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### Alcohol and self-esteem

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#### Abstract

Alcohol consumption is major public health concerns and is prevalent in the society. Globally, around one in seven adults are daily smokers and one in five adults consumes alcohol excessively at least once a month. Alcohol and drug abuse has been showing an increasing trend in India. Global states report on alcohol reported that annual prevalence of drinking among adult males in India is 21.4%. Report revealed that among the total drug uses alcohol (43%) was the most commonly used drug. The alcohol consumption have a greater impact on the disease burden than either behaviour alone and beyond health consequences, bring significant social and economic losses to public health, such as ill-health related costs.

Psychological factors, such as stress and depression, have been identified for behaviour change interventions for smoking cessation and to reduce alcohol consumption. Self-esteem is another potentially important psychological factor in targeting addictive behaviours, though it has not been studied extensively in terms of its associations with alcohol consumption.

Global self-esteem is defined as an interpretation of one's self-worth and the beliefs and perceptions about oneself in a favourable or unfavourable way. It has been suggested as an important motivational factor to drive behaviour, as people with high self-esteem are likely to feel good about themselves and engage in behaviours that protect or improve their health and wellbeing, whereas low self-esteem has been shown to be positively associated with substance use.

**Keywords:** Alcohol, self-esteem, addiction, abstinence, alcoholism

#### Introduction

Alcoholism, or the dependence on and compulsive consumption of alcohol, is a serious disease that can have serious consequences <sup>[1]</sup>.

Alcoholism is seen as the world's highly prevalent public health problem and it is a matter of serious concern not confined to any group culture/country. Alcohol and drug abuse has been showing an increasing trend in India. Global states report on alcohol reported that annual prevalence of drinking among adult males in India is 21.4%. Report revealed that among the total drug uses alcohol (43%) was the most commonly used drug.

Alcohol use may harm not only the individual drinker but also the lives of their partners, families, friends, work colleagues, and their communities. It has become a matter of global concern because of impact on social and economic burden in societies. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that there are around 3.3 million deaths worldwide per year because of harmful use of alcohol. Alcohol-related deaths make up nearly 6% of global deaths per year <sup>[2]</sup>.

#### Signs of Alcoholism

According to a national survey in 2015, over 15 million adults in the United States abuse alcohol or suffer from alcoholism. Some of the signs of alcoholism include the following:

- Inability to stay in control of drinking alcohol
- Inability to refrain from drinking alcohol
- Suffering from shaking, sweating, and mood swings when you stop drinking alcohol
- Alcohol use interferes with the ability to maintain a job or relationship
- Withdrawal from hobbies and responsibilities so you can drink
- Drinking alcohol secretly
- Having the urge to drink alcohol as soon as you wake up
- Not remembering what happened while on a drinking binge

#### Alcoholism and Low Self-Esteem

The effects of alcoholism can also be far-reaching and lead to problems with mental health.

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One of the effects frequently seen amongst alcoholics is the development of low self-esteem. Self-esteem is defined as the way we view ourselves. Individuals with high self-esteem tend to view themselves in a positive light and have high confidence levels. In contrast, individuals with low self-esteem tend to have negative images of themselves and lack the ability to believe in their own self-worth and abilities <sup>[3]</sup>.

Low self-esteem is often seen in individuals who have problems with alcohol. Although self-esteem tends to increase in the beginning stages of alcoholism, it eventually tends to decrease as alcoholics become more and more isolated and lose connections with people who used to be important in their lives. This decrease in self-esteem can lead alcoholics to accept that they will never escape addiction, thereby preventing them from seeking help <sup>[3]</sup>.

### Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is how a person views his or herself. Very often, this idea we have of ourselves is at least partially the result of others' opinions. It's our self-esteem that determines how we process those opinions and gives us our sense of self.

While self-esteem may seem like a subjective idea, it can actually be calculated quantitatively, and different things can drastically alter that number either positively or negatively.

Things that can affect self-esteem are not limited to:

- Your thoughts and perceptions
- How other people react to you
- Experiences at home, school, work, and in the community
- Illness, disability, or injury
- Age
- Role and status in society
- Media messages
- Exercise or level of physical activity
- Substance use
- Personality disorders

Because of how people often talk about improving one's self-esteem, there is a misconception that the higher the self-esteem the better. A higher self-esteem, however, does not directly correlate to a healthier life. In fact, determining a healthy self-esteem should actually be viewed as a curve on a graph. A realistic view of one's self, without constant worry they've been embarrassed or that they need to maintain an air of superiority, is considered a healthy middle-ground. Self-esteem that is too low or high can be harmful to one's health <sup>[4]</sup>.

Self-esteem is the reflection of the understanding of oneself and sense of personal value. Our perceptions toward ourselves (the ego) are developed through the process of acting, and then thinking about our actions as well as how others perceive those actions. Self-esteem refers to our feelings about ourselves or the value we have for ourselves <sup>[5]</sup>. In fact, it can be said that self-esteem is a general judgment about ourselves <sup>[6]</sup>.

Most people's thoughts and feelings about themselves are partly based on their daily experiences. The score someone obtains in a test, how his/her friends behave toward him/her, and life's fluctuations or ups and downs can all have a temporary effect on that individual's vision of him/herself.

However, it should be noted that self-esteem is something more fundamental than "fluctuations" related to situational changes. For people with basic and high self-esteem, natural fluctuations can lead to a special feeling toward the environment and themselves, but only to a limited extent.

On the contrary, to people with poor self-esteem, these "fluctuations" can mean the whole world (and therefore that individual is highly influenced by them). Often, the feeling of people with low self-esteem toward themselves is determined by their current actions. Such people are constantly in need of external positive experiences in order to overcome negative thoughts and feelings they are constantly influenced by. In such situations, a good feeling (e.g. a good test score and etc.) can only have a temporary effect. However, a healthy person's self-esteem is based on their abilities to know themselves accurately, as well as acceptance of and value for themselves (no feelings of humiliation and contempt). This means that an individual can realistically recognize his/her own strengths and weaknesses (which everyone possesses) <sup>[7]</sup>.

The features of high self-esteem are those in which someone believes he/she is important and the world would even be better because he/she lives in it, believes in himself with confidence, can ask for help, and trust his decisions. However, the features of low self-esteem are those in which the individual does not think he/she is important, expects others to humiliate him, does not trust others, and thinks nobody likes him/her. Such an individual also feels loneliness and separation from others, and is not interested in himself and others <sup>[7]</sup>.

Self-esteem is a very certain and specific topic in psychology which is referred to every other psychological concept or domain including personality (e.g. shyness or self-consciousness), behavioral (functioning), cognitive (orientation) and clinical domains (e.g. stress and depression) <sup>[8]</sup>.

External factors such as social prestige (parents), wealth, education level, and job title do not have a meaningful effect (as often imagined) on self-esteem <sup>[9]</sup>. Attitudes and behaviors of parents, acceptance of children, clear demands and respecting their actions in a certain area are of determinant affairs which cause the feeling of being valuable in children <sup>[10]</sup>.

The relationship between self-esteem and psychological satisfaction (e.g. depression, social anxiety and loneliness) can be an important factor in understanding the relationship between self-esteem and health. Many researchers have found several relationships between self-esteem, optimism and inadaptability <sup>[11]</sup>. Furthermore, the relationship between self-esteem and many socioeconomic, behavioral, and psychosocial features and diseases has been reported <sup>[12]</sup>.

In addition, the Mental Health and Counseling Center of the university of Texas also reported that low self-esteem can lead to lack of development and/or tendency toward drugs or alcohol consumption <sup>[8]</sup>.

Environmental stressors are related to the reduction of well-being, prosperity and health which accordingly are also related to smoking and alcohol consumption. Smoking is significantly correlated with alcohol consumption <sup>[13]</sup>. Self-esteem is correlated with regular exercise which can help in the avoidance of drugs and narcotics. Moreover, consumption of such drugs, narcotics and alcohol is correlated with alcohol and drug abuse among peers and friend groups <sup>[14]</sup>. Self-esteem is directly correlated with

exercise, but has a reverse correlation with drug addiction<sup>[15]</sup>. Lack of self-esteem can be the cause of many social problems including some crimes and drug abuse; although it may not be the major factor for such cases, it often plays a special role in this regard<sup>[16]</sup>.

Wheeler reported that the higher the self-esteem, the lower the likelihood of drug abuse in girls. In addition, Wheeler concluded that increased self-esteem and academic performance improvement among young girls can have benefits in decision-making related to sexual intercourse and drugs tendency<sup>[17]</sup>.

On the other hand, addiction often negatively influences family and work relationships and perhaps leads to frequent loss of jobs in an individual<sup>[18]</sup>.

Alcohol and self-esteem mutually impact one another. Alcohol use can temporarily raise or lower self-esteem, but it typically creates lower self-esteem in the long-term. Low or high self-esteem can be a contributing factor to alcohol abuse and dependence, but an appropriate level of self-esteem is a powerful tool in the battle against alcoholism<sup>[19]</sup>.

### **Alcoholism Triggered by Unhealthy Self-Esteem**

Alcohol abuse goes hand-in-hand with a harmful self-esteem. Self-esteem that is too low or high can be a trigger for someone to start drinking. Though they are for opposite reasons, both lead to a potential for dependency.

### **Filling the Void of Low Self-Esteem with Alcohol**

People who battle low self-esteem hold themselves with little regard. They don't believe that their thoughts or opinions hold as much value as others' and that they won't have the same level of success as those close to them. Low self-esteem can be an issue in its own right, or it can be the result of a number of different personality disorders, such as Borderline Personality Disorder.

Anyone who suffers from a disorder that makes them feel like an outsider may experience lowered self-esteem as a result. This also makes them more likely to turn to alcohol as a misguided way of "self-medication." As a depressant, alcohol works to dull their mind and stop them from obsessing over things they don't like about themselves. As with any disorder, however, using alcohol as a means of self-medication can cause addiction faster.

### **Reinforcing Fragile High Self-Esteem with Alcohol**

Having a high self-esteem can be just as dangerous when dealing with the use of alcohol. People with a "Fragile High Self-Esteem" think highly of themselves but are sensitive to opinions that call that into question. So, these individuals constantly look for things that can defend or increase those feelings.

People with fragile high self-esteem can often be identified by them hinging their self-worth on their performance in regular tasks. Failure can be a trigger for them to start using or become aggressive at others, trying to tear them down to feel better about themselves.

### **Fluctuations in Self-Esteem from Alcoholism**

Though it is often overlooked due to it being legal, alcohol is a mind-altering substance. This means it can change the way the brain functions and perceives the world around it. As a result, alcohol can damage someone's self-esteem.

Drastic changes in self-esteem, either raising or lowering it, can hasten the development of a dependency on alcohol.

Alcohol is widely used as a crutch for those suffering from self-esteem issues, whether as a false means of increased self-esteem or just to push the nagging voice from their mind. Using alcohol in this way, however, is the first step toward dependency and addiction<sup>[20]</sup>.

You may think that low self-esteem is only a small part of addiction. However, the number one factor causing alcohol or drug addiction is low self-esteem. People with low self-esteem may feel:

- Inferior to others
- Insignificant
- Incompetent
- Like they have lost control of their lives
- Lonely, depressed, or anxious
- Guilt, shame, or anger

All of these issues feed into a person's sense of self. They may reach out to alcohol to hide their true feelings and pain. But what starts out as low self-esteem will develop into dependence and addiction to alcohol. The individual who thought that alcohol may help their problem has discovered that alcohol has made their situation much worse. Not only do they have self-esteem problems to overcome, but they also now have an alcohol addiction. This can create their lives to spiral out of control even more.

### **Ways that Low Self-Esteem Can Develop**

Most people don't develop a low sense of self-worth overnight. It is a gradual process that may take months or years to fully emerge. Some ways that a person may develop low self-esteem include:

- A negative perception of body image
- Childhood abuse or neglect
- Failure at school or work (or perceived failure)
- Relationship troubles
- Having a family history of depression or other mental illnesses
- Financial issues
- Comparison to a family member or friend (e.g. Why can't I be like him/her?)
- Chronic illness
- Perpetual negative views regarding personal ability or appearance<sup>[21]</sup>

### **Treatment for Alcohol and Self-Esteem Issues**

If one's already fallen victim to alcoholism and requires treatment, that doesn't make the issues of self-esteem secondary. Recognition of the underlying issues that damage self-esteem can be the first step to a better life. Otherwise, it is likely for the individual to relapse. Any issues that deal with someone's self-esteem should be considered at the initial assessment. Dealing with how the afflicted sees themselves is an invaluable step on the road to recovery<sup>[22]</sup>.

Battles with self-esteem can begin at a young age and, with the stigma that comes with mental health, many are hesitant to talk about it. Know that you are not alone. If you, or someone you know, suffer from alcoholism, issues with self-esteem could be a substantial factor. Only looking at the addiction can be setting yourself or your loved one up for relapse. If you don't know what to do about your issues with

alcohol and self-esteem, or even where to start, try reaching out to a dedicated treatment provider. They're here as your first step towards a new life of sobriety <sup>[22]</sup>.

### **How to Build Self-Esteem during Recovery from an Addiction**

- Use Affirmation
- Forgive Yourself
- Accept Compliments
- Be Kind
- Make Changes

Self-esteem refers to an individual's overall subjective feelings of personal value and self-worth. It can have an effect on many areas of life, including substance use and recovery.

Low self-esteem has been linked to the onset of drug use, and research has also shown a connection between low self-esteem and behavioral addictions including internet addiction, eating problems, and compulsive buying <sup>[1]</sup>. While alcohol, drugs, or compulsive behaviors can initially mask insecurities and even make people feel more confident, these feelings are short-lived.

Over time, grappling with the effect of addiction can harm a person's self-esteem and make recovery more difficult. Whether you're contemplating doing something about your addiction, or you're already on the road to recovery, these five exercises can help rebuild your self-esteem and improve your well-being and outlook on life.

### **Write Your Own Affirmation**

An affirmation is a simple, positive statement you say to yourself. Write an affirmation that reflects how you want to feel about yourself, for example: "I am proud of myself."

Repeating these affirmations can help transform negative self-talk into a more optimistic view of the self.

It is important to remember, however, that these affirmations take time. Give yourself a month of saying it out loud to yourself every day.

One study found that in individuals with low self-esteem, self-affirmations helped improve their attitudes toward health risk advice <sup>[2]</sup>. This might be particularly helpful for people who are working to recover from a substance or alcohol use disorder.

Affirmations may help people feel more receptive and motivated to participate in treatment and recovery.

### **Forgive Yourself for Past Mistakes**

People who have struggled with an addiction are often plagued by self-blame, which worsens low self-esteem. Addiction can really affect your judgment and impulse control, so you say and do things you later regret.

Beating yourself up about what you did in the past will only increase the likelihood of relapse, so now is the time to recognize and acknowledge what you did, let go of punishing yourself, and commit to doing things differently in the future <sup>[3]</sup>. In other words, never let past wrongs define your present.

Research also supports the importance of self-forgiveness. Studies suggest that people who forgive themselves for past mistakes experience less anxiety and depression <sup>[4]</sup>.

### **Self-Forgiveness**

Taking responsibility for your behaviors, allowing yourself to feel remorse, and then looking for ways to do better in the

future are some of the key steps in self-forgiveness.

### **Accept Compliments**

Research has shown that people who have low self-esteem have a difficult time accepting and benefiting from compliments from other people <sup>[5]</sup>. This is challenging not only for a person's self-esteem but also makes it harder for people who care about that individual to express their positive feelings for that person.

Why is it so hard for people with low self-esteem to accept a compliment? It happens in part because people doubt the sincerity of the compliments, a problem that is then compounded by feelings of embarrassment over the thought that they are being patronized.

People with low self-esteem often miss opportunities to build their self-esteem simply by acknowledging the kind words of others. Some things you can do instead the next time someone gives you a compliment include:

- Resist the urge to dismiss it.
- Assume that they are sincere.
- Say thank you and enjoy the compliment.
- Note how the compliment reflects your strengths.
- Do Something Kind Every Day

Research also suggests that engaging in prosocial behavior, or actions designed to benefit others, can also play a role in improving self-esteem. One study found that prosocial behavior was actually a predictor for self-esteem, especially in women. Women who reported engaging in more prosocial actions also had higher levels of self-reported self-esteem <sup>[6]</sup>.

One way of increasing the appreciation that others express toward you is to do kind things for them. You don't have to make a grand gesture; something as simple as holding a door open for another person, giving up a seat on the bus, or giving someone directions if they look lost can elicit a genuine "thank you."

Even if the other person does not express their gratitude, you can bask in the good feeling of having helped another person. You may also consider volunteering to help others in recovery.

### **Start Making Changes**

Self-determination can also play a role in improving self-esteem. Self-determined behaviors are those that people perform of their own volition as a result of conscious, intentional, self-motivated choices <sup>[7]</sup>.

Self-determination is also an important part of recovery from substance and alcohol use. In order to achieve your recovery goals, you need to feel that you have the skills, motivation, and ability to succeed. When slips do happen, however, it can have a detrimental impact on self-determination and self-esteem.

It is important to remember that change takes time. Making self-determined steps in the right direction—even small ones—can play a role in boosting your self-esteem.

Everyone has things they would like to change in their own lives, or in the lives of those around them, but for people with addictions, change happens in stages.

If a major change seems like too much, break it down into smaller acts, and choose to do one a day or one a week, whichever you feel you'll follow through on. With each small change, inwardly celebrate your success in moving toward your goal.

### A Word from Very well

Addiction can make it hard to feel good about yourself and your abilities, especially if you find yourself focusing on past mistakes. Self-esteem can be an important part of the recovery process, so finding ways to build your belief in yourself can make it easier to appreciate your strengths and take note of all of your progress.

Self-help strategies can be a good way to start improving your self-esteem. If you continue to struggle with low-self esteem, talk to your doctor or mental health professional. They can recommend treatments that may help, which may include psychotherapy or medications to treat underlying feelings of depression or anxiety <sup>[23]</sup>.

### Conclusion

Self-esteem had a meaningful role in the individual's tendency to addiction. It is concluded that those who are involved in addiction have a lower self-esteem compared with the ordinary person. Thus, it is necessary to increase an individual's self-esteem in order to decrease their tendency to addiction.

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