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Spirituality as a Therapy for Alcohol Addiction

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Abstract:

Addiction is a craved feeling that originates within a person regarding a certain object. It encompasses behavioural and cognitive characteristics of the individual. The addict is always willing to sacrifice, invest anything to be attached with the addictive object. This research focuses on how the alcoholism can be traced using spiritual care of the person. The process is making the individual aware of the cognitive functioning and to understand the mentality and then avoiding the addictive behaviour through a positive spiritual care. Spirituality is carried out by constructs such as personality, cognition, culture etc. Addiction therapists tend to explore the ways and means of spirituality in addiction assessment and treatment. Spirituality can be used from the very beginning of the addiction therapeutic process. Mixed methodology issued in this research. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used. Therefore, this involves the secondary data collection along with an analytic approach in the discussion. A randomly selected five persons were selected in the case studies. A spirituality based therapeutic center was selected to do the case studies. The participants stayed residentially for three months. The observations and interviews were carried for six months. In the case studies it could find that spirituality-based practices such as meditation, dhamma preaching, dhamma chanting, determination pooja can be considered effective means of reducing the addictive behaviour and changes the person in a positive way. Therefore, the spiritual care can be recommended as a successful method of behavioural and cognitive changes in addictions in long term therapeutic process.

Keywords: Addiction, alcoholism, treatment, spiritual care

1. Introduction

Addiction is a serious problem in present world. Even in Sri Lanka, there are many, adults and even youngsters have been addicted in the pharmacological drugs, alcohol, and other serious and dangerous drugs. Therefore, to address this problem with an effective way without relapses and failures, the spiritual care can be considered a successful method. In this article the main objective is to discuss how the spiritual care can be applied in the bar to brain and brain to mind or the spiritual development process in addiction.

1.1. What is Addiction?

Addiction has been defined in various means. Therefore, it is not only limited to the substance abused disorder or the alcohol addiction. Therefore, there we can find many definitions that have defined addiction under various aspects, such as social, clinical, psychological etc. To have a certain understanding about the term 'addiction' it is necessary to go through the definitions first.

Addiction can be defined as 'an abnormal love and trust relationship with an object or event in an attempt to control that which cannot be controlled'¹. Here, in this definition it mentions about a relationship. Explaining this further, this relationship directly requires the mutual effort to be attached, the sacrifices, and investment toward it. The person should have the mutual effort to get together with the particular event or the object that the person is being attached with. Then the person should sacrifice the time and his most important things in the life in order to get together with the object/event. Then third the person should invest, for an instance, the alcoholic or a drug addicted person might invest a larger amount of his salary for purchasing alcohol or any other drug.

This relationship as explained in the previous paragraph, is building up with the initial attraction that person has with the objects. First the person should feel the pleasure from the specific object or event, so that he builds up the relationship in the first place. Then when the person feels good and a trust towards the object then he develops the romance and passion towards the objects. Then it becomes a true intimacy and then turns into the commitment, that the person is sacrificing his life to seek the object/event. Then how does this relationship become abnormal? When the people feel good and builds up love and trust towards the objects then this becomes an abnormal relationship, which is harmful to the person himself and to others as well.

Another definition attempts to discuss about the addiction as 'an increased desire for something with an accompanying decreasing ability to satisfy that desire'². In this definition, it is a sort of biological in sense, and it discusses

¹ Juhnke, Gerald A. & Hagedorn, W. Bryce. (2013), Counseling Addicted Families: An Integrated Assessment and Treatment Model, Routledge, P. 02

² Juhnke, Gerald A. & Hagedorn, W. Bryce. (2013), Counseling Addicted Families: An Integrated Assessment and Treatment Model, Routledge, p. 04

the decreasing ability of satisfying the desire. For an example, let's say that the person is addicted in alcohol and consumes a bottle of alcohol a day, but when time passes, the amount of alcohol that he is consuming has to be increased because he cannot satisfy his need with the same amount of alcohol anymore. Then he is attempting to consume more. This happens biologically, due to the brain and neuronal functioning.

1.2. Alcoholism

Alcohol is coming under depressants. More than that, the prescription drugs such as barbiturate³, methaqualone⁴, tranquilizers⁵, etc. are also coming under depressants. With a regular use of these drugs the person gets a high potential of getting addicted and the tolerance. The specialty of these drugs is that a small amount of them can make calmness and relaxation, but larger amount can lead to serious problems such as addiction, which carries the impaired judging, loss of motor coordination and many other problems.⁶

Since the main attempt of this article is to discuss about the alcoholism and the spiritual care towards alcoholics, it is necessary to define the alcoholism first. According to the DSM-IV⁷ clinical definition, it is 'a maladaptive use of chemicals that occurs over time and that impacts major life domains and responsibilities'⁸. Alcohol is a mixture of several chemicals and due to the usage of alcohol the person's life has been severely impacted and damaged. The person will be escaping the responsibilities and major life events. Sometimes the family members and others would not accept the alcoholic person as a member of them. It seems that these are not that much hard to deal, but when it comes to the real life of the subjective person, it brings a serious of problems day by day.

Alcohol is produced by fermentation that occurs when yeast reacts with the sugar in grains, fruit, or vegetable juice. Products are wine, beer, and distilled drinks. Some beverages have more alcohol content than others (beer has about 4.5% alcohol; table wines average from 11% to 14%; 'fortified,' or dessert, wines have 16% to 20%; distilled spirits range from 40% to 50%). However, in a normal portion, each drink (i.e., 12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine, and 1 1/2 ounces of distilled spirits) contains approximately the same amount of alcohol.⁹

When the person is alcoholic, the person experience role failures in his/her life. This means, the person might not be able to fulfill all the needs and wants and expectations of the family members, and might miss the responsibilities that he has towards others. So, he fails as he performs his role. For an instance, if the person is the father of the family, he will miss all the responsibilities that he has for his wife, parents, children, relatives and friends. May be his professional life also will become a mess. Alcoholic persons mostly face accidents. The reason behind this, they are used to consume alcohol when during dangerous situations. For an example, the person might be using alcohol when he is driving his car. The next most common experience of the alcoholic people is that the legal issues. The alcoholics face lots of legal issues. Sometimes they borrow money from others, they get loans, they might be damaging the public or private property and many other problems might occur.

There are several substance dependency symptoms. These are also available in alcoholism as well. The first symptom is the tolerance. This is why the addicted person tries to get more amount of alcohol day by day. The amount of alcohol that he is taking should be increased because his brain and nervous system is getting used to the amount that he is getting every day. Therefore, when the person is using alcohol next time, he has to take an increased amount rather than the previous day. They are trying to use more chemicals over long time period because of this. These alcohol addicted people might get psychological and physiological withdrawal symptoms when they stop using the drug. They will get withdrawal symptoms like vomiting, anxiety, headache, nausea, insomnia, sweating etc.

Most of the time, if the alcoholic person is trying to stop his addiction, these attempts are always unsuccessful. Because they cannot handle their behavior, since the withdrawal symptoms are available after stopping the usage of alcohol. Therefore, it is a real hard task for the person to do by himself. Another symptom that can be found within the alcohol addicted is that, the exorbitant time that he is spending for obtaining the drug. This becomes a problem, when the person is escaping his daily work and responsibilities. This also can impact on the person's professional life as well. These people are sacrificing their social, occupational and relationship activities in order to satisfy their strong desire of having the drug. Another instant symptom of the alcohol addicted person is that even if they know the negative physical and psychological impact that they can have they are not ready to get rid of the addiction.

Although prevalence figures are notoriously unreliable, alcoholism is known to be a widespread disorder. It affects the young and the old; college students and late-onset residents of retirement communities; men and women; straights and gays; the disabled and the bodily intact; whites, Asians, Native Americans, and blacks; all social classes, economic levels, occupations, and religious groups – even those that forbid alcohol consumption.¹⁰

Alcoholism is considered to be a biological disorder. There is no limit for the alcoholism; any person can be addicted at any time. There is no difference in adults and young people, college students or professionals, any person can

³ A barbiturate is a drug that acts as a central nervous system depressant, and can therefore produce a wide range of effects, from mild sedation to death.

⁴ Methaqualone, formerly sold under the brand name Quaalude and Mandrax, was a sedative and hypnotic medication. It is a member of the quinazolinone class.

⁵ A tranquilizer refers to a drug which is designed for the treatment of anxiety, fear, tension, agitation, and disturbances of the mind, specifically to reduce states of anxiety and tension.

⁶ Coombs, Robert Holman. & Howatt, William A. (2005), *The Addiction Counselor's Desk Reference*, John Wiley, p.04

⁷ The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, published by the American Psychiatric Association, offers a common language and standard criteria for the classification of mental disorders.

⁸ Juhnke, Gerald A. & Hagedorn, W. Bryce. (2013), *Counseling Addicted Families: An Integrated Assessment and Treatment Model*, Routledge, p. 04

⁹ Coombs, Robert Holman. & Howatt, William A. (2005), *The Addiction Counselor's Desk Reference*, John Wiley, p.04

¹⁰ Brizer, David. & Castaneda, Ricardo. (2010). *Clinical Addiction Psychiatry*. Cambridge University Press. p.102

become an alcoholic. It does not depend upon the class, religion or race. It is all about how much the person is being attached to the alcohol, the frequency of using alcohol and finally the amount of alcohol that is being used.

So how does alcohol impact on the brain functioning? Explaining this, cells of the brain are called the neurons, and it is believed to be like approximately one trillion neurons existing in the human brain.¹¹ Mainly, the brain signaling is governed by the neurons of the brain. With the help of these trillion of neurons, the brain is capable of providing the capacity of sensation, movement, language, thought and emotion.¹² When the person is taking alcohol, what happens here is that the signaling process is blocked by the chemicals and the person loss the self-control.

Regarding alcoholism, there are several main factors involved in alcoholism. They are as the heredity, environment and personality. The factor heredity, involving in alcoholism, has many strong evidences to prove that there is a genetic impact towards being alcoholic within families.¹³ This contains the family attitudes towards drinking, children modeling¹⁴ the alcoholic people etc. Mostly when families build positive attitudes towards using alcohol, the children also get the habit of using alcohol with their parents. Sometimes, people get addicted in alcohol as an optional effort of coping with pain and trauma. Which means, most people have identified the alcohol as a way of reducing pain and trauma, they think that it can be the best way to get rid of the pain and the problems that they have in their lives. But this seems to be a maladaptive effort. That is, this behavior is not normal.

The environment is also an influencing factor on the alcoholism. For an instance, smoking, consuming alcohol, all comes from the environment. This can be seen especially within teenage groups, with regards to smoking, peer groups influence the members of the group to smoke. Even considering alcohol consuming, people think that alcohol is a way of showing the 'machismo'¹⁵ to others. Especially within male groups, they force those who do not consume alcohol, to use alcohol, with the terminology of showing 'machismo'. More than that, within youth sub-cultures, like in universities, they are using alcohol within their sub-cultural boundaries as normal. Within this sub-cultural context, the utilization of alcohol is considered as the normal behavior, sometimes in the present era, these people are used to consume drugs like cannabis, heroin, cocaine and sometimes other pharmaceutical drugs as well. Also, sociologists explain that around the globe there are cultures that use drugs in their daily lives, the best example here would be the hippy¹⁶ culture. They are using drugs like cannabis in daily basis.

The personality is another factor that is influential in alcoholism. Explaining this, there are problem drinkers. These problem drinkers are those who drink for getting rid of their problems. They are all under the social political context of the state.

Personality factors [...] etiological factor in the development of alcohol addiction. People who use externalization, projection, and denial as primary defense mechanisms/coping strategies are at heightened risk of alcoholism, as are those who suffer from lack of affect tolerance and/or impulsivity (Ciarrocchiet al., 1991). An angry, rebellious, acting-out configuration of personality trait sharply predisposes to alcoholism, and plays a central role in maintaining the addiction. So do depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and poor interpersonal skills. It seems that high-rolling, devil-may-care types and withdrawn, isolated, emotionally tormented types are especially prone to substance abuse, including alcohol abuse, albeit for different reasons. And each of these sets of personality traits militates against recovery.¹⁷

Therefore, the alcoholism can be taken as a serious problem which takes place within the present world. Then how should be the spiritual caring focus the alcoholics? The discussion of this article is 'Bar to Brain: Brain to mind and Spirituality', then how does the negative impact of the bar can be replaced with a positive change of spirituality?

2. Methodology

This is a qualitative research that expected to provide a conceptual analysis throughout the discussion analyzing the data. The data was collected through referring to secondary resources. Therefore, the data was collected using e-books and other documentary materials relevant of the main theme of the research paper. The quantitative method was also used in the research. Five case studies were done. Five male alcohol addicts between the ages of 35-45 were observed throughout six months of time. Spirituality development therapies were used practically in their daily life routine. And continuously observed the changes of the participants behaviour and cognitive changes and stress levels, physical withdrawal symptoms.

3. Discussion

3.1. The Spiritual Care for Alcoholism

Spirituality, within the history of time, has been recognized under the religion mostly. After 'The Varieties of Religious Experience' of William James¹⁸, the spirituality became different from the religious means. After this book, the spirituality was recognized under the individual subjective experience, which is beyond the material world and linked

¹¹ Thombs, Dennis L. & Osborn, Cynthia J. (2013). Introduction to Addictive Behaviour. Guilford Press. p. 112

¹² *ibid.* p. 38

¹³ Brizer, David. & Castaneda, Ricardo. (2010). Clinical Addiction Psychiatry. Cambridge University Press. p.103

¹⁴ *ibid.* p. 103

¹⁵ *ibid.* p. 106

¹⁶ A hippie is a member of the counterculture of the 1960s, originally a youth movement that began in the United States during the mid-1960s and spread to other countries around the world.

¹⁷ Brizer, David. & Castaneda, Ricardo. (2010). Clinical Addiction Psychiatry. Cambridge University Press. p.107

¹⁸ William James was an American philosopher and psychologist, and the first educator to offer a psychology course in the United States. James was a leading thinker of the late nineteenth century, one of the most influential U.S. philosophers, and has been labeled the 'Father of American psychology'.

with a higher power, God and angels, meaning of life, ultimate values, ultimate reality within the boundaries of human existence, life after death, etc. In the scientific explanations of spirituality, every person was located in somewhere of the dimensions in spirituality. Especially in the scientific perspective, the spirituality was taken under the health and personality concerns. The scientific world possesses that spirituality as unprofessional and unscientific.¹⁹ Spirituality can be concerned with the constructs like personality, cognition and culture as well. Therefore, to understand spirituality one must take it under physiological, psychological and cross-cultural concerns.²⁰

There is a strong tendency of professionals in utilizing the spirituality in the assessment, treatment and recovery process of the addicted.²¹ It is true that addiction needs the medical treatments to get rid of the withdrawal symptoms, and counseling assistance to get rid of the addiction. In counseling process, the spirituality can be utilized and an effective way of making the client aware of his situation. It is important to understand that there is no single explanation of addiction.²² There are biological factors, psychological factors, social and cultural factors that influence the addictive behavior. That is why the spiritual concerns are more important. The balance of the inner mentality would be an effective way if treatment when it comes to the alcohol addicted. Spiritually focused interventions that are directly related to an addiction, they aim for wide-ranging changes in core belief systems and behaviors—some of which may be harmless or even better left intact.

When treating for addicted people, it is a long-term goal of the counselor to build up the personality while reducing the spiritual confusion of the person. The counselor should try to make the client understand the powers that he should develop within themselves in order to have a meaningful life.²³ If the spirituality base treatment plan works properly, then the client understands the need of the spiritual stability within themselves and also, they will understand the link between the spiritual confusion and the addiction. Therefore, the spiritual confusion, which is lack of the understanding of the importance of spirituality in their mind, that can lead a person to be addicted.

There are several useful treatment methods with regards to the spirituality. They can be taken as the personal meaning in therapy, meditation, alcoholic anonymous method etc.²⁴ 'the personal meaning in therapy' is where the addicted person understands the value of their lives. He is giving a personal meaning to their lives. This is a spiritual approach. Meditation is a very common method that can be developed with the spiritual care for the addicts. But the important fact here is to understand that there is a proper time for every client to experience meditation since it is a strong method of dealing with the unconsciousness of the person. The method termed as alcoholic anonymous, is where others helping the alcoholic addicted to get rid of it. Therefore, these therapies and methods are included in the spiritual care for the addicted.

Five alcohol addicts were selected in the case study randomly. All were males between 35 to 45 years old. The beginning of the six months was hard for the addicts since the withdrawal symptoms arose and they had to get the treatments from a physician. And it was compulsory for them to attend the treatment process residing in the therapeutic center for the first three months. This therapeutic center is a Spiritual Care and Therapeutic Center was situated in the Ambepussa area. Throughout the process they were introduced several spirituality based practical activities. And introduced a particular daily routine, which means they were supposed to wake up at 6.00 am in the morning and go to sleep by 10.00 pm in night. In mornings and evenings there were two separate meditation sessions. Yoga was practiced in mornings mostly. All five participants attended on a Buddhist pilgrim. Rest of the day they were involved in craftwork while listening to dhamma preaching and dhamma chantings. In the evening they all gathered for a determination pooja (Adhishtana Pooja) which made them promise themselves that they are responsible for their life and they will attempt their best to get rid of the alcohol addiction. By the end of three months the urge for alcohol disappeared. And the second three months they stayed at their home and participated activities in the therapeutic center for two weeks per month. Their progress and ups and downs were administrated by the therapeutic center while doing continuous follow ups to their houses. All five participants were involved in their daily work, professions and balanced in social relationships. No one went back to alcohol use and by the end of the six months they were stabilized and involved in their daily life activities without any problem.

4. Conclusion

Alcoholism is an abundantly discussed topic in the society. Most of the family problems such as divorce, child abuse, domestic violence, have occurred within the families where at least a single person uses alcohol. Alcoholism is simply, being addicted to use alcohol, where the person cannot move without it and when he tries to stop using alcohol a series of problems arise. Therefore, when treating an alcoholic addicted, biological or medical consultancy is also important along with the psychological counseling process. People drink for several reasons; there are problem drinkers, there are people who cannot live without a single drop of alcohol, and there are many others who were forced by the others to drink. All these people get addicted, because of the lack of their personality or because of the lack of spiritual base in their lives. Spirituality is not the religion. For many years, the spirituality was understood within a religious framework. But it is more than that. It is something that comes along with the sense of connection to something bigger than us. It is similar to a universal experience. The misunderstanding between religion and spirituality arise here. The

¹⁹ Miller, William R., Forcehimes, Alyssa A., & Zweben, Allen. (2011). *Treating Addiction: A Guide for Professionals*. Guilford Press. p.334

²⁰ Galanter, Marc. (1997). *Recent Developments in Alcoholism: Alcohol and Violence-Epidemiology, Neurobiology, Psychology, Family Issues*. Springer Science and Business Media. p.126

²¹ Juhnke, Gerald A. & Hagedorn, W. Bryce. (2013), *Counseling Addicted Families: An Integrated Assessment and Treatment Model*, Routledge, p. 103

²² McMurrin, Mary. (1994). *The Psychology of Addiction*. Taylor and Francis. p.44

²³ Perkinson, Robert R., Jongsma, Arthur E., & Bruce, Timothy J. (2014). *The Addiction Treatment Planner*, 4th ed. John Wiley & Sons, p.447

²⁴ Galanter, Marc. (1997). *Recent Developments in Alcoholism: Alcohol and Violence-Epidemiology, Neurobiology, Psychology, Family Issues*. Springer Science and Business Media. p.126

spiritual care for the addiction is very much needed since their problem mainly arise with the lack of spiritual base within themselves. In the case studies it was clear the spirituality-based activities can impact the person's behaviour and cognition to change their addictive behaviour. The meditation practices, determination pooja, Dhamma preaching, Dhamma chanting and involvement of religious practices were highly influential towards addicts. The stress levels of the addicts were reduced about 85% after the treatment process. The participants were positively engaged in family work and social gatherings. The behavioural and cognition changes were clearly visible after the spiritual caring and therapeutic intervention. Withdrawal symptoms were also fully reduced. All they wanted was to live a happier and a peaceful life without any addictions. That is why the alcoholic addicted people need the spiritual care within their treatment plan. It will help them to build up a strong relationship along with the universal experience of existence. Therefore, it can conclude the spiritual care as a therapeutic method for addictions can be used effectively as long-term treatment plans as a way of changing cognition and behavioural aspects of the addicts positively.

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