

## Dissertation Abstract

Lena Dahlgren:

### FEMALE ALCOHOLICS

Department of Clinical Alcohol and Drug Research, Karolinska Hospital, Karolinska Institute, Stockholm, Sweden.

Defence of dissertation 1979 05 28 Karolinska Hospital.

The study provides a social and psychiatric description of 100 women, consecutively hospitalized during the years 1963-1969 at the Department of Alcoholic Diseases, Karolinska Hospital, Stockholm. Comparisons are made with 100 men of the same ages, admitted in the same period. The purpose of the department was to treat early cases i.e. subjects with little or no previous treatment for alcoholism and with retained social functions. The patients were followed until 1975. Investigations as to way of admission, development and pattern of problem drinking, marital situation, morbidity and mortality were carried out.

Results: More women than men were admitted in an acute condition, often with dramatic complications. Unlike the men they did not seek help spontaneously. In spite of our intention to collect early cases only, many women, although novices in a treatment situation, had been drinking heavily for many years and displayed severe complications. They did not usually represent "early" but rather advanced cases of "hidden" alcoholism.

The women started to abuse alcohol at higher ages than the men, exhibited a lonely drinking pattern and a more rapid progress of the illness. They were afflicted with more nervous symptoms both earlier in life and acutely, had made more suicide attempts, showed a higher rate of drug abuse than the men and the incidence of psychiatric illness was higher for first degree relatives. Furthermore, the women experienced more disturbances in married life. One-half of the husbands were alcoholics as well. The marriages did not last; those of the male patients tended to end in divorce, those of the female patients by death. The morbidity increased in both sexes after the treatment period, i.e. disability, severity and frequency rates. The number of persons with disability pensions and social stigmatization rose. More women than men, and more women than expected, were granted disability pensions. The women, however, had far fewer registrations in social registers. There was an excess mortality for both sexes. A high frequency of cirrhosis of the liver was found among the women.

Key words: Alcoholism - sex factors - psychiatric characteristics - drinking pattern - marriage - social adjustment - morbidity - mortality.