Therapeutic efficacy of "ATHENA" program in a sample of alcoholics

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The past decade has seen remarkable advances in alcoholism treatment research. Researchers and treatment providers now have a better understanding of the effectiveness of pharmacological or no approaches. Various epidemiological studies show that only a small proportion of those who are dependent on alcohol receive alcoholism treatment. "ATHENA" program is an outpatient drug free substance addiction clinic of the Athens University Medical School Department of Psychiatry. Cognitive-Behavioral psychotherapy on an individual level is the main therapeutic approach of the Unit combined with family therapy interventions based on systemic theory. The aim of this study is to assess the therapeutic efficacy of "ATHENA" program in a sample of alcoholics, who contacted the program during a three-year period (1998-2001) seeking for help. All the subjects fulfilled the DSM-IV diagnostic criteria for alcohol abuse/dependence. Individuals with major psychiatric symptomatology such as schizophrenia or bipolar disorder were excluded of this study. Sociodemographic, psychological, behavioral, drug use and deviant characteristics were assessed by means of a structured interview. For the purpose of this study, we used a semi-structured questionnaire, designed by the Pompidou Group experts, the "Exit From Treatment Indicator" (ETI). Data collected through this instrument provide information about the client's situation concerning various aspects of their life such as alcohol use, psychical and psychological health, family and social relationships, criminal activities, etc. A percentage of 78.2% of the total sample were male, while the mean age of them was 42.8 years. A percentage of 72% of the alcoholics have full-time job, while 60% of them were married. Of the total sample 147 clients (58.3%) participated in the therapeutic procedure, having more than four sessions. The mean rate of therapeutic sessions was 12, with the mean retention rate being 3-3.5 months. The results from this study show that a percentage of 62% of the individuals who received therapy were reported to be alcohol free upon discharge, while 32% of the sample modified positively their addictive habit. The alcoholics also reported noticeable changes in various aspects of their life pertaining to psychical (78.2%) or mental health (82.3%), family (60%) and social relationships (66%), criminal activities, etc. Alcohol problems may be acute or chronic, may range from mild to severe, and may vary in their response to treatment. Although several types of interventions, psychotherapeutic or pharmacological, are effective for helping alcohol abusers, no single treatment has been demonstrated to treat all patients. Findings from this study support views of the world literature which indicate that alcohol abusers with high motivation for treatment, who collaborate and comply with the therapeutic addiction clinic can modify positively not only their addiction but also a lot of features of their maladaptive daily behavior.

Key words: "ATHENA" program, alcohol abuse/dependence, treatment, cognitive/behavioral psychotherapy.
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