

# Understanding Alcoholics' "Difficulty in Life": An Empirical Comparison of Alcoholics and Nonalcoholics

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## Abstract

The Japanese success rate for alcoholism treatment is approximately 30%, indicating high relapse rates. Although "difficulty in life" is thought to contribute to alcoholics' relapse, the characteristics of the phenomenon are unknown. This study examined the factors contributing to alcoholics' difficulty in life. Alcoholic self-help group members, who indicated the extent of their difficulty in life and described the factors that contributed to this difficulty, completed a self-administered questionnaire. Participants' hypersensitivity/grandiosity traits were also examined. A control group of nonalcoholic men also completed the questionnaire. Simple tabulation, descriptive statistics, Mann-Whitney U tests, and multivariate analyses were used to compare data between groups. Ultimately, 574 and 512 valid responses were received from the alcoholic (response rate: 27.1%) and nonalcoholic (response rate: 33.1%) groups, respectively. The proportion of alcoholics (54%) who indicated that they found life difficult was significantly higher relative to that of nonalcoholics (39.9%). Alcoholics' mean hypersensitivity score was significantly higher (2.67) relative to that observed for nonalcoholics (2.44). Significant between-group differences were observed for the following factors: building and maintaining relationships, satisfaction with life, self-distrust, cognitive bias, loneliness, empathic understanding, and self-acceptance. Multivariate logistic regression identified cognitive bias and building and maintaining relationships as factors contributing to alcoholics' difficulty in life. Alcoholics' social contexts, including broken families, social instability, and cross addiction, also contributed to this difficulty. Personal characteristics, such as hypersensitive-type narcissistic tendencies, relationship problems, and cognitive bias, were also associated with alcoholics' difficulty in life.

**Keywords:** addiction, alcoholism, difficulty in life, grandiosity, hypersensitivity

A nationwide survey conducted in 2003 to improve understanding of drinking in Japanese adults found that the drinking habits of 4.8% of men and 0.5% of women were classified as harmful alcohol use, and 1.9% of men and 0.1% of women were considered alcoholics (Osaki, Matsushita, Shirasaka, Hisanori, & Higuchi, 2005). Based on these proportions, Japan contains an estimated 810,000 alcoholics. In addition, alcoholism—which is defined as dependency on or addiction to the consumption of alcoholic drinks—results in numerous health problems, which incur high medical costs, and the proportion of Japanese hospital admissions that are related to alcohol is estimated at 14.7% (Tsunoda, 1994); therefore, alcohol-related disorders and alcoholism are major social issues.

Currently, Japanese medical institutions that treat alcoholism provide alcohol detoxification, treat-

ment for related complications, and psychotherapy such as cognitive-behavioral therapy and motivational interviewing. In a previous long-term follow-up survey of alcoholics, sobriety rates were 28–32% for 2–3 years, 22–23% for 5 years, and 19–30% for 8–10 years (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2016). Therefore, relapse rates are extremely high.

The direct cause of relapse in alcoholics is the desire to drink. However, drinking is also a means via which to escape from life's problems, and alcoholics' lives may be particularly difficult. To live is to engage in social life, subjectively and purposefully striving to

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live one's life by maintaining good relationships and coping with the problems that arise in daily life. In the current study, "difficulty in life" was defined as difficulty in managing everyday activities, social situations, and personal relationships. "Difficulty in life" can therefore be defined as problems experienced in daily living. Often, alcoholics attach great importance to social life because those in remission are forced to cope with numerous problems that they have previously avoided through drinking, which means that they could experience greater difficulty in life relative to that experienced by nonalcoholics. True recovery from alcoholism could, therefore, entail overcoming their difficulties in life. However, the factors contributing to alcoholics' difficulty in life have yet to be demonstrated empirically. The purpose of the study was to compare perceived difficulty in life, relationship quality, hypersensitivity, and grandiosity between alcoholics and nonalcoholics and to identify the factors that contributed to this difficulty in alcoholics.

## Method

### Participants

The participants were male alcoholics, who were members of an alcohol dependency self-help group in the Kantō area of Japan, and nonalcoholic men aged 30-70 years from the same region. Participants were randomly selected from the municipal government's Basic Resident Register. The absence of alcoholism was confirmed among nonalcoholic participants using two items: "Have you experienced a withdrawal symptom from alcohol?" and "Do you continue drinking alcohol every few hours?"

### Survey Methodology

The study was conducted between March and July 2013 and included a self-report questionnaire. Consent to conduct the survey was initially obtained from the alcohol dependency self-help group office; thereafter, the researcher requested members' cooperation and distributed consent forms and questionnaires at group meetings. Participation in the nonalcoholic control group was requested by mailing consent forms and questionnaires to randomly selected participants. Participants were asked to complete the questionnaire, place it in the return envelope provided, and return it via mail.

### Survey Items

The survey items included seven items. Survey items pertained to personal data, a 31-item researcher-developed questionnaire regarding factors contributing to difficulty in life, and the 18-item

Narcissistic Personality Inventory—Hypersensitive and Grandiose Traits (NPI-HGT; Nakayama & Nakaya, 2006).

### Personal Data

Both groups answered five of the items, while only the alcoholic group answered two additional items. Participants were asked about their age, employment status, the quality of their relationships with the people around them, the age at which they began drinking, and their life experiences. The alcoholic group was also asked about the age at which they were diagnosed with alcohol dependency and the duration of their sobriety.

The quality of their relationships was measured using five items corresponding to different individuals, including "father," "mother," "brother or sister," "spouse," and "child." Participants rated the importance of each item on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = alienated, 2 = relations are not good, 3 = cannot say, 4 = relations are good, and 5 = very close). Participants also reported whether they were "divorced," "separated," or "single" when answering the "spouse" item; whether they were "living apart" for the father and mother items; and whether they were "living apart" or "have none" for the brother and sister items.

The life experience scale comprised 22 items, each of which was made especially for this study, and these were extracted from the interviews with the alcoholic group. The participants confirmed whether each item "exists" or "does not exist."

### Perceived Difficulty in Life

Using a 4-point Likert scale, participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they felt that life was difficult. Scores ranged from 1 (I always feel that way) to 4 (I never feel that way).

### Factors Contributing to Difficulty in Life

The researcher developed a list of questionnaire items reflecting factors contributing to participants' perceived difficulty in life. This was done through careful reading of 161 notebooks kept by the alcoholic participants of the self-help group, identification of content relevant to difficulty in life, and iterative consideration of meaning and similarities, which resulted in 31 items in seven categories. These items were listed randomly in the questionnaire to prevent the sequential presentation of questions belonging to the same category from influencing participants' answers. Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which each item contributed to their difficulty in life using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree).

**Table 1.** Factor Analysis of Items Affecting Difficulty in Life

Factor name/Questionnaire item	Factor Loadings							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
<b>Factor 1: Building and maintaining relationships (<math>\alpha = .87</math>)</b>								
I am good at handling criticism from others.	0.917	0.071	-0.100	0.202	-0.086	-0.002	-0.248	
I'm good at reconciling with people when something disagreeable has happened.	0.774	0.037	-0.024	0.036	-0.057	-0.063	-0.159	
I can be open with people right away.	0.601	-0.028	0.139	-0.360	0.061	-0.054	0.076	
I interact well with people around me, even when I think differently from them.	0.554	0.062	-0.011	0.068	-0.172	0.000	0.005	
I can start up a conversation easily with someone I don't know.	0.544	-0.148	0.128	-0.407	0.101	-0.062	0.156	
I can be frank when expressing how I think and feel.	0.518	0.033	-0.052	-0.071	0.090	-0.009	0.121	
I am good at telling others what I'd like them to do for me.	0.464	-0.100	-0.259	-0.084	0.069	0.082	0.020	
I am good at talking to people.	0.461	-0.089	0.035	-0.433	0.164	0.058	0.048	
I apologize readily when I have done something wrong.	0.418	0.096	0.158	0.098	-0.051	0.134	0.086	
<b>Factor 2: Satisfaction with life (<math>\alpha = .89</math>)</b>								
I think my way of life is right for me.	0.002	0.911	0.063	-0.087	0.110	-0.038	0.024	
I feel motivated by my current way of life.	0.027	0.859	0.052	-0.080	0.057	-0.026	0.001	
I am satisfied with myself now.	0.033	0.737	-0.048	-0.047	0.061	0.024	0.007	
<b>Factor 3: Self-distrust (<math>\alpha = .77</math>)</b>								
I can't be confident in my abilities.	0.030	0.108	0.876	0.046	-0.043	0.015	-0.003	
I can't do things the way I think they should be done.	-0.016	0.008	0.736	-0.015	-0.055	0.017	0.064	
I really don't know what I want to do.	0.056	-0.231	0.415	0.179	-0.002	0.051	-0.032	
I am confident that I can achieve what I want to do (reverse scored).	-0.100	-0.121	0.400	-0.091	-0.088	-0.130	-0.229	
<b>Factor 4: Loneliness (<math>\alpha = .82</math>)</b>								
I feel isolated from others.	0.091	-0.133	0.089	0.703	0.207	-0.028	0.095	
I feel closed to others.	-0.025	-0.070	0.047	0.658	0.160	-0.054	0.131	
I feel that relationships are troublesome.	0.044	-0.145	0.063	0.608	0.089	0.002	0.139	
<b>Factor 5: Cognitive bias (<math>\alpha = .72</math>)</b>								
I see things in black and white.	-0.005	0.072	-0.199	0.154	0.695	-0.037	-0.067	
I think in terms of whether things should or should not be done.	0.000	0.141	-0.031	0.047	0.653	0.032	-0.097	
When something bad happens, I think, "It's always like this!"	-0.022	0.012	0.161	0.093	0.555	0.013	-0.073	
I end up thinking negatively, even without justification in reality.	-0.130	0.024	0.300	0.122	0.377	0.045	-0.045	
<b>Factor 6: Empathic understanding (<math>\alpha = .73</math>)</b>								
I can guess how someone will take things I say.	-0.033	-0.079	-0.019	-0.042	0.032	0.905	-0.087	
I understand what people are thinking from their facial expressions and gestures.	-0.036	-0.041	-0.025	-0.068	0.069	0.750	0.017	
I take people's views into consideration when I act.	0.131	0.155	0.147	0.083	-0.183	0.466	0.007	
<b>Factor 7: Self-acceptance (<math>\alpha = .65</math>)</b>								
I think it's alright to live my life my own way.	-0.108	-0.024	0.052	0.158	-0.125	-0.067	0.803	
I value my own individuality.	-0.018	0.131	-0.131	0.022	0.000	0.020	0.553	
I can acknowledge my good and bad points for what they are.	0.148	0.121	0.009	0.092	-0.142	0.063	0.442	
<b>Factor correlation matrix</b>								
	<b>Factor</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	1	—	0.479	-0.490	-0.626	-0.232	0.531	0.587
	2		—	-0.612	-0.438	-0.335	0.295	0.488
	3			—	0.537	0.350	-0.274	-0.417
	4				—	0.223	-0.323	-0.498
	5					—	-0.018	-0.020
	6						—	0.517
	7							—

**Table 2.** Comparison of Personal Data

	Alcoholic Group	Control Group (nonalcoholic group)	t/F	p
Number of responses	574	512		
Mean age (SD)	59.5 (11.5)	47.8 (11.2)	-17.023	<.001
Mean age at first drink (SD)	17.1 (4.4)	18.0 (3.3)	6.423	<.001
Employed (%)	296 (51.6)	474 (92.6)	274.577	<.001
Divorced (%)	70 (12.2)	18 (3.5)	17.410	<.001
Separated from children (%)	47 (8.2)	10 (2.0)	14.363	<.001

Note. We performed *t*-tests for “mean age” and “mean age at first drink.” Discriminant analysis was performed for “employed,” “divorced,” and “separated from children.”

## NPI-HGT

Psychological characteristics were assessed using the NPI-HGT, with the permission of the researchers who developed the scale (Nakayama & Nakaya, 2006). This questionnaire comprises 18 items and is used for the direct measurement of degree of grandiosity and hypersensitivity, which are two types of narcissism that have been observed in alcoholics in clinical settings. Hypersensitivity refers to the tendency to excessively react to an inferiority complex, criticism, or failure, whereas grandiosity refers to an unrealistic sense of superiority. The NPI-HGT has 18 items (eight for hypersensitivity and 10 for grandiosity). The hypersensitivity items were as follows: “I have a feeling of being of little worth,” “I am often made a fool of,” “I play myself down,” “I am often told that I am a strange person,” “my personality is often ignored,” “failure depresses me,” “I feel upset about making mistakes,” and “I can’t have confidence in myself.” The grandiosity subscales items included “attractiveness,” “one’s opinion is right,” “I have abundant experience,” “I am one of the special people,” “I should get high evaluations,” “I am a genius,” “I want to be proud of myself,” “I am clever,” “I will succeed in the future,” and “my sensitivity is high.” The validity and internal consistency of this scale were examined in a previous quantitative study (Nakayama & Nakaya, 2006). Participants were asked to respond to the NPI-HGT using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = rather not, 2 = I don’t really think that, 3 = cannot say, 4 = I sometimes think so, and 5 = I think so very much).

## Data Analysis

SPSS Statistics 22.0 was used to perform the statistical analysis. Simple tabulation and the calculation of descriptive statistics (e.g., means and standard deviations) were performed for all items. Cross-tabulation, chi-squared tests, and multivariate analyses were performed to analyze differences in perceived difficulty in life, relationship quality, and NPI-HGT scores between the alcoholic and nonalcoholic groups.

Factor analysis was used to develop an instrument to measure 31 factors contributing to

difficulty in life and determine subscale reliability (Table 1). Exploratory factor analysis was performed using the principal factor method and the extraction of factors with an eigenvalue of >1 yielded a seven-factor solution. Factor analysis was repeated with a seven-factor structure assumed and the principal factor method and promax rotation applied, and two items were excluded because they showed communality of < 0.4. Further factor analysis was then performed to examine the remaining 29 items. Prior to rotation, the seven-factor, 29-item scale explained 52.1% of the total variance in difficulty in life. Factor scores obtained using factor analysis were then used in multivariate logistic regression and covariance structure analysis to define the factors contributing to alcoholics’ difficulty in life.

## Ethical Considerations

The ethics committee of the university with which the author was affiliated approved the study. Consent forms were provided, and participants received a written explanation regarding the purpose of the study and study procedure, assurance that participation was voluntary and anonymous and personal information would be protected, and details concerning data handling and the publication of the results. Informed consent to participate in the study was assumed with receipt of the survey questionnaire.

## Results

### Comparison of Personal Data

The results of the comparison of personal data are shown in Table 2. In total, 574 valid responses (27.1%) were received from the alcoholic group and 512 (33.1%) were received from the nonalcoholic group. The mean ages of participants in the alcoholic and nonalcoholic groups were 59.5 (*SD* = 11.5) and 47.8 (*SD* = 11.2) years, respectively. The mean ages at which participants in the alcoholic and nonalcoholic groups had consumed their first drink were 17.1 (*SD* = 4.4) and 18.0 (*SD* = 3.4) years, respectively. In addi-

**Table 3.** Comparison of Life Experiences

	Alcoholic Group		Control Group (nonalcoholic group)		<i>p</i>	OR*
	Yes, <i>n</i>	(%)	Yes, <i>n</i>	(%)		
Parental indifference	48	(8.4)	18	(3.5)	<.001	2.5
Lack of parental control	66	(11.5)	25	(4.9)	<.001	2.5
Excessive parental interference	100	(17.4)	38	(7.4)	<.001	2.6
Verbal or physical abuse by parents	78	(13.6)	28	(5.5)	<.001	2.7
Being bullied	93	(16.2)	79	(15.4)	.791	1.1
Bullying others	70	(12.2)	43	(8.4)	.052	1.5
School delinquency	45	(7.8)	11	(2.1)	<.001	3.9
Social withdrawal	70	(12.2)	9	(1.8)	<.001	7.8
Verbal or physical spousal abuse	206	(35.9)	26	(5.1)	<.001	10.5
Being verbally or physically abused by spouse	56	(9.8)	27	(5.3)	.008	1.9
Verbal or physical abuse of children	103	(17.9)	30	(5.9)	<.001	3.5
Allowing children to do as they please	62	(10.8)	13	(2.5)	<.001	4.6
Depression	164	(28.6)	33	(6.4)	<.001	5.8
Nicotine addiction	270	(47.0)	116	(22.7)	<.001	3.0
Drug addiction	49	(8.5)	5	(1.0)	<.001	9.5
Gambling addiction	98	(17.1)	47	(9.2)	<.001	2.0
Habitual money wasting	139	(24.2)	33	(6.4)	<.001	4.6
Pathological lying	83	(14.5)	7	(1.4)	<.001	12.2
Eating disorders	27	(4.7)	4	(0.8)	<.001	6.3
Shopping addiction	52	(9.1)	16	(3.1)	<.001	3.1
Love addiction	27	(4.7)	3	(0.6)	<.001	8.4
Sex addiction	51	(8.9)	6	(1.2)	<.001	8.2

Note. Pearson's chi-squared test was performed to test for independence. \*alcoholic /control group.

**Table 4.** Comparison of Relationships

		Good		Poor		<i>p</i>
		<i>n</i>	(%)	<i>n</i>	(%)	
<b>Father</b>	Alcoholic group	182	(46.8)	96	(24.7)	<.001
	Control group	241	(59.2)	39	(9.6)	
<b>Mother</b>	Alcoholic group	255	(61.0)	69	(16.1)	<.001
	Control group	324	(71.7)	28	(6.2)	
<b>Siblings</b>	Alcoholic group	235	(47.7)	94	(19.1)	<.001
	Control group	291	(62.0)	57	(12.2)	
<b>Spouse</b>	Alcoholic group	243	(58.6)	69	(16.6)	<.001
	Control group	323	(78.4)	16	(3.9)	
<b>Children</b>	Alcoholic group	228	(59.1)	56	(14.5)	<.001
	Control group	296	(83.9)	8	(2.3)	
<b>Boss/colleagues</b>	Alcoholic group	145	(48.8)	38	(12.8)	.301
	Control group	239	(51.5)	31	(6.7)	
<b>Friends</b>	Alcoholic group	236	(51.5)	45	(9.8)	.002
	Control group	291	(59.8)	19	(3.9)	
<b>Self-help group members</b>	Alcoholic group	346	(64.3)	13	(2.4)	—
	Control group	—	—	—	—	

Note. Good = "extremely good relationship" or "very good relationship" and Poor = "completely estranged" or "very poor relationship." Mann-Whitney U tests were performed for each item.

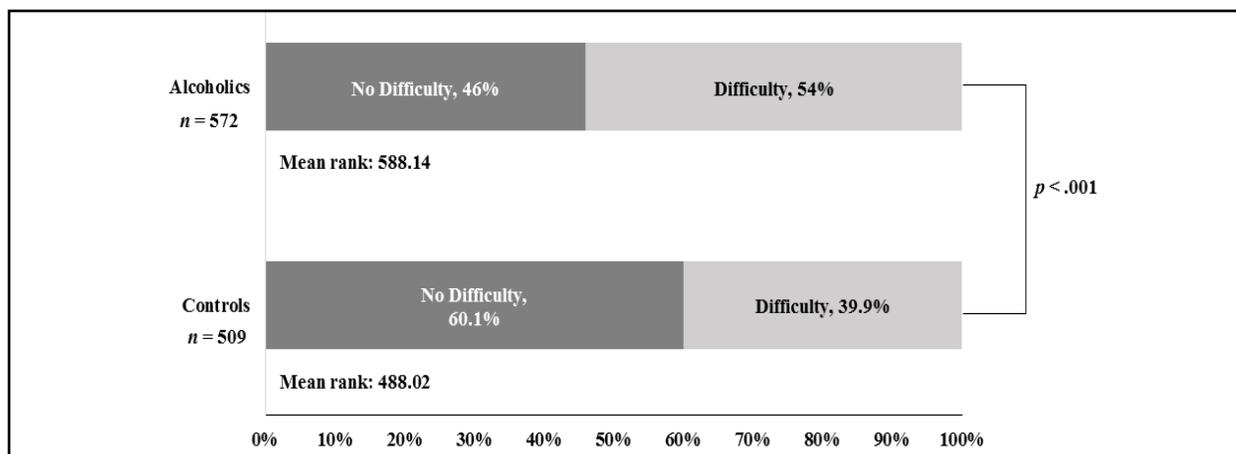
tion, 296 (51.6%) alcoholic participants were employed, 70 (12.2%) were divorced, and 47 (8.2%) were separated from their children. Of the non-alcoholic participants, 474 (92.6%) were employed, 18 (3.5%) were divorced, and 10 (2.0%) were separated from their children.

Results from *t*-tests showed that participants' current mean ages and mean ages at first drink differed significantly between groups. Discriminant analyses

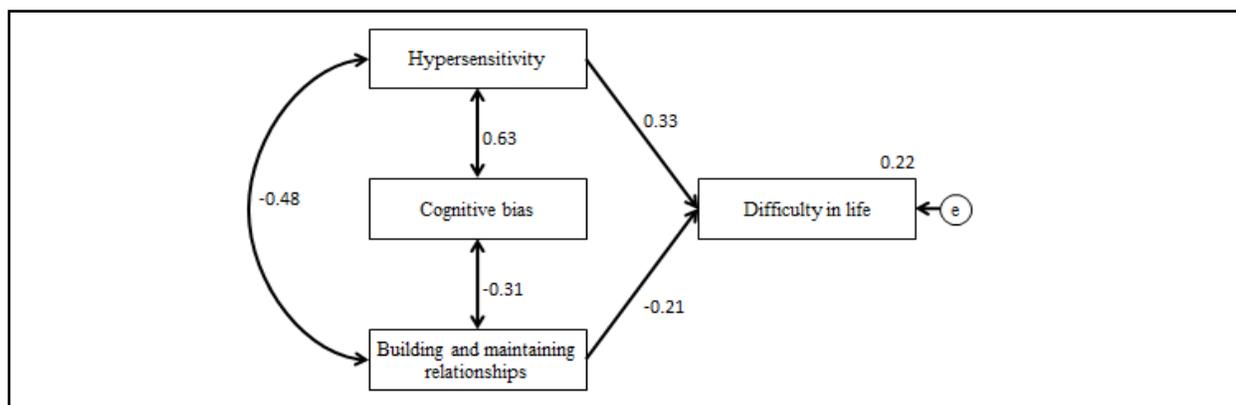
showed that employment status, divorce, and separation from children differed significantly between groups after controlling for age.

### Comparison of Life Experiences

Table 3 shows the results of cross-tabulation and Pearson's chi-squared tests performed to assess the independence of life experience items for the alcoholic



**Figure 1.** Perceived difficulty in life. *Note.* Dependent variable: perceived difficulty in life; independent variable: alcoholic status; Mann-Whitney U tests performed.



**Figure 2.** Covariance structure analysis of factors contributing to difficulty in life.

and nonalcoholic groups. All items other than bullying others and being bullied differed significantly between groups. Odds ratios were calculated for the occurrence of each item for both groups, and the results showed that, relative to participants in the nonalcoholic group, alcoholic individuals were 12.2 times more likely to be pathological liars, 10.5 times more likely to have verbally or physically abused their spouses, 9.5 times more likely to have experienced drug addiction, 8.4 times more likely to have experienced love addiction, and 8.2 times more likely to have experienced sex addiction.

### ***Comparison of Perceived Difficulty in Life and Hypersensitivity/Grandiosity Traits***

In total, 313 (54%) and 204 (39.9%) participants in the alcoholic and nonalcoholic groups, respectively, reported that they sometimes or usually felt that

life was difficult (Figure 1). A Mann-Whitney U test, with participants' perceived difficulty in life used as the dependent variable and alcoholic status used as the independent variable, showed that perceived difficulty in life differed significantly between groups ( $p < .01$ ).

Mean hypersensitivity scores were 2.67 and 2.44 for the alcoholic and nonalcoholic groups, respectively, and multiple regression analysis showed that hypersensitivity differed significantly between groups when controlling for age ( $t = 8.392, p < .01$ ). In contrast, the mean values for grandiosity were 2.54 and 2.62 for the alcoholic and nonalcoholic groups, respectively, and multiple regression analysis showed that grandiosity did not differ significantly between groups when controlling for age.

### ***Comparison of Relationship Quality***

The results of the comparison of relationship quality are shown in Table 4. In total, 96 (46%), 69

**Table 5.** Comparison of Factors Contributing to Difficulty in Life

		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	* <i>p</i> value
<b>Building and maintaining relationships</b>	Alcoholic group	-0.15	0.989	-7.444	<.001	.037
	Control group	0.15	0.876			
<b>Satisfaction with life</b>	Alcoholic group	-0.10	0.962	-5.930	<.001	.961
	Control group	0.10	0.924			
<b>Self-distrust</b>	Alcoholic group	0.09	0.906	6.319	<.001	.491
	Control group	-0.10	0.922			
<b>Loneliness</b>	Alcoholic group	0.08	0.961	5.568	<.001	.268
	Control group	-0.09	0.869			
<b>Cognitive bias</b>	Alcoholic group	0.15	0.864	6.555	<.001	<.001
	Control group	-0.16	0.844			
<b>Empathic understanding</b>	Alcoholic group	-0.13	0.949	-5.164	<.001	.267
	Control group	0.14	0.852			
<b>Self-acceptance</b>	Alcoholic group	-0.15	0.897	-6.179	<.001	.076
	Control group	0.16	0.824			

Note. \*Multiple logistic regression likelihood ratio test.

(16.5%), 94 (19.1%), 69 (16.6%), and 56 (14.5%) men in the alcoholic group reported having poor relationships with their fathers, mothers, siblings, spouses, and children, respectively. In addition, 39 (22.4%), 28 (6.2%), 57 (12.2%), 16 (3.9%), and 8 (2.3%) men in the nonalcoholic group reported having poor relationships with their fathers, mothers, siblings, spouses, and children, respectively. Considering the high proportions of positive responses in both groups, the quality of relationships with spouses, children, and mothers was particularly good for those in the nonalcoholic group. On the other hand, the quality of relationships with other members of the self-help group was good for those in the alcoholic group. Mann-Whitney U tests assessing each of the relationship items showed that the quality of relationships with fathers, mothers, siblings, spouses, children, and friends differed significantly between the two groups. The quality of other relationships did not differ significantly between groups.

### **Comparison of Factors Contributing to Difficulty in Life**

Table 5 shows the means and standard deviations for the scores obtained for factors contributing to difficulty in life for the alcoholic and nonalcoholic groups. Multiple logistic regression performed for each factor, with age included and a dummy variable used for alcoholic status, showed that life satisfaction, self-distrust, cognitive bias, loneliness, empathic understanding, self-acceptance, and building and maintaining relationships differed significantly between groups.

To identify factors that contributed to alcoholics' difficulty in life, multiple logistic regression analysis was performed for seven factors, with age included and a dummy variable used for alcoholic status, and a likelihood ratio test for significance showed that build-

ing and maintaining relationships ( $p = .037$ ) and cognitive bias ( $p < .001$ ) differed significantly between groups.

In the covariance structure analysis, cognitive bias, perceived difficulty in life, hypersensitivity, and building and maintaining relationships yielded (standardized) estimated values that were all significant at the 5% level. In addition, the fit indices showed adequate goodness of fit (goodness-of-fit index = .844; root mean square error of approximation = .265; Figure 2). Notably, grandiosity was not significantly related to difficulty in life; as the characteristic of alcoholics is a hypersensitive personality, we opted not to include "grandiosity" in the analysis. The coefficient for the path from hypersensitivity to perceived difficulty in life was 0.33, indicating that when hypersensitivity increased, perceived difficulty in life also increased. The coefficient for the path from building and maintaining relationships to perceived difficulty in life was -0.21, indicating that when levels of relationship building and maintenance decreased, perceived difficulty in life increased. The analysis also showed that hypersensitivity were positively correlated with cognitive bias, and building and maintaining relationships was negatively correlated with hypersensitivity and cognitive bias.

## **Discussion**

### **Social Context in Alcoholics' Lives**

Many of the alcoholic men in this study were divorced and separated from their children. It could be assumed that the loss of family relationships occurred while they were drinking, particularly as the current results showed that the alcoholic participants were 10.5 times more likely to have verbally or physically abused

their spouses, relative to those in the nonalcoholic group. According to a study conducted by Shimizu (2004), which examined the relationship between drinking and domestic violence, general population surveys showed that long-term problem drinking was correlated with various types of domestic violence, and as many as 67.2% of those involved in cases of domestic violence resulting in criminal punishment had been drinking at the time of the crime (Shimizu, 2008).

The 51.6% employment rate in alcoholic participants was low relative to that of the nonalcoholic group (92.6%). The high employment rate in the nonalcoholic group, which consisted mainly of men in their 30s to 60s, reflects the results of the Japanese government's Labor Force Survey, which showed that the employment rate for this age group exceeded 90% (Statistics Bureau, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2014). In contrast, the employment rate for the alcoholic group was lower relative to that of 68.8% for all people aged 15 years or older in Japan. Possible reasons for this finding could be that the mean age of the alcoholic group was higher, relative to the of the nonalcoholic group, and those who were initially employed may have been unable to continue working as their alcohol dependency progressed and it became obvious that they had a drinking problem. Returning to work after achieving sobriety can often be difficult because of possible damage to relationships with colleagues. Further, returning to the same workplace entails a high risk of relapse, as it constitutes a return to the environment in which the individual previously drank. In addition, maintaining sobriety after returning to the same job can be difficult. Given that Saito (1982), Horii (1987), and Fujimoto and Komatsu (1989) demonstrated the relevance of factors related to social stability, such as employment status and long-term prognosis, the comparatively low employment rate for the alcoholics in this study could be considered an indicator of a lack of socioeconomic stability.

Rates of pathological lying, drug addiction, love addiction, sex addiction, and eating disorders in alcoholics were higher relative to those observed for nonalcoholics, demonstrating that they were susceptible to multiple addictions. Even if alcoholics are able to cease drinking, they are prone to engaging in other addictive behaviors involving drugs, sex, or overeating, and easily transition from alcoholism to cross-addiction. Therefore, alcoholics' everyday lives could be extremely difficult if they live within the social context of broken family relationships, social instability, and potential cross-addiction.

### ***Alcoholics' Difficulty in Life***

The results showed that approximately half of the alcoholics felt that their lives were difficult. The factors that contributed to difficulty in life included low scores for life satisfaction, empathic understanding,

self-acceptance, and building and maintaining relationships; and high scores for self-distrust, loneliness, and cognitive bias. Further, cognitive bias and building and maintaining relationships were identified as factors contributing to alcoholics' difficulty in life. These two factors could be considered representative of the essential differences between the alcoholics and nonalcoholics, with the remaining factors occurring secondarily.

Considering the relationships between perceived difficulty in life and cognitive bias, hypersensitivity, and building and maintaining relationships, when hypersensitivity and difficulty in building and maintaining relationships increased, difficulty in life also increased. Further, the results showed that hypersensitivity was positively correlated with cognitive bias, and building and maintaining relationships were negatively correlated with hypersensitivity and cognitive bias.

Therefore, the greater alcoholics' hypersensitivity to the opinions of those around them, and the more they try to behave in ways that meet others' expectations, the greater the contribution of cognitive bias, characterized by "I should" and black-and-white thinking, to difficulty in building and maintaining relationships. This, in turn, could make life more difficult for them. While alcoholics often try excessively hard to meet the expectations of the people around them, if those efforts are not met with empathic understanding, their actions are frequently misunderstood and come across as self-serving. As a result, alcoholic individuals could terminate relationships or feel alienated under the biased perception that they have failed. This experience of failure can reduce their positive sense of self and decrease their satisfaction with life. Furthermore, alcoholics' scores for hypersensitivity and grandiosity were higher and lower, respectively, than were those of participants in the nonalcoholic group. Predominantly hypersensitive-type personalities are believed to be susceptible to psychological stress because of proneness to shame and a lack of self-esteem. Overall, the characteristics of alcoholics observed in this study, which included predominantly hypersensitive-type narcissistic tendencies, problems in building and maintaining relationships, and cognitive bias, contributed to their difficulty in life and could underlie the development of alcoholism as a primary addiction.

### ***Child-Rearing Environment and Primary Addiction***

Alcoholics reported poor relationships with their parents more frequently, relative to nonalcoholics, and stated that they had experienced parental indifference, lack of parental control, excessive parental interference, and physical or verbal abuse. These results were similar to those reported by Chartier, Hesselbrock, and Hesselbrock (2010) based on the results of the 2007 National Survey on Drug Use and Health in the United States, which showed strong correlations be-

tween stressful life events, abuse during childhood, domestic violence, and lack of social resources in families who experienced alcoholism, depressive symptoms, and behavioral problems. Consistent with these findings, the results of the current study showed that the lack of parental control during childhood was particularly strongly correlated with the abuse of substances, including alcohol.

According to Strozier (2011), Kohut believed that parental responsiveness during childhood determines self-strength and integration. He hypothesized that an absence of maternal acceptance would promote heightened anxiety and low self-confidence. Further, without sympathetic parental acceptance of one's ideals, values and morals would not develop, inevitably resulting in oversensitivity to the opinions of others. Therefore, certain tendencies arising from the child-rearing environment could underlie the development of alcoholism.

For example, Zimberg (1985) explained that the mechanism underlying the development of addictive behaviors involved the experience of stress associated with parental rejection and overprotection, resulting in premature independence in early childhood and fostering excessive dependency and attachment needs. Anxiety concerning one's existence emerges because of repeated rejection, and this anxiety leads to grandiose thinking and the creation and accumulation of failures within relationships. The individual is then consumed by feelings of remorse, guilt, loneliness, and anger and attempts to escape these negative emotions through intoxication, which potentiates addictive behavior. As a result, alcoholics' scores for hypersensitivity and grandiosity were higher and lower, respectively, than were those of participants in the nonalcoholic group. This all suggests that alcoholics are highly vulnerable to stressful situations, and their choice of coping mechanism is an attempt to escape the situation and they have acted egocentrically, which can be considered indicative of grandiosity. Endo (1998) argued that addictions should be categorized as either primary or secondary and stated the following:

In primary addiction, people have problems in attachment formation, deeply feeling anxieties such as fear of abandonment, unfulfilled desires, and loneliness. Because of these attachment needs and their being unmet, people turn to various dependencies such as alcoholism and drug addiction as secondary addictions (pp. 27–28).

Alcoholics who have been deprived of sufficient acceptance and sympathy by those responsible for their care in childhood could experience difficulty in life and become anxious individuals with low self-confidence who are oversensitive to the critical opinions of others. As these tendencies develop, they cause problems in building and maintaining relationships and create cognitive bias. Alcohol dependency could be the

consequence of repeated use of drinking to cope with difficulty in life.

## Conclusion

The results showed that alcoholics reported experiencing greater difficulty in their lives, relative to that described by nonalcoholics, and the social contexts of their lives, which included broken family relationships, social instability, and cross addiction, made everyday life extremely difficult. The characteristics related to alcoholics' difficulty in life included predominantly hypersensitive-type narcissistic tendencies, problems in building and maintaining relationships, and cognitive bias. These characteristics were associated with alcohol dependency in the current study; however, further research is required to determine whether causal relationships exist.

Because drinking is a part of everyday life in contemporary Japanese society, abstinence from alcohol is not a simple challenge. Moreover, alcoholics in remission face specific difficulties in life as they strive to remain sober. Future research is planned to extend the knowledge provided by the results of the current study, to support recovery.

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## Declaration of Conflicting Interest

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest in relation to this study.

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