

Marital Quality and Social Functioning in Spouses of Individuals with and without Alcohol Dependence

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Alcohol is one of the leading substances abused worldwide. Alcohol affects the user's ability to perceive, integrate and process information and can increase the user's sense of personal power and domination over others especially their spouses. Alcohol addiction causes marital disharmony and instances of family violence leading to an unhealthy ambience in the family environment. This study intends to explore two important areas related to the spouses of alcohol addicted individuals i.e. marital quality and their social functioning. **Methodology:** *Study Design:* Cross sectional comparative study. *Venue:* Central Institute of Psychiatry, Ranchi. *Samples:* total sample size of the study was sixty; 30 participants were the spouses of Alcohol dependent (AD) who fulfilled the criteria of ICD-10-DCR and 30 participants were from normal population. *Statistical measures:* Descriptive statistics chi-square and independent samples' t-test used for comparison and Pearson's Correlation Coefficient was used for correlation. **Results:** Spouses of alcohol addicted individuals perceived significantly lesser marital quality and social functioning than the spouses of non-alcoholic individuals. There is positive relation between marital quality of life and social functioning of spouses of alcohol dependent individuals. **Conclusion:** Spouses of alcohol dependent individuals have lower marital quality as well as social functioning in comparison to spouses of individuals not dependent on alcohol.


Keywords: Marital quality, social functioning, spouses, alcohol dependence

INTRODUCTION

Empirical studies had shown that alcoholism has overwhelming detrimental impact on every subtle areas of family life. Alcoholism has temporal association with marital and family disharmony, economic and financial crisis in the family, legal problems, and instances of violence and abuse and poor parenting.^[1] The World Health Organization estimates that worldwide about

16.0% of drinkers aged 15 years or older engage in heavy episodic drinking. It is more common among males and young adults. In 2012, total of 3.3 million deaths (5.9% of all global deaths) are believed to be due to alcohol ^[2]. Alcoholism is known as a family disease because alcoholism is responsible for causing more family problems than any other single cause. Alcoholism has very negative effects on the marital relationship.

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The spouse display negative feelings like 'hatred', 'self-pity', 'avoidance of social contacts or occasions', 'emotional exhaustion' and 'psychological problems like anxiety and depression'^[3]. In families with alcohol dependent individuals, very often the non-addicted spouses have to supplement the roles of their addicted spouses. Roles pertaining to parenting and childcare are shifted to non-addicted spouses and because of role overloading children of these families are often deprived of adequate parental care and attachment. Having financial difficulties is another issue that families of persons with alcohol dependent have to deal with. Alcoholism has been found to be a major factor of premature widowhood and divorce^[11]. Alcohol dependence is highly associated with poor marital quality as the person with alcohol dependence tends to adapt faulty communication patterns and behaviour which in turn leads to poor adjustment, unhappiness, and a high degree of dissatisfaction with relationships. The heavy drinking and alcoholism are widely accepted as causes of marital problems and dissolution. Husband's alcohol use is generally regarded as one of the common reasons given for the breakup of the marriage. Hostile marital interactions were observed among couples with an antisocial alcoholic husband. Excessive drinking and alcoholism would have a detrimental impact on marital quality and, if unresolved, could result in marital separations and divorce. Spouses of persons with alcohol dependent are known to be exposed to high rates of domestic violence, which could be physical, verbal or sexual. Low marital satisfaction, maladaptive coping skills and poor social support, in addition to economic burden and social stigma, are the other major issues among the spouses.^[3]

⁶⁾Marital quality is often used in a sense that includes marital adjustment as well as happiness and satisfaction. Marriage is a strong bond between couples with the promise of lifelong dedication and emotional wellbeing. The effects of alcoholism in husbands may lead to disturbances in marital life. Lack of understanding, unpredictable behaviour of the husbands, and their irresponsibility in family matters can often lead to poor quality of a couple's relationship^[5,6]. Social functioning has been defined as "the ability to construct representations of the relations between oneself and others and to use those

representations flexibly to guide social behaviour"^[7]. Social functioning can be defined as the level at which an individual functions in his or her social context, such as function ranging from self-preservation and basic living skills to the relationship with others in society^[7]. Social functioning can be understood as the ability of an individual to interact with his environment as well as understandability his role and task assignments within his own social environment. Every human being has to function daily with several components within his social environment, e.g., job and workplace, social and leisure activities, keeping mutual relationship with marital, parental, and with the extended family systems^[8]. Several past studies have vividly documented that spouses of alcohol addicted individuals very frequently witness problems like 'strained marital relationship', 'lack of spousal support and association', 'increased perception of distress', 'poorer health condition' and marked deficits in various areas of social functioning^[9-18]. In the past, numerous studies and empirical observations have meticulously examined different facets of marital relationship and interactions in the context of addiction. Some studies concluded that the wives of alcohol addicted persons have certain pathological personality needs which influence their husbands to be addicted in the long run. The Opposing views negate this thesis by stating that wives of persons addicted to alcohol cannot be held responsible conclusively for their husbands' alcoholism because several meddling factors may have influential roles in this process^[15-22]. The present study was an endeavour to assess the quality of marital relationship and social functioning of spouses of individuals with alcohol dependence syndrome.

METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out in Central Institute of Psychiatry, Ranchi. The Central Institute of Psychiatry has been operating under the aegis of Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India and an institution known to be the vanguard of modern mental health care in this country. The samples of the study were selected purposively with their consent from the Addiction Psychiatry Wing of this institute. At the onset, thirty married male patients who have the final diagnosis of Alcohol Dependence Syndrome were

selected as per the inclusion and exclusion criteria of the study and their spouses were approached by the researcher to be the main participants of the study. Normal individuals and their spouses were selected with their consent after matching them with Participants belonging to the Study Group in basic socio-demographic parameters, e.g. 'age', 'education', 'monthly income' and 'length of marriage'. Since the focus of the study was marital quality and social functioning from the perspective of the spouses of persons addicted to alcohol, so the wives of these persons were contacted by the researcher. Data collection measures used in this study were, socio-demographic and clinical data sheet, Severity of Alcohol Dependence Questionnaire (SADQ)^[23], General Health Questionnaire-12 (GHQ-12)^[24], Marital Quality Scale^[25] and Social Functioning Questionnaire^[26]. The SADQ was applied on the patients for measuring their level of alcohol addiction. The SADQ is a 20-item questionnaire designed to measure the severity of dependence on alcohol. There are five subscales with four items in each: Physical Withdrawal, Affective Withdrawal, Withdrawal Relief Drinking, Alcohol Consumption, and

Rapidity Reinstatement. Each item can be scored on a 4-point scale, ranging from "Almost Never" to "Nearly Always," resulting in a corresponding score of 0 to 3. The General Health Questionnaire-12 was applied on the Normal individuals as well as their spouses for ruling out psychological morbidity in them. The 12-Item General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) is the most extensively used screening instrument for common mental disorders throughout the world²⁴. Persons scoring >3 in this scale is thought to be psychologically morbid. Therefore, in the present study, people scoring <3 in GHQ-12 were considered to be the participants of the study. The Marital Quality Scale^[25] and Social Functioning Questionnaire^[26] were applied the spouses of individuals belonging to either group for measuring their perception on marital quality and their present social functioning. The collected data were analyzed by the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Windows version 22.

RESULTS

In the two tables (Table 1 & 1.1), socio-demographic profiles of the subjects of both the groups are presented.

Table-1
Socio-demographic Profile of the Participants

Variables		Group (N=60)		χ ²	p
		Study Group (n=30)	Control Group (n=30)		
Family Type	Joint	11(52%)	10(48%)	.073	1.00 (N.S.)
	Nuclear	19(48%)	20(51%)		
Patient Occupation	Employed	29(49%)	30(51%)	1.017#	1.00 (N.S.)
	Unemployed	1(100%)	0(0%)		
Religion	Hindu	19(49%)	20(51%)	.073	1.00 (N.S.)
	Other	11(52%)	10(48%)		
Domicile	Rural	13(50%)	13(50%)	.000	1.00 (N.S.)
	Urban	17(50%)	17(50%)		
Spouse Occupation	Employed	14(50%)	14(50%)	.000	1.00 (N.S.)
	House wife	16(50%)	16(50%)		

#Fischer's Exact Test used; N.S. - not significant

Table-1.1
Socio-demographic Profile of the Participants

Variables	Group (N=60)		t	p
	Study Group (n=30) Mean ± SD	Control Group (n=30) Mean ± SD		
Patient Age	40.70±6.11	40.56±6.33	.083	.934 (N.S.)
Spouse Age	36.33±6.91	36.50±6.35	-.097	.923 (N.S.)
Education	11.93±4.42	12.40±3.69	-.444	.659 (N.S.)
Spouse Education (year.)	10.96±4.86	11.26±4.32	-.252	.802 (N.S.)
Duration of Marriage (year.)	14.53±6.04	13.03±5.93	.970	.336 (N.S.)

N.S. - not significant

Table 2

Duration and Severity of Alcohol Dependence in Study Group

Variable	Mean ±SD
Duration of Alcohol Dependence	14.26 ±7.59
SADQ Score	35.33±4.99

* Standard Deviation

In terms of comparability, these two groups do have adequate comparability in all parameters. In order to assess the comparability, Chi-Square Test and Independent “t” test were used and no statistically significant difference was noted between these two groups in any of the socio-demographic parameters.

Table 2: Mean duration of addiction to alcohol of the selected married males was enumerated to be 14.26 years and the score in SADQ was 35.33. As per the norms of the SADQ, a score above 30 suggests the person is in need of active detoxification, urgent need of cutting down his daily amount and intensive medical management of associated physical problems originating from his habit. So, persons (addicted to alcohol) selected for the current study need active detoxification.

Table 3: Significant differences were noted between the spouses of the persons addicted to alcohol and normal individuals in the both marital quality and social functioning. In the both Marital Quality and Social Functioning Scale spouses persons addicted to alcohol have reported higher problems (higher scores in both the scales) than that of spouses of normal individuals.

Table 4: Significant positive correlation was seen between marital quality and social functioning in the

Table -3

Social Functioning and Marital Quality

Variables	Group (N=60)		t	p
	Study Group (n=30) Mean ± SD	Control Group (n=30) Mean ± SD		
Social functioning	16.10±2.60	2.86±2.02	21.952	.001***
Marital Quality	131.06±23.45	65.90±5.82	14.767	.001***

***p=0.001

Table-4

Correlation between Marital Quality & Social Functioning (In Study Group)

Variables	Social Functioning
Marital Quality	.689**

***p<0.001

study group (Spouses of persons addicted to alcohol). It means that better the marital quality better the social functioning of these people.

DISCUSSION

The present study was an endeavour to study the 'Marital Quality' and 'Social Functioning' among the spouses of individuals addicted to alcohol. An attempt was also made to compare the same with normal population. Existing literatures^[27-30] and empirical observations have showed emphatically that spousal addiction to psychoactive substances can have overwhelming detrimental impact on conjugal life and interpersonal interactions. The quality of marital interactions of alcoholism affected couples is found to be as negative as interactions in couples with strained marital relationship sans alcoholism. Married couples with an alcohol addicted husbands have been found to be hostile and aggressive towards their wives and they do not give more importance to their wives interests, needs and requirements. Wives of these people tend to be edgy most of the time because of unpredictability and uncertainty in daily family interactions and activities. Because of their husbands' habit, they have to put extra effort to maintain the stability or homeostasis of the family and this extra load in their role assignments impairs their social and interpersonal relationship patterns. Numerous past studies have also shown the correctness of those aforesaid statements^[16-22]. Spousal alcohol addiction has been found to be a perineal source of stress to wives and their daily social and personal functions. This kind of picture is found in almost all cultures, because chronic alcoholism cripples the generic family functions as well as individual functions. In the present study, findings suggested that wives of the problematic alcohol drinkers have significant problems in their social functioning and they don't perceive their marital relationship as satisfactory. This finding of the present study is consistent with the past observations.^[16]

LIMITATIONS

Present study has some limitations. The sample size of the present study was small, which reduces the generalizability of the study findings. The study group mainly represented the spouses of individuals with severe level of alcohol dependence. Spouses of individuals with mild and moderate dependence could not be assessed. The marital quality and social functioning in mild to moderate group might differ from the severe group. This further reduces the generalization of the study.

CONCLUSION

Marriage is a strong bond between couples with the promise of lifelong dedication and emotional wellbeing. Alcoholism not only damages health of the addicted persons but it also causes comprehensive damage to the family and marital life of concerned people. The present study showed that social functioning and marital quality in spouses of individuals with alcohol dependence was very lower as compared to spouses of individuals without alcohol dependence. Further, it also showed that marital quality and the social functioning of the spouses of persons addicted to alcohol are positively related.

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