ABSTRACT

Alcoholism was once considered a problem for men but recent research is indicting that about one third of all alcohol-abusing persons, are women. Wilsnack and Wilsnack (1978) point out that increased drinking among women might be a result of the social movement and changes in women’s, roles, especially changes that involve exposure to formerly masculine environments and roles. Thus gender gap in drinking behaviour is decreasing because of the gradual changes in social norms. Nonetheless women are underrepresented as subjects for research studies in alcoholism and left out of the forum for discussion on alcohol consumption. Such gender differences in alcohol use have bolstered costly biases in how societies identify and try to control alcohol-related problems. Such attitude further prevents these women from getting the needed intervention and treatment (NIAAA, 1998).

Thus the main aim of this study was to devote research attention to women’s alcohol consumption while investigating differences between male and female respondents on alcohol expectancies, social cultural variables, stress and coping indicators as various antecedents to alcohol consumption and psycho social consequences that arise; with levels of alcohol consumption (hazardous, harmful use and alcohol dependency), as the dependent variable, within Goan society.

The major emphasis of this research work was to gather data that is distinctive to alcohol consumption in women. For this purpose the respondents were administered a questionnaire that initially categorized them into various stages of high risk alcohol consumption i.e hazardous,
harmful use and dependency. They were later measured on various indices i.e. the alcohol expectancy questionnaire scored cognitive motivators and beliefs which people have about alcohol consumption. The brief stress and coping inventory by Richard H. Rahe was used to find out different areas of stress and coping skills. The balance obtained would give the risk for health in terms of risk for illness or injury during the coming year. The social cultural variable and psycho social consequences questionnaire was used to find out variables in the environment that influenced alcohol consumption and the resultant effects.

The hypotheses tested for gender differential in drinking and influence of the antecedents on levels of alcohol consumption and the psychosocial consequences that arise. The t-test was used for comparison between males and females on levels of alcohol consumption, alcohol expectancies, stress, coping, social cultural influences and psycho social consequences. While stepwise multiple regression analysis was used to identify the variables that would significantly contribute to the dependent variables as indicated by hypothesis number 7.

The results obtained indicated significant difference between male and female in all the dimension and overall AUDIT i.e. hazardous indicator (t=2.34; p<0.05), harmful drinking (t = 3.28; p<0.01), dependency (t=2.40; p<0.05) and overall AUDIT (t=2.78; p<0.05); when compared to female respondents. Further male respondents have shown higher significance in global positive indicator (t=3.11; p < 0.01), social enhancement (t= 2.75; p < 0.05), and alcohol expectancy positive total (t=1.602; p < 0.05); when compared to female respondents. Female respondents have shown higher significance in who am I index (t= -3.795; p < 0.01), physical symptoms (t= 1.496; p<0.05), psychological symptoms (t= -4.23; p<0.01) and total stress scores ( t= -2.249; p<0.01) when compared to male respondents. Whereas male respondents have shown higher significance in behavior and emotion dimension (t= 2.426; p<0.01) when
compared to female respondents. Male respondents have shown higher significance in health habits index ($t=1.394; p<0.05$) when compared to female respondents and female respondents have shown a higher significance in response to stress index ($t= 1.341, p<0.05$) when compared to the male respondents. Additionally the difference between male and female respondents on the stress and coping balance is not significant. Since the overall total balance for both the genders is negative indicating a greater risk of illness or injury in the upcoming year.

Female respondents have shown higher significance in age of initiation to alcohol ($t=2.06; p<0.05$), availability of alcohol ($t= -4.22; p < 0.01$) and family influence ($t=-4.301; p < 0.01$) when compared to male respondents whereas it is found that male respondents have shown higher significance in the dimension of peer pressure (3.263; p< 0.01) when compared to female respondents. Furthermore, Male respondents have shown higher significance in the trouble with legal/law index ($t=4.228; p < 0.01$) and trouble with finances ($t= 4.221; p<0.01$), when compared to female respondents. But there was no significance observed with the consequences indices of family relationship, social relationship and absence from work.

Using the stepwise method, a significant model emerged from the data obtained using regression analysis when AUDIT was taken as dependent variable. ($F_{9, 290} = 155.784, p < 0.005$). Adjusted R square = .823. Consequences on occupation i.e. work study, Alcohol expectancy total, consequences on social relationships, consequences on finances, peer pressure, alcohol expectancy negative family influence, gender and stress totals influenced alcohol consumption. Levels of significance at (p<0.005), whereas Coping Totals, Stress and Coping Balance, Availability, Family Influence, and Trouble with the Law was not a significant predictor in this model.
The research data further indicates trends of alcohol consumption amongst women. Hazardous consumption was seen to be more within the younger females predicting a step towards dependency and if more women are drinking at hazardous levels now than before than gender gaps in alcohol consumption might decrease at alarming rates unless the issue is addressed through social policy and interventions.

A salient cultural specific indicator that is significant is the belief women have about alcohol having health benefits. While social pressures and relief of tension are quoted as important factors for initiation of drinking in the West (Wilsnack S.C. 2000), expectancy that alcohol will cure physical ailments like cold, fever, and reduce pain seem to stand out as the influences that initiate hazardous alcohol consumption amongst women in Goan society. In general, women perceive moderate alcohol consumption as positive. However drunkenness amongst women is not tolerated and this dual approach to alcohol consumption present a barrier to the appropriate diagnosis of women as alcoholics.

Another variable that is significant amongst high risk female respondents in the population sample are the stress levels which indicate future health risks. Women scored a higher mean total which is a negative number (-2.47) indicating a risk for illness or injury in the coming year. These scores are further significant in women with alcohol dependency. Areas of stress that were investigated show early childhood abuse, both emotional and physical, which was seen to be high amongst respondents that drank at high risk levels and in general these respondents showed higher stress scores than low risk female respondents.

Life satisfaction was low across all the respondents where the ability to feel fulfilled and satisfied in areas such as health, work, relationships and financial matters were considered.
Drinking by family members is seen to have a significant influence on women alcohol consumption than in men and this influence is seen across all the levels of alcohol consumption categorized by AUDIT i.e. hazardous consumption, harmful use, and alcohol dependency. Beside a genetic predisposition that the child may inherit, parents’ drinking becomes vicarious learning for children but more importantly for women it could be a liberal permission to drink alcohol or get drunk; which is otherwise generally prohibited. The immediate environment can also increase the probability of alcoholism amongst women. Those women who socialize, or live romantically with their spouse tend to drink in excess, whether dependent or not. These women are more likely to put themselves at risk for alcohol abuse and alcoholism.

Family and social relationships are seen to be affected by alcohol consumption across all the levels of alcohol categorization and for both genders. Although men are significantly influenced by finances and trouble with the law; women are more concerned about their relationship with family and friends and absenteeism from work or bunking class because of a hangover. Gender specific roles were not discussed which might have given further insight to these consequences.