

## Emotional Regulation Among Alcoholics: A Study among Occasional Drinkers and Recent Abstainers

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### Abstract

It is seen from the studies conducted in the past that increase in the emotional sensitivity is related to the abstinence which occurs early in Chronic Alcohol Dependency. The current study was done taking into consideration the Indian backdrop where its motive was to investigate more on this phenomenon and hence aimed at comparing men who were identified and were dependent on alcohol as well as with men who drank only on social occasions on the front of their capacity to manage their emotions. The participants of the study consisted of 60 people (N= 30 identified with dependency on alcohol, N= 30 people who only drank on the social occasions) who fell within the age range of 18 to 55 years of age. The participants for the study were taken from Pune, a prominent city in the state of Maharashtra. For assessing the ability to regulate emotions, Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS) was used. Along with that for screening, GHQ i.e. general health questionnaire was used. For the intensity of consumption of alcohol, AUDIT i.e. alcohol use disorders identification test was used. In order to analyze the means for the groups, an independent t test was conducted. The findings indicated that significant difference was there in the ability to regulate emotions among alcoholics who were recent abstainers and occasional drinkers.

*Keywords:* emotional regulation, recently abstinent alcoholics, social drinkers

As per WHO, there are approximately more than 2 billion consumers of alcohol in the world and about 76.3 million are diagnosed with alcohol usage disorder (World Health Organization, 2004). It is seen widely that there are around 1.4 % of the population with an alcohol consumption disorder (Global Burden of Disease, 2017). In India, the most common substance of addiction is alcohol followed by tobacco (Kumar, Nehra, Kumar, Sunila & Gupta, 2013). It has been well documented that substances can control emotions by remedially changing one's emotional condition and individuals who have a predisposition to a certain negative emotional state are more prone towards using a substance that will reverse the particular emotional state (Khantzian, 1997).

Dysregulation of emotions is the incapacity, despite when one puts in his or her full capacity to change emotional cues in a desirable manner, what one feels or lives and/or non-verbal expressions under general normative conditions (Neacsiu, Linehan & Bohus, 2014). Emotion regulation refers to the process of managing our emotions by influencing emotions that we are feeling, whenever they are felt, at the same time how they are experienced by one and how one expresses them (Gross, 2015). It is the conscious or non-conscious control of emotion (Gross, 1998). Gross (1998) defines emotion regulation as "a heterogeneous process through which emotions are themselves regulated". Emotion regulation thus means molding which particular emotions or feelings one has got, as well as when does one have them, and how one feels or opens up about these emotions. As per the researchers, Social Drinkers are the occasional alcohol Consumers who tend to consume alcohol on various social occasions but their consumption is not as problematic as they still tend to have a control. Problems or difficulties in maintaining "Regulation" of any sort starts to become a hindrance in a person's

way when one crosses the boundary or limitations. And same is prevalent in the case of Alcohol Consumption. Difficulties in emotion regulation are broadly associated with alcohol-related consequences with not being able to take in responses which are emotional, problems associated with self-control, no emotional clearance as well as difficulty in handling goal-oriented behaviors being most related with alcohol use disorders (Dvorak, Sargent, Kilwein, Stevenson, Kuvaas & Williams, 2014). Studies have demonstrated that individuals who are addicted to substance face significantly more difficulties in regulating emotions than those who don't have an addiction history (Zareban, Bakhshani, Bor, & Bakhshani, 2017). However, very few studies have compared emotion regulation difficulties of recently abstinent alcoholics to social drinkers (Fox, Hong & Sinha, 2008).

This study aims to compare the problems in regulating emotions among of late alcoholic men who were abstinent and people who drank only on social occasions using the difficulties in emotion regulation scale in the Indian context.

Fox, Hong, and Sinha, (2008) conducted a study on assessing Problems in Regulation of Emotion as well as Impulse Control between individuals who were recent abstinent alcoholics in comparison with social drinkers. The motive of this research then was seen for problems in controlling of emotions at the time of the alcohol abstinence. In order to measure the emotion control, DERS scale was administered on 50 people who were alcohol dependents and were taking treatments and 62 people who were social drinkers. The results of the study indicated that people who were alcohol dependent had seen to have more problems in regulation of emotion as well as impulse control as compared to people who were social drinkers.

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Ottonello, Marcella & Fiabane, Elena & Pistarini, Caterina & Spigno, P & Torselli, Elisa. (2019) conducted a study on understanding how problems in emotional regulation can be associated with metacognitive beliefs about the usage of Alcohol also with the Risk of Relapsing during the times of early abstinence. The study was conducted on 65 patients who were undergoing treatment in a rehabilitation program. The results of the study indicated that there was seen a significant difference among people with abstinence and non-abstinence particularly in emotional clarity.

Berking, Margraf, Ebert, Wupperman, Hofmann, & Junghanns, (2011) conducted a study on understanding deficiencies in skills used in controlling emotions in and post CBT for the liquor dependency. The study was conducted on 116 people who were being under the treatment of Alcohol Dependency with CBT. Here, the Regulation of emotion and indicators of liquor Dependency were measured using self-report measures. The findings of the research revealed that people with liquor Dependency reported significantly more problems in regulation of emotions skills as compared to people in non-clinical controlled participants.

#### **Statement of Problem**

To compare the difficulties in Emotion Regulations skills among treatment taking recently abstinent Alcoholics and among Social Drinkers.

#### **Objective**

To Study and compare the Emotion Regulation skills among men with treatment taking alcohol abstinence and among Men who are Social Drinkers.

#### **Method**

##### **Sample**

The participants in the research had 60 men, (thirty therapy taking liquor relied individuals that had been admitted to a rehabilitation center for at least one month) and (thirty social drinkers). The age groups of the samples who participated in the Study were of 18 to 55 years of age. The participants were taken from Pune.

##### **Inclusion Criterion**

The individuals who were seeking treatment for alcohol dependence and who were diagnosed of alcohol dependence according to ICD- 10 were taken up for the study.

‘Social drinkers’ those individuals whose scores fall under Level 1 or Level 2 of Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test were taken up for the study.

##### **Exclusion Criterion**

Individuals who were dependent on any other substance other than alcohol and nicotine were excluded from the Study.

Individuals who were seeking treatment for more than three months in the rehabilitation center were also excluded from the Study.

Individuals who scored more than the cut off on Montreal Cognitive Assessment were also excluded from the study.

Social Drinkers with current or past diagnosis of any substance dependence were excluded. Also, all participants were excluded from the study if they had any present standard for disorders in the psychotic spectrum from ICD-10.

#### **Tools**

##### **1. The Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale-36 (DERS – 36):**

In order to access Emotional Regulation among the participants in the study, The Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale-36 (DERS) developed by Gratz, K.L., & Roemer, L. (2004) was used. It is a 36 item self-report scale a measure with sound psychometric properties.

##### **2. The General Health Questionnaire- 12 (GHQ-12):**

The (GHQ-12), a 12 itemed questionnaire which is widely used for seeing for psychiatric disorders was being administered on the participants during the study.

##### **3. Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test:**

In order for assessing the usage of liquor consumption among participants and also to look for other drinking -behaviors, The Alcohol Use Disorder Identification Test (AUDIT) was used. It is a widely used screening tool developed by WHO.

#### **Procedure**

In this Study, the inpatients were screened for cognitive impairment and other psychiatric disorders with the use of Montreal Cognitive Assessment and Brief Psychiatric Inventory. Mental Status Examination was also conducted. Social Drinkers were screened for psychiatric disorders by using the General Health Questionnaire- 12. The severity of liquor usage was examined using the WHO’s AUDIT scale. The Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS- 36) was administered to the inpatients and social drinkers.

#### **Results and Discussion**

In this study, Independent t tests was used to examine group distinctions in liquor usage, difficulties in emotion regulation and other demographics. SPSS 16.0 was used for analysis

As per the results, social drinkers were younger than recently abstinent alcoholics in the study ( $27.13 \pm 8.81$  versus  $33.54 \pm 10.5$ ). The mean education was graduation. Patients had significantly higher scores on AUDIT than social drinkers ( $24.22 \pm 7.15$  versus  $4.86 \pm 4.02$ ).

The independent t test was used to compare the DERS scores among social drinkers and recently abstinent alcoholics. According to Levene’s test, as F is .480, which is lower than .491 suggesting that the samples were homogenous. The t score is -3.241 with df being 59 and significance  $p > .002$  thus rejecting the null hypothesis. Results indicate that significant difference is present in the ability to regulate emotions among recently abstinent alcoholics and social drinkers.

**Table 1 : Means, SDs and t Ratio**

	Recent Abstainers	Occasional Drinkers	Recent Abstainers	Occasional Drinkers	
	Mean	Mean	SD	SD	t
Age	33.55	27.1333	10.50	8.82	
DER S	99.23	82.3333	20.38	20.32	3.24**
Audit	24.23	4.8667	7.16	4.02	

\*\* Significant at .01 level

This study aimed to examine emotion regulation difficulties between treatment engaged recently abstinent individuals diagnosed of alcohol dependence and social drinkers. Individuals with alcohol dependence noted comprehensive difficulty with regulation of emotion when compared to social drinkers. The research caveats include the fact that a broad band of age was used for the study with a relatively small sample size. Although the individuals in the study were diagnosed with chronic dependence, the number of years of consumption was not controlled. Despite the limitations, the present study is one of the few studies that have examined the differences in emotion regulation ability among social drinkers and recently abstinent alcoholics in an Indian context. The study indicated that recent abstinence does not suggest improved emotion regulation abilities.

#### Conclusion:

The study aimed to compare the problems in regulating emotions among alcoholics who were abstinent recently and those who drank on social occasions. The findings indicated that individuals with alcohol dependence, even after recent abstinence, experienced significantly more difficulties in emotion regulation compared to social drinkers. Specifically, the results showed that alcohol-dependent individuals exhibited higher scores on the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS), reflecting greater challenges in managing emotions and impulses. This suggests that even after a period of abstinence, emotional regulation remains a significant issue for alcohol-dependent individuals. These difficulties may contribute to relapse risk and highlight the importance of addressing emotional dysregulation in treatment programs. Despite some limitations, such as the broad age range and small sample size, this study provides valuable insights into the emotional challenges faced by alcohol-dependent individuals in an Indian context. It emphasizes the need for tailored interventions that focus not only on abstinence but also on enhancing emotional regulation skills to support long-term recovery. Overall, the study underscores the ongoing nature of emotional deregulation in individuals recovering from alcohol dependence, suggesting that more comprehensive therapeutic strategies are needed.

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