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## Overcoming Difficult Life Situations in Alcohol-Dependent Men and Women: The Potential of Psychocorrectional Group Sessions

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### Abstract

**Introduction.** The article is devoted to the analysis of strategies for overcoming difficult life situations of men and women with alcohol addiction. Due to the current need to revise the concepts of rehabilitation measures and psychological impact on persons belonging to the addictive category of the population, we have developed and implemented a program of group sessions with patients and evaluated its effectiveness.

**Methods.** The study was conducted among 120 respondents in the Lugansk Republican Narcological Dispensary: 60 patients with I-II stages of chronic alcohol addiction (30 men and 30 women), as well as 60 employees of the medical institution without alcoholism in the anamnesis (30 men and 30 women). The method of psychological testing and psychodiagnostic tools were used: Test "Overcoming Difficult Life Situations"; "Coping Behavior Questionnaire"; "Stress Susceptibility Questionnaire"; "Level of Subjective Control Questionnaire"; Michigan Alcohol Screening Test. The group psychocorrectional sessions were aimed at increasing the level of expression of adaptive strategies for overcoming difficult life situations in men and women with alcohol addiction, along with the reduction of dysfunctional and maladaptive behavioral strategies; increasing the level of internality of the locus of personality control, as well as reducing the severity of stress and actualization of resources for its overcoming. **Results.** Addictive men prefer to engage in confrontation with others with a clear sense of self-pity. Women are oriented towards obtaining effective and emotional support and delegating personal responsibility. Psychocorrectional group sessions contribute to the manifestation of active and goal-oriented strategies of effective resolution of difficulties. The increase of self-control,

acceptance of responsibility, as well as the decrease in susceptibility to stress with the increase in internality of the personality are resources for the formation of constructive behavior of alcohol-addicted patients. **Discussion.** The externality of the addicts control locus and low stress resistance indicate a variant of the destructive manifestation of personal resources. The formation of a cognitive and practical basis for functional strategies is possible through a comprehensive rehabilitation process.

### Keywords

difficult life situation, alcohol addiction, strategies for overcoming difficult life situations, coping, dysfunctional behavior, psychocorrection, training impact.

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### Introduction

The realities of modern society expose people to the need to overcome difficult life situations, without losing their own effectiveness. The success of the interaction of the individual with the surrounding world lies in the assessment and relief of stress, its timely reduction. In this regard, the predominance of constructive and functional strategies in the behavioral repertoire of the individual has special significance for their personality, which is also one of the factors of integrity, stability and adaptability of the personality (Abdurakhmanov, 2019). The integral indicator of a difficult life situation is a disruption of the adaptation mechanism, an increase in the intensity of psychological stress (Evtushenko, Karnaukhov, 2018).

The impact of a difficult life situation on an individual manifests itself in obstacles to its full functioning. Under conditions of a difficult life situation, a person needs changes and restructuring (Nartova-Bochaver, 1997). Restructuring requires an increase in social activity when choosing resources and strategies to overcome a difficult life situation (Parfenova, 2009).

The focus of attention of researchers in the field of psychology of coping behavior has for the most part been concentrated on the study of general and age-related features of the behavior repertoire of an individual without pronounced pathologies and deviations (Heim, 1988; Lazarus, 1998; Nartova-Bochaver, 1997; Kryukova, 2007; Kossova, 2005; Covered, 2006). Separately, the behavior and cognitive assessment of patients with chronic alcoholism in the context of encountering with difficulties was studied (Biggs, Brough & Drummond, 2019; Kelly, Humphreys & Ferri, 2020; Spivakovskaya, Lutsenko, 2021; Tsapenko, 2021).

Constructive behavior and the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and skills for coping with difficulties not only serves as a factor of personality protection from destructive phenomena, but also as a factor that contributes to the recovery, actualization of the adaptive potential, the formation of life experience without addiction and the development of the ability to resist the influence of the external environment for persons exposed to narcological diseases (Fadeeva, Lanovaya, 2024).

The realities are characterized by a greater normalization of the lifestyle, including latent or irregular drinking regardless of gender. There is a unification of condemnation of female alcoholism in society, which leads to its universality as a disease (Mandel, 2018; Stepanova, Salimova, 2020; Shaidukova, 2005).

In addition, the data on the need to revise the concept of treatment and rehabilitation of addictive patients are mainly due to the low rehabilitation potential of patients, the severity of anosognosia (Yalton, 2017), along with the lack of stability of external and internal motivation, the weakness of the "I-concept" and the lack of environmental and internal resources to cope with difficulties (Shaidukova, 2005). The task arises of forming and subsequent implementation of a group training impact program that contributes to the corrective and auxiliary effect in terms of constructive and socially acceptable behavior in the addictive category of the population (Bordonosenko, 2023a).

Thus, the goal of the study is to research the strategies for overcoming difficult life situations among men and women with alcohol addiction, to develop a training program for accompanying addicts and to evaluate its effectiveness.

The main goals of the developed correctional measures can be highlighted as follows: formation of cognitive and practical foundations of skills for the use of effective and problem-oriented strategies in men and women with alcohol dependence, as well as reduction of dysfunctional and maladaptive behavior; increasing the level of internality of the personality control locus as well as reducing the degree of stress and actualization of resources for its overcoming (Bordonosenko, 2023b).

## Methods

### *Sample*

An experimental study of 120 respondents (resp.) was conducted on the basis of the Lugansk Republican Narcological Dispensary, where some author's studies were previously conducted (Bordonosenko, 2023a). A group of alcohol-dependent respondents (group 1) with stage I-II disease (60 reps.) was formed, of which 30 men (average age 44.6 years) and 30 women (average age 45.1 years).

After the initial presentation of psychological tests (Overcoming Difficult Life Situations (ODLS) test; questionnaire "Methods of controlling behavior" Lazarus R., Folkman S. (Kryukova, Kufiyak, 2007); questionnaire determining the tendency to develop stress

(according to T. Nemchin and S. Taylor); questionnaire "Level of subjective control" (LSC) Bazhin EF, Golyukina EA, Etkind LM; Michigan alcohol screening test), an experimental group was formed for further participation in the cycle of sessions developed within the framework of this study. The experimental group included 10 men (average age 46.2 years) and 10 women (average age 47.4 years) with I and II stages of chronic alcohol addiction. A control group was also formed to search for indicators of program effectiveness: 10 men (average age 45.9 years) and 10 women (average age 46.2 years) with stage I and II disease.

In addition, respondents without a history of alcohol dependence (Group 2) were studied, consisting of 30 men (average age 43.3 years) and 30 women (average age 38.3 years). Respondents in Group 2 are medical staff of the Lugansk Republican Clinical Psychoneurological Hospital.

### ***Techniques***

The psychodiagnostic toolkit includes:

1. Test "Overcoming Difficult Life Situations" in the adaptation of Vodopyanova N. E. (Vodopyanova, 2009);
2. Questionnaire "Methods of coping behavior" Lazarus R., Folkman S. (Krukova, Kufiak, 2007);
3. Questionnaire determining the tendency to develop stress (by Nemchin T. A. and Taylor S.) (Raigorodsky, 2001);
4. Questionnaire "Level of Subjective Control";
5. Michigan Alcoholism Screening Test (MAST).

### ***Data processing***

Statistical data processing was carried out using the Statistica program 13.3. The non-parametric U-criterion of Mann-Whitney was used to identify differences in the results of non-addicted and addicted respondents, as well as differences due to gender, differences between the control and experimental groups. The Spearman rank correlation method was used to identify features of choosing strategies to overcome difficult life situations in men and women with alcohol addiction. The Wilcoxon T-criterion was used to evaluate the effectiveness of the developed training program in the experimental group.

## Results

### *Description of training impact*

The training impact involved 8 group meetings in a mixed composition. The selection of participants in the group was carried out in compliance with the ethical regulations and voluntary consent of patients, as well as taking into account the severity of the level of their maladaptive behavior strategies in combination with stress exhaustion and predominant externality of personality.

The program was developed based on the elements of cognitive-behavioral therapy aimed at creating a cognitive and practical basis for functional skills and working with beliefs (Beerse, Van Lith, & Stanwood, 2020); gestalt approach was integrated into the therapy to build the foundations for recognizing, monitoring and verbalizing one's own state; elements of an existential approach were integrated to confront the boundaries of the self and explore the images of the self-concept; body-oriented therapy techniques combined with art techniques were integrated to ensure the relaxation component of the sessions (Kelly, Humphreys & Ferri, 2020).

The program of psychocorrectional sessions is presented in Appendix.

### *Screening test for alcoholism*

According to the Michigan Alcoholism Screening Test, no alcohol dependence was detected among respondents in Group 2. The suspicion of the syndrome of heavy alcohol use in this group for 10% of men (3 respondents) and 3.3% of women (1 respondent) is an intermediate stage of abusive drinking behavior and cannot be correlated with the established diagnosis. The subjects in Group 2 do not have a history of diagnosed alcohol dependence. In Group 1, alcohol addiction was found in 100% of the subjects (60 respondents), during the period of diagnostics, the respondents were patients of narcological departments.

### *Overcoming difficult life situations*

The application of the test "Overcoming Difficult Life Situations" in the adaptation of N.E. Vodopyanova reflects the tendency towards increased irritability, conflict behavior, and aggressive tendencies in men with chronic alcoholism (SD = 14.2). At the same time, the behavioral repertoire is characterized by a tendency towards frequent unjustified and exaggerated self-pity (SD = 10.3). The tendency to delegate responsibility to the reference group is observed in women with addiction when coping with difficulties, along with

the expectation of emotional support and interest in improving their well-being (SD = 23.4). However, negative experiences do not find their constructive resolution and lead to valuing alcohol as a means to cope with stress (SD = 24). The respondents with addiction tend to have a similar cognitive appraisal of difficulties, forming distinct negative images of possible consequences, along with a decrease in goal-oriented and problem-oriented behavior.

Training sessions can reduce maladaptive manifestations of self-pity (Temp. = 0 in men and Temp. = 5 in women). The activity-oriented component of overcoming difficulties, control over the situation becomes more pronounced in men (Temp. = 3) and women (Temp.= 10) with alcohol addiction after attending training sessions (Uemp = 98), which may indicate an increase in the ability to analyze the situation, plan and execute the necessary actions to resolve the problem.

### ***Coping strategies***

In the experimental group, the questionnaire "Ways of Adaptive Behavior" by Lazarus R. and Folkman S. indicates a marked predominance of confrontation combined with avoidance of difficulties among men (70% of respondents) with low self-control (90% of respondents), indicating impulsiveness and loss of purposefulness of behavior. Attending the training sessions reduces excessive tension of maladaptive coping strategies. Before attending the training, women had a pronounced need for social support (80% of respondents), low levels of responsibility (90% of respondents) and problem-solving planning (100% of respondents).

The impact of training sessions increases the tendency to choose constructive behavior strategies. It can be concluded that the training impact contributes to a positive dynamics and change in behavior towards greater adaptability. Moderate use of confrontation in difficult life situations indicates the formation of skills of constructive defense of one's own position, which is confirmed statistically: Temp.= 9 in men and Temp.= 3 in women. The results indicate a change in favor of a more independent and active resolution of difficulties (Temp.= 1 in men and Temp.= 0 in women).

The given sessions increase acceptance of responsibility, establish a causal link between personal contribution to the resolution of a situation, as well as the consequences of such intervention (Temp.= 0 in men and Temp.= 6 in women) and reduce the likelihood of accumulation of unresolved situations (Temp.= 3,5 in men and Temp.= 6 in women). Maladaptive manifestations are preserved in patients not involved in psychocorrection.

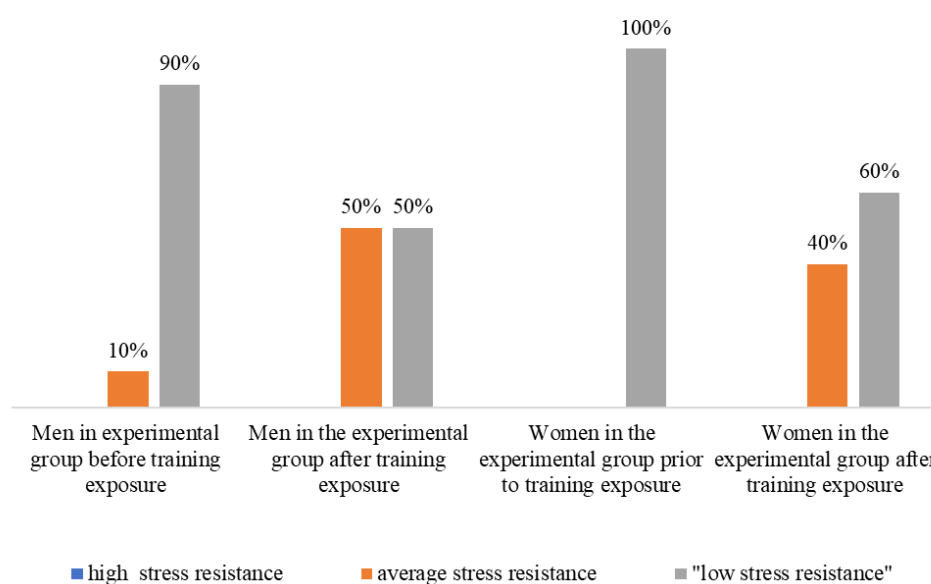
### ***Tendency to develop stress***

Indicators according to the scales of the questionnaire determining the tendency to develop stress (according to T. A. Nemchin and S. Taylor) in men and women with alcohol dependence before and after the training are presented in Figure 1.

Before attending the group sessions, the pronounced stress state and low stress resistance indicate insufficient stability of the alcohol-addict respondents and the development of negative consequences in the absence of appropriate measures (see Figure 1). The intensity of stress in addicted men and women may be intensified through ineffective responses to difficult life situations, thereby encouraging them to repeat alcohol consumption. Training sessions contribute to increasing patients' stress resilience. Training impact acts as a measure that prevents the development of a stressful state, and also promotes the mastery of skills of self-regulation of behavior, relaxation techniques, and reassessment of the situation (Temp.= 6.5 in men and Temp. = 0 in women). A high tendency to develop stress is characteristic of the respondents of the control group, who did not attend the sessions (Uemp = 125.5).

**Figure 1**

*Correlation of stress resistance levels of men and women in the experimental group before and after training impact according to the questionnaire determining the tendency to develop stress (according to T.A. Nemchin and S. Taylor)*



### ***Level of subjective control***

Let us consider at the results obtained by the LSC questionnaire (Bazhin E.F., Golinkina E.A., Etkind L.M.). In the absence of appropriate corrective measures, the personality of alcohol-addict men and women is characterized by a clear predominance of externality in all the studied spheres. Significant events, regardless of their scale and emotional charge, are perceived as the result of the influence of uncontrollable circumstances from the outside (100% of respondents). Building the foundation for the manifestation of internality of the personality of alcohol-addicted people will contribute to the increase in self-efficacy and the sense of control over situations, the ability to take actions to transform them. Despite the previously identified importance of receiving social support, women with alcohol addiction are not inclined to show initiative and responsibility both in the family (70% of respondents) and in interpersonal communication (100% respondents), expecting active actions from their environment. Passive position and delegation of responsibility on others is also noted in addicts, regardless of gender, in relation to health, revealing passive position in treatment and manifestations of alcoholic anosognosia (100% of men and 100% of women).

Group sessions promote responsibility in the area of emotionally positive events in 50% of men (5 respondents) and 30% of women (3 respondents), which is confirmed statistically:  $Temp. = 6$  for men and  $Temp. = 5.5$  for women. Respondents who attended the training sessions show a greater degree of general subjective control ( $U_{emp} = 90$ ) and internality in the area of achievements rather than those in the control group ( $U_{emp} = 101$ ). The training effect contributes to an increase in responsibility in situations related to family interaction in 40% of men (4 respondents) and 50% of women (5 respondents), but significant indicators were identified only in women ( $Temp. = 2$ ), which is likely to be due to their greater orientation to interaction with other people, getting attention and empathy. However, externality in the area of health at this stage is not subject to correction, which is presumably due to the chronic course of addiction and the progression of the disease, along with manifestations of anosognosia and unstable internal motivation for sobriety.

### **Discussion**

The study allows us to conclude about the distinct manifestation of maladaptive and non-constructive strategies among men and women with alcohol addiction. For patients with this narcological disease, the phenomenon of alcohol degradation is characteristic, which, most likely, has an effect on the absence of intersexual differences in preferred strategies for coping with difficult life situations (Bratus', 1988). For respondents with



alcohol addiction, it is characteristic to manifest hostility in combination with high levels of aggression and confrontation with reduced self-control, as well as avoiding responsibility and the need for effective resolution of the situation (Folomkin, Veprencova, 2021). Psychoactive drugs act as a leading component in coping with difficult life situations (Beerse, Van Lith & Stanwood, 2020). The social support process also has a pseudo-adaptive character: when the basic strategy of "search for social support" develops, the patient is oriented towards the local alcoholic environment, and not towards the prosocial supportive behavior (Belokolodov, Malkova, 2016).

Given that alcohol consumption has a destructive effect on the nervous system and higher nervous activity, the uncoped psychoemotional stress in maladaptive behavior also reduces the resistance to the influence of stress situations (Saunders, Degenhardt, Reed & Poznyak, 2019). Alcohol addicts, are more characterised by a high propensity to develop stress, a general depletion of internal personality resources (Castillo-Carniglia, Keyes, Hasin & Cerdá, 2019). Taking into account the data on the pathogenesis of alcohol dependence, it is noted that in addictive women this maladaptive mechanism proceeds rapidly and intensively, which is due to the high progression of the disease and more severe clinical manifestations in general (Bohan, Ankudinova, Mandel, 2013).

It is important to note the pronounced lack of resources for coping with difficulties that connect the personal characteristics of the addict and the social situation: deformed and negative "self-concept" in combination with a lack of manifestations of empathy and affiliation, externality of the locus of control, predominantly in all areas of social relations (Milayeva, 2023; Stepanova, Salimova, 2020). The mentioned characteristics are evaluated as destructive psychological factors that enhance the individual needs of addicts for alcoholic beverages (Goncharova, 2022). A distinctive feature of this model is the absence of factors that ensure the preservation and stability of the psychological well-being of patients, which can additionally enhance maladaptation (Yaltonsky, 2017). In the context of the model presented above, addiction acts as a maladaptive, stress-coping behavior. The studies of Castillo-Carniglia et al. (2019) also indicate a direct connection between the effectiveness of overcoming difficulties and a decrease in the frequency of relapses.

The addict's behavior largely depends on how the current or potential situation is perceived and assessed, the level of development of basic coping resources is also important: self-confidence, competence, degree of recognition of the presence of addiction, self-control (Barman, 2019; Khantzian, 2021). In the situation of inclusion of alcohol addicts in the process of mastering the cognitive and practical foundations of adaptive strategies, the progressive process of the disease can become controllable and correctable (Belokolodov, Malkova, 2016; Rachok, 2001).

Considering the need to form a stable inner motivation, to overcome the contradictory behavior of patients, as well as to develop adaptive and functional strategies, during the comprehensive rehabilitation process, both individual and mixed group classes can be conducted (Breuninger et al., 2020). Preference is often given to personality-oriented therapy, and the implementation of the sobriety program is also monitored (Kuhlemeier et al., 2021).

### **Conclusion**

According to the obtained results, alcohol addicted men and women are prone to pronounced aggression and confrontation in combination with low self-control and responsibility, along with avoidance of active and proactive problem solving. In addition to these maladaptive manifestations, addicts are characterized by a pronounced orientation towards receiving social support and sympathy from their environment, orientation towards a local alcoholic social environment and evaluation of alcohol as a means of relieving psychological and emotional stress.

The developed training program demonstrates its effectiveness in the aspect of increasing the expression of active and targeted strategies for overcoming, aimed at effective problem solving, both in alcohol addicted men and in women. Increasing tendencies towards self-control, acceptance of responsibility in combination with control over the stressful situation with an increase in the internality of the individual, as well as decreasing tendency to stress development act as important intrapersonal resources, contributing to the formation of constructive behavior of alcohol-dependent patients.

The data of the conducted research may be useful not only in the situation of narcological treatment against the background of a given diagnosis, but also act as a basis for the preparation of psychoprophylactic programmes and educational events among the adolescence and youth.

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## Appendix

### ***Group Session Program for Men and Women with alcohol addiction***

**Goal.** To increase the level of expression of adaptive coping strategies in difficult life situations in men and women with alcohol addiction, along with a reduction in dysfunctional and maladaptive behavioral strategies; to increase the level of internality of the locus of control of the personality, as well as to reduce the severity of stress and actualisation of resources to overcome it.

**Objectives:** to provide general psychological education to men and women with alcohol addiction attending training sessions; to teach the skills of recognizing, monitoring, and verbalizing their own emotional state and identifying the causes of its occurrence; teach adaptive behavior skills; teach skills for dealing with aggressive behavior, expressed in confrontation and anger; develop the ability of self-regulation and strengthen the ability to differentiate personal experiences; teach skills of taking responsibility and reducing the expression of the avoidance strategy; activate positive personal resources and increase internality as a personality characteristic; investigate and integrate the "Self-concept" images of the group members, increase their level of reflection and build internal psychological supports, positive personal resources for overcoming difficult life situations; form the cognitive basis of confident behavior, open expression of feelings; form the cognitive basis of understanding psychological barriers in interpersonal communication and practical work on forming, consolidating the skills of their overcoming; consolidate skills of open expression of both positive and negative feelings of the participants of the training based on the actualization of their personal experience; activate positive intra-individual resources of the training participants, self-reflection and positive reassessment of the main aspects of the personality.

**Group inclusion criteria:** Alcohol-addicted men and women who show a high level of expression of maladaptive coping strategies in difficult life situations: aggression, confrontation, avoidance, seeking social support and psychoactive drugs (alcohol), along with low stress resistance and a predominance of externality of the locus of control.

Form of conducting sessions: group work of a mixed group (10 men with alcohol addiction and 10 women with alcohol addiction).

**Methods and techniques** used: cognitive behavioral therapy: formation of the cognitive basis of functional skills using thematic information blocks; methods of existential therapy: Methods of clarification and elaboration, methods of "life path (continuum)," methods of confrontation with existential boundaries "I" (collisions with boundaries of proximity),

methods of deepening freedom of choice and responsibility: awareness of maladaptive defenses and methods of evading responsibility, motivation letter to the future; elements of body-oriented therapy; gestalt approach in therapy: techniques "Here and Now," "Building Living Chains," "Integrating Awareness," "I Like It/I Don't Like It"; art-therapeutic techniques: Metaphorical self-portrait, "Map of my soul».

**Total work time, frequency of meetings:** 8 psychocorrectional meetings, 3 times a week.

**Duration of the correctional session:** 8 sessions of 90 minutes each.

**Expected result:** Reduction of the severity of maladaptive strategies for overcoming difficult life situations, as well as an increase in indicators related to functional and adaptive behavior: acceptance of responsibility, planning for solving the problem, positive reassessment of the situation.

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## Author Contributions

**Svetlana S. Kuzenko** – formulation of the research concept, development of the research methodology; preparation of a plan and scientific editing of the text of the article; preparation of appendices of the article and description of the program of psychocorrection group classes; translation and preparation of the article in English.

**Anastasia S. Bordonosenko** – review of studies on the article problem, statistical processing of empirical data in the Statistica 13.3 program, interpretation of study results, formulation of conclusions, development and approbation of the group training session program, formation of methodological recommendations.

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### **Conflict of Interest Information**

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.