of qualitative research in which the opinion, attitude and perception of people regarding a concept is asked. It is an interactive discussion setting where the participants are free to discuss with each other. Such discussions provide additional data and insights as experiences of one may trigger memories or perception in the other. This brings in more insights and keeps the discussion moving to new realms of information Lindlof, Taylor (2002). Focussed groups also allow a scenario where there is validation between the participants undergoing a similar situation, and such discussions allows for expression of experiences in a setting where similarity is felt between the participants in terms of a common issue Tracy, Lutgen-Sandvik, Alberts (2006).

Therefore focussed group discussion is used in this study to understand the new idea that gets generated, and to explore further on this as the memories that get stimulated through sharing of information will help in sharing of new information. Conducting a focussed group interview will help in understanding the new themes and ideas that come up, which could be further explored through in-depth interview. Focussed group discussion will help to identify and generate new ideas, by keeping it fixed to the focus of the study, where new ideas and memory triggered experiences of maintaining abstinence could be elicited

In-depth interview is designed in such a way that questions are prepared in order to elicit responses based on the research question and the samples will be interviewed based on these questions, to get the desired response. The questions are also refined based on the main ideas of focussed group discussion and these are administered on samples refined from the respective group. Data collection will take place in two phases:

The first phase will be done by a focussed group interview which will concentrate on free flow of ideas, triggered by discussion, but without losing the focus. The second phase will be done by an in-depth interviewing of the samples outside the focussed interview group to explore in detail the ideas and concepts that were identified in focus group interviewing to collect more generative and rich data.

2.9 Method of data analysis

Thematic analysis by identifying the main themes.

Thematic analysis is the method of data analysis in which the data is analysed for the main themes to emerge as the findings of the study. The themes that are expected to be identified from this study are the factors that help in long term abstinence.

2.10 Ethical considerations

Informed Consent from the participants was taken before administering the scales for the study.

The subjects were allowed to exercise their right to not participate in the study. Thus, participation in the study was completely voluntary.

The subjects were assured of confidentiality.

The subjects were encouraged to contact the researcher in case they wished to know the results for the data they provided for the study.

3. Results and Discussion

The major themes that emerged from the data are:

Table 1: thematic framework

GLOBAL THEME	ORGANISING THEME	BASIC THEME
ABSTINENCE AS A JOURNEY	Charecteristics of journey	Difficult journey Another phase of life that will lead to the better Transforming journey Challenging and tough journey Rebirth and new life Longevity
	Predisposing factors	Effect on physical health of self Effect on family equilibrium in the form of disrupted Family relationships Realisation of empty self Step towards turning point
	Benefits from this journey	Beneficial in improving life Positivity gained journey Fulfilling journey Happiness giving Achievement New perspective Confidence and accomplishment
	Hurdles to be crossed	Uncertainty in the journey Lack of confidence Amendment of relationships Control of instincts Dependence on alcohol Low self worth Denial Blaming others Thinking drinking
	Source of strength	Self motivation and inner strength for change External source of strength in family and togetherness with them
CONCEPT OF ABSTINENCE	Personal experiences	Phase of life with total cessation of drinking Phase of life which is good Painful beginning Newer meaning of sobriety
	Speciality of this experience from the previous experiences	Control over my life Journey that secures lost relationships back Asset filled Happiness giving journey Spiritual journey of surrenderence to a higher power Focussed life
TIME	Qualities of time	Time as a healer Time as teacher Different
	Personal experience of time	Time as a teacher Transforming Healing Precious Engaging
	Relevance of time period	Time as protector Time as a teacher Engaging One day at a time Simple steps to recovery
	Changes during this time/events that helped In abstinence	Order in life with time Learning a new way of life Gaining of support and happiness in relationships Surrenderence Small steps towards recovery Time bringing healing

	Alcoholic Anonymous Divine help
Justification for the time period and preference for a long period of abstinence	Time as healer and helper Overcoming programmed pattern of drinking Recovery not to be taken for granted Helpful in staying away from drinking
ALCOHOLIC ANONYMOUS MEETINGS AND ITS ELEMENTS	Nature/characteristics
	Delivering understanding and confidence Support rendering Fellowship Oneness Non labelling Non judging Non imposing Love and care No fragmentation Common experience Acceptance
How it acted to be beneficial	Adding on confidence Transformative Supportive Love and care Breaking denial Assistance in recovery Supportive Awareness about recovery
Effect of 12 steps/contribution of 12 steps	Promotive influence to do one day at a time Spiritual Understanding about abstinence Transformative Eye opener
Influence of AA meetings	Supportive and high bonding Recovery gained No dos and don'ts Commonality as a comfort zone Love and care aiding recovery Identification Acceptance and helping
Influence and nature system of elders/sponsors	Supportive, guiding and comforting Genuine Spiritual guidance
Social network at alcoholic anonymous meetings- influence	Strongly supportive Caring Sharing in joy and sadness Genuinity Availability
Motivational level at AA meetings	Inspirational Friendly correction Genuinity Availability Strong bonding Relatable
Spiritual awakening in relation to 12 steps	Spiritual and surrendering Holistic awakening Awareness Freedom Surrenderance

SELF	Attributes of self	Self confidence and courage Self determination, inner motivation Surrendering to higher power Humility Readiness to change Emphasis on present Awareness Humility Acceptance of change Cultivation of good changes No past No shame and guilt No regret
	Coping styles	Spirituality Introspection and self monitoring Goal oriented and focussed Self responsibility Support from others Internal External
SPIRITUALITY	Nature and features	Awareness about god and reconciliation with others Blind faith Oneness with higher power
FAMILY	Changing factor	Supportive family Acceptance by family Flexibility and adaptability of the family

3.1 Major findings of the study

The major findings of the study reveal that life after abstinence is perceived as a re-birth and new one. The journey of abstinence is found as a transformative one that has helped in framing a new life filled with achievements and newness in socio-relationship circles. Abstinence can be considered as a journey because one gets from one place to another, by passing through different stages and events and experiences something different at the destination. This can be metaphorically considered as that of a journey itself, because, the person travels from the starting point of alcohol dependence, passes through stages of denial, detoxification and quitting, by crossing many hurdles and uncertainties, and finally manages to reach the destination, which is a complete newness in life.

This journey is indeed a tough and challenging journey because the person has to gain back the trustworthiness from the lost relationships. It can have hurdles like overcoming self, denial and impulse to drink, along with convincing family and others, which is filled with uncertainty. The sources of strength are the support one receives and the internal drive to change. The benefits are that of newness, experience driven and achievements that one gets in life contrary to the disgusting self of one, that he realises as a trigger to start thinking about change.

It is quite an interesting finding, in theme 02, that the usual notion of abstinence that it is staying away from a pleasure got changed with the dimension that abstinence is a sadful experience where one may keep ruminating mentally and emotionally of the old times of drinking and that sobriety should be the experience where one is able to enjoy life without drinking by improving the quality of life. Therefore this was the understanding that came up by the study.

Time period of abstinence is described by the participants as healing, protective and reforming. This time period has given a lot of reformation in life, helping to personally reflect on the flow of life and to make it better. This time has been instrumental in securing lost relationships back and in helping to focus more on the future of life. There may be much scepticism about how and why such a long period of time is chosen for the study. It is something that could be understood only from the phenomenological experiences of the people as well as from studies that show that a period of 10 years is at least necessary to confirm the experience of abstinence. The chances of relapse are high in the initial years both from the interview as well as in the supporting literature. It is needed that many years would bring in more realisation and introspection into the experience in understanding the phenomenon itself. During this time, the major supportive factors for change are that of self efficacy and Alcoholic Anonymous group support.

Alcoholic Anonymous is a very powerful inspiring factor that helps in the maintenance of abstinence, by its friendly, understanding, accepting and non imposing styles of fellowship. Here the person feels so much convinced about the need and the benefits of being sober and there it gives a space to take one's own hand in contemplating over it. The fellowship thus is transformative, recovery supportive and denial breaking. The style of alcoholic anonymous meetings that is filled with love and genuine concern is worth commenting because the commonality of the experience and non judgemental corrections helps one to change. The oneness in the group helps the person to feel belongingness and experience empathy as facilitators for change. Same is the experience with the social supportive network here. However sponsors are expressed as spiritual guides of change. The twelve steps act as factors of change by being an eye opener,

giving a new view about life by amendments and forgiveness and a spiritual awakening to become one with a higher power, nature and others around. This spiritual awakening helps one to see life with a new perspective and reflection. The person is able to derive motivation from this as well as the supportive network that is connected to Alcoholic Anonymous.

The interviewees has expressed self motivation and the sense of self efficacy that is instilled by vicarious learning experiences and verbal persuasion, in par with the social learning of Bandura, are the factors that brought about change in theme 05. It becomes noticeable that scolding or emotional drama will not instill the realisation to change in an alcoholic but it is only genuinity and true social support with which he could identify and relate to, will act as helping factors as how it could be seen in Alcoholic Anonymous groups which are non pretence support systems. Self motivation, humility and commitment towards life which helps in breaking the guilt of past are the reasons from within, that helps in embracing abstinence.

Spirituality in the form of reconciliation with self, others and circumstances brings in a realisation about one's existence and this has helped a person in overcoming the addiction over drinking. Spirituality which is the surrendence to higher power, blind faith in this power due to acceptance of the powerlessness within oneself and total dependence on this power initiates change. When one realises that he is completely powerless over addiction and nothing could be done over it, but do it by complete surrendering on a one day basis will help in change.

Most of the Indian households are stigmatised about alcoholism and fears disclosing it to others and seeking help at the right time through de-addiction and self help groups. All what happens is that of emotional drama and dysfunctional relationship pattern. Imposive persuasion might take place, but this is without understanding what the person is going through, therefore he also fails to identify the intention. Only very few are able to bring about change by full understanding and non imposive methods, through de- addiction and support groups. But if family is able to understand well and support well that becomes a major revival factor and maintaining factor. Acceptance by family is a key element in helping a person to become abstinent because it is ultimately something that every person recovering from alcohol addiction longs for.

4. Summary and Conclusion

Abstinence from alcoholism is the cessation from the habit of consumption of alcoholism, and abstaining it for a long period of life contributes to sobriety. It becomes abstinence from alcohol by enjoying life and improving the quality of life, without being sad about the fact of not drinking alcohol. That becomes the success of being abstinent from alcohol. Therefore it is essential to explore the factors that facilitate this. Studies show that there are certain elements that help in abstinence. One of the lacunae in this field of literature is that these data are not found in one study alone, and is scattered among many. And the second one is that, studies exploring and explaining these factors from the level of individual perceptions of the phenomenological experiences of people are very few. The present study does this in getting detailed explanations from the people going through the experience of long term abstinence. Before administering the questionnaires informed consent was obtained and confidentiality was explained to them in detail. Detailed explanation of the objectives of the study was done. Data was collected by a semi structured interview guide with open ended questions, which was validated thrice. It was collected in two phases. Initially a focus group discussion was done, with 7 participants in order to get a broad framework of the responses. Followed by this was the in depth interview in order to confirm the responses as well as to add on few more queries from the input of focus group discussion. The participants were selected based on the inclusion criteria of having the experience of abstinence of 10 years or more, without any relapse episodes. They were interviewed to know the factors that help in abstinence along with exploring their views and life experiences on abstinence; therefore it also becomes a phenomenological study in this way.

4.1 Implications of the study

The study gives a detailed description of how each listed factor helps in change, which is not seen in present literatures. This study, by way of in depth phenomenological exploration helps in understanding the dynamics played by each factor in helping a person to attain long term abstinence from alcohol. So far these factors have only been named, but this study comes up with the dynamic explanation of the factors, which will pave way towards applying them in the correct measures and thereby bring in an alcohol free society.

4.2 Limitation

Only male gender has been covered which is a limitation in terms of gender distribution. The population were people who are in touch with Alcoholic Anonymous groups which failed to evoke responses outside this factor, which is also a bias towards the above said dimension.

4.3 Future direction

The findings of this study can be used to develop an educative material to deliver education to people who are trying to attain abstinence as this will serve as an inspiration towards self efficacy. It can be used to educate the public about the dimensions of abstinence and how difficult it is to obtain, and all what the person requires is genuine facilitation. It will help families in not being emotionally depressed but in getting their loved one back by means of genuine persuasion. This can also serve as an educative material in the de addiction centres and the relapse prone population, if developed into a psycho educative module by future researchers.

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