

Perceived Stress and Coping ways among the Wives of Alcoholics and Non-alcoholics

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Abstract:

The author examined the perceived stress and the ways of coping among the wives of alcoholics and non-alcoholics. The groups were formed on the basis of the responses to the self-report- inventory of alcoholism screening test. The purpose was to assess the relation between the perceived stress and the ways of coping and to compare the wives of alcoholic group with the wives of non-alcoholic group. The sample of 110 married women (55 the wives of alcoholics and 55 the wives of non-alcoholics) was taken for this study. The perceived stress scale and the ways of coping questionnaire were administered to the wives of alcoholics (WOA) and non-alcoholics (WONA). Percentage, correlation and 't- test' were done for analysis. Discussion focused on the relation between the perceived stress and the ways of coping and the comparison of the two groups of the wives of alcoholics and non-alcoholics. The findings were that the wives of alcoholic and non-alcoholic spouses differed significantly in the perceived stress and the ways of coping.

Keywords: perceived stress and coping wives of alcoholics and non-alcoholics

Introduction:

Drug and alcohol use has been found to be a consistent risk marker for the use of violence towards female partner [1]. Women married to alcoholics report several interpersonal, extra-personal, and intrapersonal stressors and the most frequently reported stressor has been their relationships with their husbands [2].

Studies indicate an increased risk for spouse abuse among the Alcoholics. For example, the rates of marital aggression in men diagnosed with a current alcohol problem (44%) is about three times greater than in men without an alcohol use disorder (15%) [3]. There have been positive relationships between alcoholism and marital conflict [4] as well as marital violence [5] & [6]. Several studies [7] & [8] have shown that spouses of alcoholics have significant rates of mental and physical problems, communication problems, low social activity and poor marital satisfaction. The spouses deal with stressors and they adopt coping behavior which seems to be rather uniform although spouses of alcoholics are a heterogeneous group with varying backgrounds [9] & [10].

Alcoholism is a family illness, referring to the tremendous impact on an active alcoholic and his wife and children [11]. It is an economic drain on family resources, threatens job security, interrupts normal family tasks, causes conflicts, and demands adjustive and adaptive responses from wives leading to increased tension and stress. In many ways, they start behaving like the addicts [12]. There are strained interaction patterns and difficulties in communication and effective involvement in alcoholics' families. The

wives develop maladaptive behaviors and they will become neurotic, psychologically maladjusted, sadistic, hostile, frustrated, quarrelsome, and agitated [13].

The wives of alcoholics have not only stress, but they also face the problems of verbal abuse, communication difficulties, low self-esteem which affect the behavior and personality of them. Due to lower marital adjustments, their quality of life does not have satisfaction to them [14].

The levels of marital conflict and aggressions are high in any couple with an alcoholic spouse. As a result the spouse may develop dysfunctional coping behavior. Marital conflict and lack of coping mechanisms are more frequent in alcoholic families [15]. People experience a common phenomenon of stress and react to stressful occasion differently.

Lazarus and Folkman state that stress does not associate with environmental events and with person's physiological responses, but the person's perception of some change in the environment determines stress. A person perceives a situation as threatening or demanding and feels stress when he or she does not have an appropriate coping response. Stressors are threats that tax or exceed personal resources and coping is constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and internal demands [16].

Discord, avoidance, indulgence and fearful withdrawal have been the commonest coping behaviors and marital breakdown, taking special action, assertion and

sexual withdrawal have been least coping behaviors. The nature of wife's coping behavior depends on her personality, the degree of duration of her husbands' alcoholism and duration of marriage etc.,

The coping behaviors, irrespective of whether cause or effect, are important in the course and outcome of the husband's alcoholism. In view of dearth of information in Indian setting, the study was undertaken to assess the perceived stress and extent of coping behaviors used by the wives towards their spouses' alcoholism and to study the relationship between coping behaviors and various personal, marital and socio-demographic variables [17].

The wives reported a progressive increase in all types of coping from the first to the third of these stages. The stages were social drinking stage, excessive drinking stage, alcoholismic drinking stage and abstinence stage. He also noted that wives who reported that their husbands had become violent and aggressive were those who were most likely to report that they themselves had reacted with quarreling, avoidance, anger and helplessness, pretending to be drunk themselves, locking their husbands out of the house and seeking separation [18]. This study helps to understand better about the perceived stress and ways of coping.

Objectives:

The objectives of this study were (i) to assess perceived stress and ways of coping in the wives of alcoholics and non-alcoholics, and (ii) to determine the relationship between the perceived stress and the ways of coping and (iii) to compare the two groups of the wives of alcoholics and non-alcoholics.

Methods:

Design: A cross sectional, descriptive design was used to assess the perceived stress and the ways of coping among the wives of alcoholics and non-alcoholics who were staying with their husbands.

Sample: Convenience sampling was done to select 100 married women (55 the wives of alcoholics by using AUDIT scale which had risky or hazardous level, high-risk or harmful level, and high-risk [19] and 55 the wives of non-alcoholics) from Chennai. The background variables such as religion, husbands' education, types of family, total family income and duration of husbands' drinking alcohol were collected.

The inclusion and exclusion criteria: The wives of alcoholics and non-alcoholics who were staying with their husbands were undertaken for the study. The wives who were legally married and living with their husbands with monogamous relationship and currently living with their husband and child / children for a

minimum period of 15 years were included. The wives whose husbands had polysubstance abuse other than alcohol and nicotine were excluded. The wives of alcoholics who consumed alcohol and with any kind of major medical or psychiatric illness were included.

Materials:

Perceived Stress Scale: (PSS) It is a measure of the degree to which situations in one's life are appraised as stressful [20] & [21]. Items were designed to tap how unpredictable, uncontrollable, and overloaded respondents find in their lives. It was well documented that spouses' wellbeing and way of life was influenced by their partner's alcohol problems.

The ways of coping questionnaire: Coping in the WOAs and WONAs was measured by the ways of coping questionnaire, a 66-item scale [22]. This instrument measured the thoughts and actions used by the two groups to cope with stressful encounters of everyday living. Items were rated on a 4-point frequency scale as: Does not apply (0), used somewhat (1), used quite a bit (2), and used a great deal (3). The maximum score was 150.

The ways of coping questionnaire consisted of eight subscales, which included confrontive coping, distancing, self controlling, seeking social support, accepting responsibility, escape-avoidance, planful problem solving and positive reappraisal. Reliability was established by split half reliability method and Cronbach alpha coefficient for the over all coping scale was 0.72.

The permission was obtained from the husbands of these wives. The oral consent was obtained from the study participants. The interview was administered in local language (Tamil) to elicit their responses.

Data Analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistics through SPSS were used to analyse the data. The percentage, correlation and 't' test were used to the scores of the perceived stress, the ways of coping and the background variables of WOAs and WONAs.

Findings and Discussion

Majority of the wives of alcoholics and non-alcoholics belonged to the Hindu religion (58.2%) & (52.7%), followed by Christians (23.6%) & (30.9%) respectively. The wives of alcoholics and non-alcoholics of Muslims had (18.2%) & (16.4%) respectively. Majority of the two groups had husbands' education secondary (40%) & (36.4%), followed by higher secondary (30.9%) and (32.7%) respectively. Majority of the two groups' income of Rs. 6001 to 10000 were (45.5%) & (43.7%), followed by the income of Rs. 3001 to 6000 (34.5%) & (32.7%)

respectively. The structures of the families were both nuclear and joint families were 65.5% & 54.5% respectively. The durations of alcoholism were (44.5%) & followed by (34.5%). (Table 1)

Table 1. The Socio demographic variables of the wives of alcoholics (WOAs) and non-alcoholics (WONAs)

S. No.	Background Variables	N	%	N	%
1.	Wives' Religion				
	Hindu	32	58.2	29	52.7
	Christian	13	23.6	17	30.9
	Muslim	10	18.2	9	16.4
2	Husbands' Education				
	Primary	6	10.9	4	7.3
	Secondary	22	40	20	36.4
	Higher Secondary	17	30.9	18	32.7
	College	10	18.2	13	23.6
3	Types of family				
	Nuclear family	36	65.5	30	54.5
	Joint family	19	34.5	25	44.5
4	Total Family Income (Rs./month)				
	Rs <3000	2	3.6	0	
	Rs 3001-6000	19	34.5	18	32.7
	Rs 6001-10000	25	45.5	24	43.7
	Above Rs 10000	9	16.4	13	23.6
5	Duration of husbands' drinking				
	3-6	19	34.5	-	
	7-10	20	36.4	-	
	11-15	16	29.1	-	

Table 2. Correlation of the perceived stress and the Ways of Coping, among the wives of alcoholics and non-alcoholics.

S.No	Groups 'score	N	WONA	r
1	Perceived stress	55	24.84	0.710*
2	Ways of coping	55	83.93	0.472*

*p<0.01

Table 3. Mean, SD and t value of various ways of coping in the wives of alcoholics and non-alcoholics.

S.no	Coping subscales	N	WOA		WONA		t	
			X	SD	X	SD		
1	Confrontive coping	55	11.93	1.79	55	10.54	1.10	5.32*
2	Distancing	55	12.47	1.45	55	10.16	1.46	9.89*
3	Self-controlling	55	10.44	1.41	55	13.04	1.25	11.02*
4	Seeking social support	55	12.31	0.88	55	10.75	1.35	7.49*
5	Accepting responsibility	55	7.76	1.34	55	7.84	1.20	1.40
6	Escape-avoidance	55	11.64	0.87	55	11.87	1.05	2.28**
7	Planful problem solving	55	11.29	1.00	55	12.44	0.97	6.55*
8	Positive reappraisal	55	13.22	0.94	55	11.24	1.08	11.20*

**p< 0.05; *p, <0.01

Table 4 Mean, standard deviation, and t- value of the wives of alcoholics and non-alcoholics

S.No	Scale	N	Wives of Alcoholics		Wives of Non alcoholics		t-value
			X	SD	X	SD	
1	Perceived Stress	55	27.96	2.57	24.84	2.55	6.36*
2	Ways of coping	55	97.16	9.34	83.93	7.90	10.21*

*p< 0.01

The study revealed that there were high correlation between the perceived stress and the ways of coping among the wives of alcoholics (0.719) as well as the wives of non-alcoholics (0.343) indicating the relationship between the perceived stress and the ways of coping. The findings indicated that both the groups

IJBCPST (2014), 3(1):1-5 used different coping strategies to manage their perception of situations. The different coping strategies adopted are confrontive coping, distancing, self controlling, and seeking social support, accepting responsibility, escape-avoidance, planful problem solving and positive reappraisal. The proportion of the responses registered in the different coping strategies is highlighted in Table 3.

The wives of alcoholics had high means in the variables such as confrontive coping, distancing, seeking social support, and positive reappraisal indicating aggressive efforts to alter the situation. it also suggests a degree of hostility and risk taking (confrontive coping); efforts to detach oneself, and to concern creating a positive outlook (distancing); efforts to seek informational support, tangible support and emotional support (seeking social support); efforts to create positive meaning by focusing on personal growth; it also has religious tone (positive reappraisal).

The wives of non-alcoholics had higher means in the self-controlling, escape-avoidance, planful problem solving. These indicate self-controlling which describes the efforts to regulate one's feeling and action. Keep their feelings to themselves; escape-avoidance which shows wishful thinking. For example, the situation would go away; behavioural efforts to avoid or escape; Planful problem solving which has efforts to alter the situation (problem focused) coupled with analytical approach to solve problem. The two groups did not differ significantly in accepting responsibility indicating acknowledge one's own role in the problem with a concomitant theme of trying to put things right. It is interesting to observe that women in both groups manage stress and the wives of non alcoholics also have perceived stress.

Mean, standard deviation, were calculated for the wives of alcoholics and non-alcoholics to facilitate the comparison of the two groups. The main analysis of the data was to determine the significance of mean difference between these groups by t-test. The mean value in the wives of alcoholics was higher than the wives of non-alcoholics indicating higher perceived stress in the wives of alcoholics. The mean value in the wives of alcoholics was higher than the wives of non-alcoholics indicating higher the ways of coping in the wives of alcoholics. The findings support the earlier research of stress and coping of wives of alcoholics [23] [24] & [25]. The findings when viewed at social angle it can be observed that considerable proportion of women in general are perceiving stress 27.96 among Alcoholic husbands' wives and 24.84 non alcoholic husbands' wives. The coping ways of the wives of alcoholic is low, and suitable measures have to be taken to increase their coping skills. (Table 4)

CONCLUSIONS:

In conclusion, the data presented add to the growing evidence that alcoholism can have serious consequences on families, especially the wives of alcoholics. Majority of the wives of alcoholics and non-alcoholics use all coping strategies at different levels during stressful situations. The wives of alcoholics used confrontive coping, distancing, seeking social support, and positive reappraisal; the wives of non-alcoholics used self-controlling, escape-avoidance, and planful problem solving. The wives of alcoholic and non-alcoholic spouses differed significantly in the perceived stress and the total score of the ways of coping. The wives cope with the stress of husbands' alcoholism, differently depending on various factors, like cultural factor, upbringing, personality etc. The findings of this study will help community health to identify, various coping strategies adopted by the wives of alcoholics and non-alcoholics and will help them to strengthen the healthy adaptive coping strategies and rectify the maladaptive coping strategies and help them perceive the stressful situations as manageable, challenging and not threatening. An understanding of adaptive coping styles can be used in the prevention of distress and the promotion of well being in the wives.

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