

CLINICAL–SOCIAL DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF
ALCOHOLISM DEVELOPMENT AMONG THE
AFGHANISTAN WAR VETERANS

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S ú h r n

Sociálne faktory hrajú dôležitú úlohu pri užívaní alkoholu aj pri vzniku závislosti od tejto psychoaktívnej látky. Rôzne spoločenské vrstvy sa odlišujú aj v spôsobe užívania alkoholu. Zvláštnu, nedávno vzniknutú vrstvu v ruskej spoločnosti tvoria veteráni afgánskej vojny. Užívanie alkoholu a ďalších psychoaktívnych látok veteránmi vietnamskej vojny bolo detailne študované. Informácie o tejto tematike u veteránov afgánskej vojny v ruskej literatúre sú veľmi skúpe.

Autori prezentujú výsledky psychiatrického a psychodiagnostického vyšetrenia 509 veteránov afgánskej vojny (mužov vo veku 23 – 31 rokov). Pri retrospektívnom hodnotení psychického stavu vyšetrených zistili, že počas služby v Afganistane boli vystavení chronickému psychickému stresu a psychotraumatizácii. Chronický stres viedol – u mladých jedincov – k zmenám v hierachii hodnôt, objaveniu sa nových hodnôt a k zmenám postojov. Konzum alkoholu a iných psychoaktívnych látok mal epizodický charakter.

Po návrate domov boli typické epizódy masívnej alkoholizácie s bizarným správaním. Neskorší vývoj vzťahu k alkoholu bol určovaný špecifickým charakterom sociálnych interakcií a mierou adaptácie jedinca v najbližšom okolí.

U 52,3 % vyšetrených sa nezistili prejavy psychickej poruchy, 20,3 % (103 osôb) malo vážnejšie adaptačné problémy po návrate domov. U 18,2 % vyšetrených (96 osôb) sa zistila porucha osobnosti (psychopatizácie) alebo neuróza. U 44 veteránov zistili ľahké organické poruchy spôsobené úrazmi hlavy.

Spôsob užívania alkoholu súvisel s psychickým stavom vyšetrených. V skupine psychicky zdravých veteránov (sem zaradili aj ľudí s ľahkými adaptačnými problémami) prevládalo epizodické pitie alebo abstinovanie. Jediní s adaptačnými poruchami ("expressed combatant accentuation") a s neurotickými poruchami pili alko-

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hol epizodicky alebo nadmerne, v skupinách osôb s prejavmi psychopatizácie a u ľudí s poúrazovými poruchami bol zistený buď abúzus alkoholu alebo závislosť od alkoholu. Alkoholizmus sa v posledných dvoch skupinách vyvíjal veľmi rýchle a má ťažšie následky.

V závere práce autori upozorňujú na špecifická starostlivosti o veteránov afgánskej vojny.

During the last decade the study of alcoholism has been very intensively removed from traditional clinical into social-hygienic and psychological spheres. Social-hygienic, psychological, psychopathological trends are distinguished among the numerous conceptions of alcoholism. These trends study the way of life role and the peculiarities of people's relations in the genesis of alcoholism. They regard alcoholic dependence as nonspecific display of social-psychological insolvency of a personality with due regard to individual features as well as gained features (Ivanets, 1988; Lisicin, 1990). Alcoholization of population partly fulfils a function of the social policy failure compensation. As for the character of alcoholic drink use and abuse, it reflects the contemporary tendencies in society division into strata and the appearance of new social groups in our country, to which, we think, the numerous Afghan war veteran contingent belongs.

Only recently the real information of the war in Afghanistan has become the property of the masses (Lyakhovski, 1991). The process of demarcation of political and psychological war aspects, the separation of "war" from "soldier", the creation of fixed socially positive image of the "Afghan veteran" is slowly developing in public consciousness (Znakov, 1990).

The problem of alcohol and drug abuse by the Vietnamese war veterans is elucidated by details according to the fundamental conception of posttraumatic stress disorders (Ingram Walker, 1982; Figley, 1978; Kelly, 1985). Publications on analogical topic are very rare in national literature. (Lytkin, 1991).

509 male persons (at the age from 23 to 31 years old) those who were on active service in Afghanistan were examined by clinical-psychopathological and complex psychological methods with the analysis of social-psychological data in questionnaires. The examination was held in different periods from 1979 till 1989. The periods of home-coming were from 2 up to 8 years. The examination was held in hospitals, in outpatients departments and in out of clinic conditions.

Retrospective analysis of psychonervous state of the examined people allows us to treat the period of stay in Afghanistan as a period of being in the state of chronic emotional stress without any reliance on concrete active service conditions with due regard to the specific character of the Afghan situation: long isolation from the motherland, uncustomed geographical cultural and climate conditions, peculiarities in relations with the native population, scanty information of real war and political situation, the concept of "enemy's" vagueness, the absence of definite division of "front" and "rear". Most of combatants subjectively marked the feeling of constant "tensity" which did not leave them even in periods free from war activities. Such psychogenic feelings caused episodic or systematic use of drugs or alcoholic drinks (without forming clinical symptoms of dependence on alcohol or drug. Constant psychotraumatism with interaction of plastic structures of young personalities causes the change in the hierarchy of life values, the appearance of new values, the creation of new outlook. Alcohol and drug use of episodic character was regar-

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ded as natural form behaviour in given conditions and as an individual form of adaptation to emergency situation. The examined people were not medically treated on this occasion during their active service in Afghanistan.

After their home-coming the episodes of massive alcoholisation were typical for the period of early adaptation to peace conditions. Being psychogenically conditioned they were accompanied by grotesque forms of alcohol intoxication and expressed euphory. Later on the forms of alcohol use and dynamics of alcoholic dependence were determined by the specific character of so-called institutional interaction (personality-society), personal understanding of the life period in Afghanistan, the level of adaptation to social microsurroundings, the degree of somatoneurological war consequence expression and individual and biological predisposition to the development of alcoholism. The contemporary period of our history itself with state destroying, breaking of life values and social-psychological stereotypes appears to be a powerful reason for population alcoholisation. It is commonly known that the spread of alcoholism directly correlates with the expression and rate of social conflicts and the degree of uncertainty about the future. Groups of people inadequately psychologically defended (here we speak about the veterans of local wars) appear to be the most vulnerable towards the activity of socio-pathogenic factors. Psychological unprotection of the combatants is determined at least by two groups of factors: the contradictory attitude of society towards the problem of the war in Afghanistan with evidently insufficient level of medical and social aid and the presence of individual-personal changes caused by participation in the war in Afghanistan. Taking all above stated information in to consideration we find it purposeful to pick out several combatant groups in medical-psychological respect according to their attitude to alcohol and to the use of alcohol (at nosological and prenosological levels.). We picked out the following combatant groups: mentally sound (52,3 % of the examined persons), persons with "the expressed combatant accentuation" (20,3 %), persons with combatant psychopathisation (Ivanets, 1988; Figley, 1978), persons with neurotic states or "combatant neurotization" (Figley, 1978), and persons with remote consequences of skull injuries (Ingram Walker, 1982; Lytkin, 1991). The structure of alcoholisation and mental disorders among the veterans of the war in Afghanistan is represented in table N 1.

We find it necessary to explain the meaning of the phrase "combatant accentuation". Under "combatant accentuation" we understand characterological changes among the Afghan war veterans after their return to peaceful life. These changes are the most characteristic of the examined people. The main factors in the forming of characterological changes appear to be emotional experiences of the life period, in Afghanistan comparison realization of one's own's "self" "then and there" with contemporary "self" "now and here", the change of outlook determined by the specific character of people's relations, formed in war conditions. We found out some basic features of the accentuation. They are: keen feeling of justice, permanent anxiety and being on the alert, difficulties in creation of personal contacts, and in keeping of the recollections concerning the war in Afghanistan in constant actuality. Temporary and reversible behaviour decompensation was marked out under the influence of such exogenic (especially-psychogenic) factors which demonstrated the heightened demands for the specific "place of the least resistance", or more exactly, when they touched very individual complex of the problems and emotional experiences concerning the war in Afghanistan.

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Table 1 The structure of alcoholisation and neuro-mental disorders among the veterans of war in Afghanistan.

| Degree of alcoholisation | Mental health | Mentally sound | Expressed combatant accentuation | Neurotic states | Combatant psychopathysation | Consequences of skull injuries | In total |
|------------------------------------|---------------|-------------------|----------------------------------|------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------|
| Abstinent | | 52 86,7 19,5 | — | — | — | 8 13 18,2 | 60 100 % 11,8 |
| Episodical alcohol users | | 168 74,3 63,2 | 32 14,2 31,1 | 26 11,5 34,2 | | | 226 100 % 44,4 |
| Alcohol abusers | | 46 26,3 17,3 | 71 40,6 68,9 | 50 28,6 65,8 | 2 1,1 10,0 | 6 3,3 13,6 | 175 100 % 34,4 |
| Alcoholism of I-II degree (extent) | | | | | 12 37,5 | 20 62,5 | 32 100 % |
| Alcoholism of II degree | | | | | 60 | 45,4 | 6,3 |
| In total | | 266 52,3 100 % | 103 20,3 100 % | 76 14,9 100 % | 20 3,9 100 % | 44 8,6 100 % | 509 100 % 100 % |

The group of "mentally sound" combatants consists of people possessing features of the above described accentuation, which is not considerably expressed. As for the characterological changes they were either of fragmentary character with some emphasized features characteristic of accentuation or they were expressed evenly but rather superficially. The use of alcohol in this group does not reach the nosological level. The persons of this group are rather adapted and practically do not complain of their health. According to the domestic hard drinking classification of A. E. Bekhtel (Bekhtyel, 1986) they may be related to the group of people who drink "moderately" or "by chance". According to the speed of alcoholisation course they may be related to the weak progredient and the progredient types. As for the domestic hard drinking dynamics (stereotype) it usually stops at the forming of the initial stage. The use of strong alcoholic drinks in this group is usually determined by social motives, such as satisfaction of social relation requirements and traditions of "war brotherhood". A picture of relative social well-being of combatants is very often deceptive. Introduction of monitoring methods into general questionnaires gives unexpectedly high result in this group. At the same time direct questions and discussions show the absence in this group. This group remains threatened according to neuro-psychic instability and alcohol abuse. This group itself represents a reserve for the replenishment of the other groups where the alcohol dependence is more clinically expressed. Such transitions may be quicker and more massive if the increase of social changes takes place.

The group of persons with "combatant accentuation" is characterized by the presence of retrospectively distinguished, not vividly expressed accentuated features in the life period before the call to military service, by sharp personal reactions to psycho-traumatizing affairs of war situation, by frequent behaviour decompensation in situations of the same kind (formally scornful attitude to the problems of the veterans of war in Afghanistan). In comparison with the first combatant group,

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the alcohol use among the representatives of this group reaches the level of heavy and serious forms of domestic hard drinking and first displays of alcoholism. The prevalence of related psychological dependence together with the reviving of emotional experiences from Afghanistan is characteristic of this group. Such persons usually try to avoid contacts with narcologists because of their sceptical attitude towards the narcological aids. They interpret alcoholisation as an integral part of natural way of life for these persons. Alcohol plays here the role of psycho-pharmacological adjustment of the present disorders and it serves as a mean of emotional strain reduction (in contrast to the first group where the alcohol is used for the euphory purposes). Social relations between the individuals of this group usually presupposes alcohol drinking for the purpose to feel former "war brother hood". Individual pseudo hard drinking forms with high tolerance and first displays of alcoholism are also marked within this group.

The group of combatants with neurotic disorders ("combatant neurotisation") consisted of persons whose neurotic states were formed according to the type of classical neuroses. In these cases the emotional experiences from Afghanistan played the pathoplastic role and the features of combatant accentuation served as the factor weakening the personality, but their influence on the clinical picture was not very essential. The neurotic states of this group representatives were also formed according to the type of paradoxical reactions with the radical changes of life conditions (war-peaceful life). That very variant of neurotic state forming was accompanied by massive alcoholic excesses. Induced pseudo hard drinking periods were noted practically for the first time in their lives during which against the background of disphoro-distymic mood the sharp intensification of the Afghan recollections was marked out. On the whole alcohol use among these combatants was of the domestic character with leading socially and psychologically conditioned motives.

Personal deviations were peculiar to the group of people with "combatant psychopathisation". Such personal deviations reached the level of psychopathic disorders during which, firstly, the appearance of heterogenic individual features was noted and, secondly, there was direct evidence of steady disorders in social adaptation. Clinical radicals were mainly formed in explosive, hysterical and mosaic directions. At this stage of our investigations we find it doubtful to speak about the creation of so-called "reactive psychopathy", the question is about the acquired psychopathic type of reaction. In the history of this group representatives: the following facts were frequently noticed: early predilection for alcohol, features of asocial character in "prewar period", systematic use of alcohol and drugs in Afghanistan, the presence of prolonged infectious diseases and clinically slightly expressed concussion of the brain. The role of the emotional experiences from Afghanistan in behaviour decompensation gradually decreases. Dependence on alcohol in this group of combatants is created catastrophically quickly. In the course of the development of alcoholism the transformation of psychopathic radical takes place, affective disorders not typical for the previous stages appear, the picture of behaviour becomes lasier and more primitive.

For the group of combatants with remote consequences of skull injuries the features of the residually-organic affections are considered to be the main clinical respect. They were marked in the form of through-asthenic symptoms, optic-vestibu-

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lar disturbances, polymorphous vegetative disorders as well as sleep disorders. The creation of alcoholism is tightly connected with the dynamics of somato-neurological state: complex of remaining post-traumatic phenomena may be of rather steady residual character or under the influence of additional exogenic harmful factors (for example alcohol), it may be of a progrediental character. The increase of psycho-organic symptoms with steady similar to psychopathic radical which is mainly represented by explosive and hysterical symptoms becomes characteristic for the last case.

Alcohol dependence among the representatives of this group develops very quickly. The complexity of different stages of alcohol dease of one and the same patient takes place. More often than in the other groups alcoholic psychoses are noted and the Afghan topic is evidently represented in their clinical pictures. Sometimes epileptic disturbances are noticed. Against a background of tolerance decrease the after-effects and pathological forms of intoxication may take place. Explosive, hysterical and disphorical variants of simple alcoholic intoxication or pseudoepileptic and pseudoparanoid variants of nontypical intoxication become characteristic of this group. The theme of the war recollections plays the leading role in painful emotional experiences. Amnestic forms of intoxication are also typical. Conditions of this group patients are considered to be very grave in somato-neurological respect.

We think that the organization and conduct of medical-prophylactic work with the veterans of war in Afghanistan should be held with due regard to the expressed degree and qualitative peculiarities of post-Afghan individual changes, the character and the motives of alcohol use in the structure of neuro-psychic disorders of former combatants and officially declared medical and social aid from the state real perspectives of receiving.

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Do redakcie prišlo dňa: 26. 11. 1996

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