



# Self Perception among the People with Alcoholism

NEHA SINGH  
Rehabilitation Psychologist, Lucknow  
U.P. (India)

## Abstract:

*The present study endeavors to cast a glance at the Perception of Self in the Alcoholics. Sample of 100 male alcoholic patients were selected through purposive sampling technique which ranged in age from 35-45 years with the mean age of 40 years from Disha de – addiction and Navjyoti Kiran de – addiction center in Lucknow city. It was an ex-post facto research. In order to gain insight into the perceived self of the male alcoholic patients “Who Am I?” technique by Arkoff (1985) was used. In this present study, this technique gives the better understanding of perceived self among male alcoholic patients and also serves as the base for identifying how they view themselves. Content analysis of the data brought to fore the fact that the self was perceived negatively by male alcoholics as compared to significant others.*

---

**Keywords:** *Perception of Self, Perceived Self, Alcohol and Alcoholics, Significant Others.*

---

## 1. Introduction

Self plays an important role in an individual's psyche. **Rogers, (1951)** proposed a phenomenological theory of personality where he laid emphasis on the understanding of human behavior from the individuals own frame of reference or from the point of view of the subjective world of the individual. This frame of reference reveals what he called the “self concept”. He defined “self” as an organized consistent conceptual gestalt composed of perception of the characteristic of the “I” or “Me” to others and to various aspects of life, together with the value attached to this perception.

Further, self is as all the perception, meanings and attitudes that the individual have about himself. In other words, perceived self means how one think he/she appears to others; how one think others evaluate that appearance; the resulting shame or pride one feel.

Perceived self is one of the aspects of this vast term which forms the base of an individual's self-perception. It is defined as the way a person assesses himself on the basis of the views of owns self and significant others. Significant others are the people considered important by an individual in his life viz. family members, friends and others.

Further, **Maslow, (1970)** reported the development of personality in terms of the “self”; he had a positive outlook towards individual's potential growth. Moreover, all theories of self development emphasize the individual's perception of self, how other person sees him that is his perception towards life. This becomes more meaningful when self perception of deviant populations is considered. Deviant population can be understood as people deviating from the social norms. Here, deviant populations included homosexuals, drug addicts, prostitutes, murderers, criminals, substance abuse, and alcoholics. Their self is very much influenced by perception of significant others. With Specific reference to Indian society, an alcoholic is a person unworthy of respect, person running from his responsibility, with the weak will power and many more.

Alcohol has been showing an increasing trend in India. It has been estimated that approximately 18% of adults experience an episode of alcohol abuse or dependence a sometime during their lives.

According to **WHO, (2004)**, FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) and World Drink Trends (2003) found that 0.82 liters pure alcohol was used by adult (15+) per capita consumption in India. Alcoholism is defined as “*a primary illness or disorder characterized by some loss of control over drinking, with habituation or addiction to the drug alcohol, causing interference in any major life function, e.g. health, family, job, spiritual, friends, legal*”(National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 2000).

The effects of alcoholism are far reaching. Alcohol affects every body system, causing a wide range of physical and psychological problems. **WHO, (2004)** mentioned some major problems which include poor nutrition, liver disease, high blood pressure, memory disorders, cancer (oropharyngeal, esophageal, liver cancers) etc. On a psychological level, alcoholism results in marital and other relationship difficulties, unemployment, depression, anxiety, stress, etc. Alcoholism contributes to a variety severe social problems including homelessness, suicide. Further, it was also found that alcohol is strongly associated with violent crime (**Graham and West, 2001**).

Paucity of work has been done on alcoholism with psychological perspective. Hence, this intruded the researcher to pick up the present study.

While reviewing the literatures, some questions came in researcher’s mind – How do alcoholics characterize or describe themselves? What strengths and positives attribute do alcoholics? What weaknesses and negative attributes do alcoholics? How they perceive their self? How they think they appear to others?

Since it is impossible to answer all the questions in one study, an attempt has been made to answer some of them in the present study.

## 2. Method

**Objective:** To study the perceived self among Alcoholics.

**Variables:**

**Independent Variable:** Gender

**Dependent Variable:** Perceived Self

**Nature of study:** The present study was an ex-post facto research with an exploratory orientation.

**Sample:** Sample for the present study was purposively selected. It consisted of 100 male alcoholic patients from Disha de – addiction and Navjyoti Kiran de – addiction centre, Lucknow, who ranged in age from 35-45 years with the mean age of 40.

**Measure:** ‘Who Am I?’ technique (**Arkoff, 1985**) was used for the present study. It is a semi projective technique which explores one’s perceived self in relation to significant others in the life space. There are variety of ways in which ‘Who am I?’ Technique is used by personality researchers. In the present study ‘Who am I?’ was used to assess perceived self, i.e. “What’s good and not so good about me?-the positive and negative shades of self.

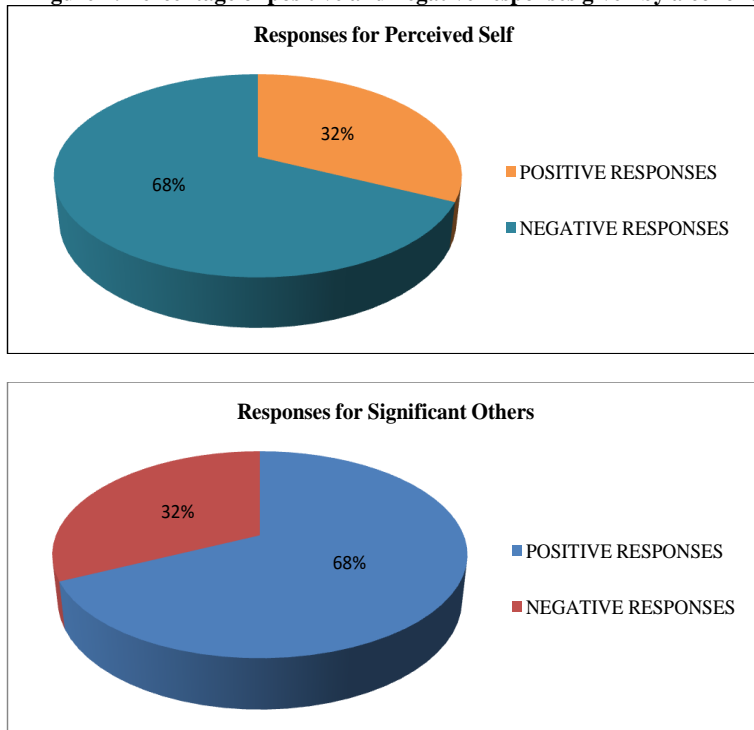
**Procedure:** The subjects were required to state their self-descriptions in terms of adjectives/statements, which consistently over time and over situations are descriptive of their behavior. The responses were noted in verbatim and participants were requested to be spontaneous. The subjects were assured of the confidentiality of the results.

**Analysis of the data:** On the basis of the obtained information, content analysis was done and results were interpreted on the basis of the percentage of positive and negative responses.

## 3. Results and Interpretation

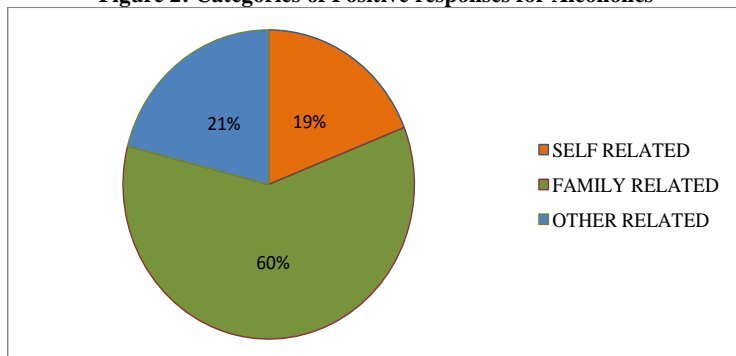
The obtained data when carefully content analyzed, led to the emergence of two major categories of responses - positive and negative. The below mentioned diagram depicts higher percentage of negative responses given by male alcoholics for themselves, as compared to significant others.

**Figure 1: Percentage of positive and negative responses given by alcoholics**



As depicted by fig.1, 68% responses given by male alcoholics were negative in nature for perceived self as compared to 32% responses given by male alcoholics for significant others. However, on an overall basis, self was found to be loaded with negativity for alcoholics. This can be supported by previous research evidence. The alcoholics have a more negative self – image (Aubry, et.al, 2004).

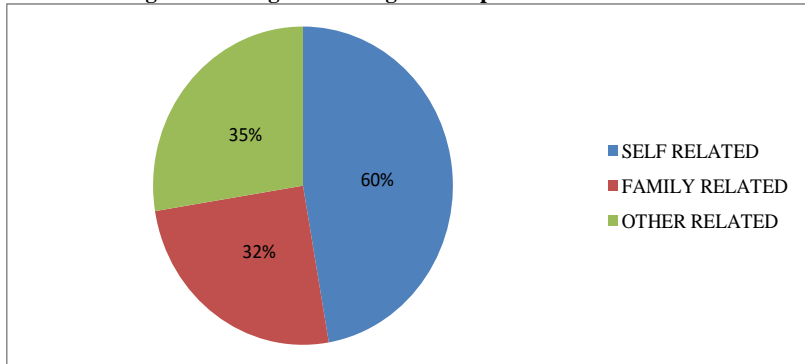
**Figure 2: Categories of Positive responses for Alcoholics**



Further, when positive responses were analyzed for male alcoholics, three major sub categories emerged (as depicted in fig.2). Surprisingly, majority of responses were found to be family related with 60% of the statements. For instance, “Main lucky hu kyunki mera parivaar bahut achha hain mere aisa karne par bhi wo mujhe support karte hain meri care karte hain”, “Meri maa aur meri wife mujhse bhut pyaar karte hain”, “Meri wife ne mera har kadam par saath diya wo bas chahti hain ki

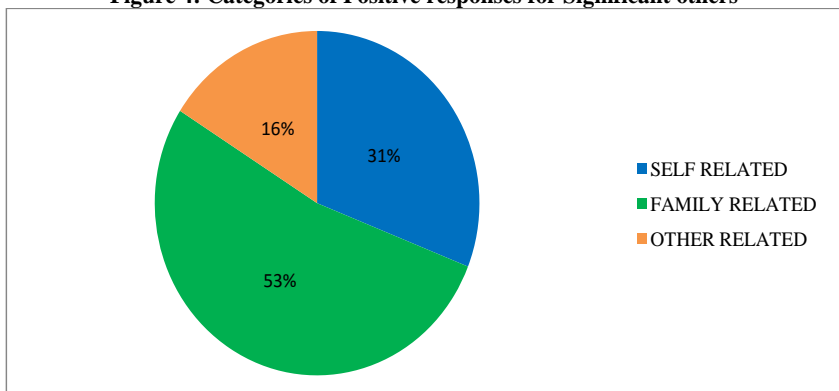
*main peena chhod du*". Moreover, 21% of responses were other related with responses like *"Bahut sare log mujhe zindadil mante hain kahte hain main bahut khushnaseeb hu jo apne mutabik apni jindagi jee raha hu"*. This category describes what according to an individual, others think about him/her. Only 19% of responses were self-related viz. *"Mujhe bhi khush rehne ka adhikaar hain"*, *"Main janta hu mujhe apni problems se khud hi nipatna hain"*. The responses under this category depicted the focus of a person exclusively towards his own self and the way he describes himself. The result brings to fore the fact that the perceived self of male alcoholics tend to be less self-focused and loaded with low positivity as compared to significant others (family and others). The present finding has been corroborated by (Aubry, et.al, 2004).

**Figure 3: Categories of Negative responses for Alcoholics**



Further when the negative responses of male alcoholics were analyzed, 60% of responses were found to be self oriented, responses viz. *"Kabhi kabhi lagta hain main bilkul akela hu"*, *"Main kisi kaam ka nahi hu"*. Next 35% of responses were observed as family related. Responses in this category were, *"Main janta hu mere parivaar ko mujhse kafi problem hain"*, *"Mere drink karne ki wajah se mere biwi bachho mujhse khush nahi hain"*. Only 32% of responses were directed towards other. Responses viz. *"Bahut sare logo ko mere sath kahin aane jaane me dikkat hoti hain"*, *"Mere dost kafi kam ho gaye hain"*. This brings to limelight the fact that there has been a dominance of focus towards self in case of negative responses also. (as shown in fig.3)

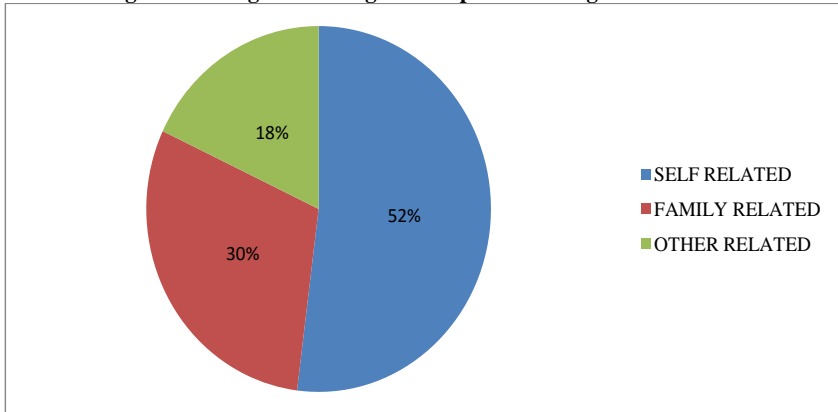
**Figure 4: Categories of Positive responses for Significant others**



With reference to significant others, a dominance of family has been witnessed in terms of positive responses (fig.4) as 53% of responses were related to family. Verbatim in this category was *"Haan log mujhe achha insaan mante hain jo keval galat sangat ke karan addict ho gaya hain"*. Further,

31% of responses were self dominated and 16% of responses were other related. Responses viz. “*Sab kehte hain ki mere parivaar ki tarah kahi aur koi nahi hain jo mera har kadam pe saath dete hain*” and “*Log kehte hain main bahut lucky hu mujhe aise dost mile jo meri financially bhi help karte hain*” respectively.

**Figure 5: Categories of Negative responses for Significant others**



In the case of negative response categories of significant others, again a dominance of self has been witnessed as 52% responses were self focused whereas 30% of responses were family oriented (fig.5). Responses viz. “*Bahut sare logo ka manna hain ki maine apni aur apni family ki zindagi barbaad kar di hain*”, “*Sab kehte hain ki mere bachhe mujhe napasand karte hain*” and “*Mera parivaar mujhse darke meri respect karta hain*” respectively. 18% of responses were related to other viz. “*Mere kuch doston ka manna hain ki mera unke ghar par jana thik nahi hain*”. The above result reveals that perceived self of male alcoholics were influenced by significant others.

Thus, on the basis of findings the emerging picture clearly indicates that male alcoholics perceive self more in negative light. Further, this negative perception is more self-dominated than significant others dominated. A probable reason could be that alcoholics feel their self is neglected, abandoned and deserted in real life so that’s why they viewed themselves as more negatively and less productive also.

#### 4. Conclusion

To conclude, one can say that male alcoholics have a negative perception of self. This is in accordance with the theoretical base which suggests that alcoholics see themselves as generally inadequate and unworthy of respect and also have depressive and distorted self (Aubry, et.al, 2004; Michael, et.al., 1974). However, possibility cannot be ruled out that excess of negativity regarding perceived self may be a result of some sort of relationship problems and denial of reality which the alcoholics face in their life.

Therefore, the need of the hour is to intensively study the sample and expose unsophisticated realities regarding their views about themselves. Acute measures in the form of providing realistic self affirmations, use of Group therapy, meditation, rehabilitation programmes and Cognitive Behavior therapy (CBT) may be applied to minimize the use of defensive behavior and would facilitate them to obtain a realistic picture of the self. This may further leads to the male alcoholics to accept their present reality and enhance their well-being.

#### 5. Implications for Research

Having gone through the exhaustive and rich data of the present study that has emerged in terms of perceived self of male alcoholics, the need of the hour is not just to add more theoretical concepts and

unveil the crude realities of alcoholics in India but what is most needed is to control the evil of alcoholism so as to spread more positivity and well being to the humanity. Further in terms of intervention, some strong steps should be taken from family members because relationship is the core need of an individual especially when the individual is using alcohol because of any relationship problems. It was found that there was a strong need of relationship in alcoholics. Thus, it can be concluded that with the help of relationship warmth and emotional support one can drag them out from this.

### References

1. Arkoff, A. (1985). *Psychology and Personal Growth*, Allen and Bacon, California.
2. Aubry, C., et.al, (2004). The alcoholic's self image: a comparative study between men and women. *Journal of L'Encephale (Elsevier)*. 30 (1): 24-31.
3. Graham, K., and West, P. (2001). Alcohol and crime: Examining the link. In: Heather, N.; Peters, T.J.; and Stockwell, T.; eds. *International Handbook of Alcohol Dependence and Problems, Part IV: Drinking Patterns and Types of Alcohol Problem*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, pp. 439–470.
4. Maslow, A. H. (1970). *Motivation and personality*. New York: Harper & Row.
5. Michael, B.O. 'Leary., & Dennis, M. Donovan. (1974). Perception of depression in self and others among male alcoholics. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 30 (2): 142–146.
6. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. (2000). 10th Special Report to the U.S. Congress on Alcohol and Health. National Institute of Health Publications.
7. Rogers, C. (1951). *Client-centered therapy: Its current practice, implications and theory*. London: Constable.
8. World Health Organization (WHO). (2004). *Global Status Report on Alcohol*. Who publications. Geneva.