

Title: Alcoholics seeking treatment: Does co-occurring social anxiety disorder interfere with AA affiliation?

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Summary:

One in five individuals seeking treatment for alcoholism also have social anxiety disorder, a comorbidity associated with more severe alcoholism and worse alcohol treatment outcomes. Social anxiety disorder has been theorized to interfere with involvement in Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), although no investigation to date has evaluated this phenomenon. Using data from Project MATCH, we compared post-treatment levels of AA affiliation of 133 individuals (35 women) with social anxiety disorder who were randomized to Twelve-Step Facilitated (TSF) treatment to 133 controls without social anxiety disorder (matched on age, gender, study-arm and treatment assignment). Collected at baseline and 3-month intervals for 15 months, AA affiliation outcomes were assessed with two subscales of the AA Involvement (AAI) scale: meeting attendance (# of meetings attended in past 90 days) and 12-step program involvement (behavioral engagement in the AA program and fellowship). Baseline covariates in mixture models included demographic characteristics, study-arm, drinking severity, and prior levels of AA affiliation. Results of random effects regression analyses showed that alcoholics with social anxiety disorder attended fewer AA meetings and were less involved in the 12-step program than matched controls without social anxiety disorder. In addition, a gender by social anxiety interaction showed that the relationship between social anxiety disorder and lowered 12-step program involvement was even more pronounced for women. Alcohol treatment providers should be aware that social anxiety disorder is a risk factor for poor AA attendance as well as AA affiliation activities outside of meeting attendance. Women with social anxiety disorder may have even greater difficulties affiliating with Alcoholics Anonymous.

Citation: Pagano, M.E., Book, S.W., Onder, C.C., Randall, C.L., & Tonigan, J.S. (2008, June). Alcoholics seeking treatment: Does co-occurring social anxiety disorder interfere with AA affiliation? *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research* 32(s1), 186A. (No. 704)