

Through the Life of their Spouses- Coping Strategies of Wives of Male Alcoholics

Chinnu Sebastian¹, Suja M.K²

¹PhD Scholar, ²Associate Professor, Department of Social Work, Amrita School of Engineering, Coimbatore, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, India

Abstract

Background: Alcoholism is a major health issue and it affects the mental stability of the individual. It is also considered as a family disease and social problem because the alcoholism of one person in the family affects the entire family by mentally, economically and physically. Among family members, the wives of alcoholics are the most affected person by their emotional and physical attachment in the relationship. The wives of alcoholics often face domestic violence, marital conflicts, insecurity, social isolation, job losses or house lose due to the alcoholism of their partner and it leads them into psychological problems like stress, anger, shame, anxiety, depression, self- blame, hopelessness, low self- esteem and suicide tendency. Copings are the thoughts and actions used by an individual to deal with a threatening situation. Since wives of alcoholics are stressed due to the drinking habit of their spouse, they need to choose different coping strategies. Coping strategies are the intensive efforts used by the wives of alcoholics both behavioural as well as psychological to endure and decrease the stress associated with their husband's drinking habit.

Methods: In this study, researchers attempted to understand the coping strategies used by the wives of alcoholics. The study measured the level of Coping Strategies and significant factors associated with wives of alcoholics of Kottayam district of Kerala, India. Survey Design was used for the study. Census method used to collect the samples. **Conclusion:** Nearly half (42%) of the respondents have a medium level of coping strategies and 32% of the respondents have high level and 26% have low level of coping strategies. The study reveals that Coping Strategies has no significant difference between sociodemographic variables like age, religion, area of residence, type of family, education, occupation, family monthly income and duration of habit in the spouse. In this study, it is understood that the coping strategies of wives of alcoholics depend on the family atmosphere, behaviour of the husbands and genetic factor and personality of the wives.

Key words: Alcohol dependents, Alcoholism, Coping Strategies, Wives of alcoholics,

Introduction

Alcoholism is a condition in which an individual has a lack of control in drinking habit due to physical and emotional dependence to alcohol and it is a chronic disease which is characterised by uncontrolled drinking and addiction.

Corresponding author:

Chinnu Sebastian

Ph.D Scholar, Department of Social Work,
Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Coimbatore, India;
Email Id: chinnumarysebastian2@gmail.com,
Mobile Number: +91 9496055243.

Alcoholism affects the individual's physical and mental wellbeing hence some people think that it is an individual problem but actually it is also a family problem and social problem because an individual's excess drinking habit or alcohol dependency will adversely affect the symphony of family functions which will lead to domestic violence, marital dissatisfactions and quarrels between family members. As we know that families are the basic building block of every society and the unsatisfied and unstable families would lead to an unstable society. Hence the alcoholism needs to be considered as a family problem and social problem.

Alcoholism is one of the major health and social problems around the world, which results in 3.3

million deaths every year (WHO, 2018)¹. India is one of the fastest-growing alcohol markets in the world. Urbanization, the large number of middle-class population and fast growing economy are the certain reasons behind an increase in the consumption of alcohol in India². The per capita alcohol consumption of India is very low due to its large population however India is the largest consumer of alcohol in the world as compared to other countries.

Kerala has the highest per capita alcohol consumption of any state in India, at over 8 litres per person per year (NFHS-4 – 2015-16)³. This is well above the national annual average alcohol consumption, which is 5.7 litres per person per year. This increase of the alcohol consumption provides more than 40 percent of revenue to Kerala's annual budget however it is also adversely affecting the state, as per the Kerala Women's Commission statement the 40 percent of road traffic accidents are directly linked to alcohol and 80 percent of divorces are also connected with alcohol⁴.

Alcoholism is considered as a 'Family Disease' because if one member in any family is alcohol dependant the entire family will suffer either by physical or by mental harassment. The alcoholics experience the burden of the physical problems, but family members often share the emotional side effects of the person's addiction. Family members of alcoholics mostly experience anxiety, depression, financial crisis and social isolation.

The wives of alcoholics are one of the main victims of their husbands drinking habit due to the intimacy in their relationship. They mostly experience insecurity, sexual dissatisfaction, shame to face public and anxiety about their future as well as the future of their children. They also experience continuing financial problems, loss of job or home, physical injuries and mental illness which requires ongoing treatment, social isolation, and withdrawal from family and friends.

When there is a mental break down, the human being grasps different ways of coping with crisis. According to Lazarus (1984) "Coping is a process of managing taxing circumstances expending effort to solve personal and interpersonal problems and seeking to master, minimize or reduce stress or conflict"⁵. Coping strategies used by the wives of alcoholics are the concerted efforts both behavioural as well as psychological which are employed by them to tolerate and reduce the stress associated with

their husband's drinking⁶.

As per Folkman and Lazarus the Coping strategies can be classified in four groups: - Problem-Focused, Emotion-Focused, Support-Seeking and Meaning-Making. In this study, researchers focused on two major coping strategies: emotion-focused and problem-focused. The problem-focused coping involves some active action to alleviate stressful circumstances, and emotion-focused coping involves the efforts to regulate the emotional consequences of stressful events. Generally, women are using emotion-focused coping and the "tend and befriend" response to stress, but men using problem-focused coping and the "fight or flight" response⁷.

Types of Coping Mechanism:

- Support- Discussing stressful situations with an intimate person is an effective method to reduce stress. Finding external support instead of self- isolating and internalizing in a stressful situation can help to reduce the adverse effects.
- Problem-solving- In this type of coping mechanism the individual first identifying the problem which causing stress and then creates the solution for effective managing of the **problem**.
- Relaxation- The relaxing activities like meditation, yoga, music listening or sitting in a calm place can help people to cope with stressful situations.
- Humour- It helps people to maintain the toughest situation to light and maintain perspective and prevent the situation to become overwhelming.
- Physical activity- Activities like running, swimming, walking, dancing, team sports will help the individual to forget or lighten the toughest situation of stress⁸.

The wives of alcoholics are trying different coping strategies at different stages of their marital life, in initial few years they trying tolerant styles with a hope to get things better and after few years if they are not getting any positive outcome the wives of alcoholics adopted withdrawal coping.

As we know alcoholism is a disease which can be treated with the support of family members especially with the help of wives of alcoholics. It is necessary to know the problems faced by the wives of alcoholics and

the level coping strategies adopted by them for effective family counselling and psychological support to them. Hence the researcher selected this topic for the study.

Materials and Methods

This paper is based on standardized scale and the data was collected with an interview schedule from wives of alcoholic attending family counselling and Al-anon meeting in a De-addiction centre of Kottayam district of Kerala. An interview schedule was used to collect data. The Coping Strategies Scale was developed by Folkman and Lazarus (1989) is used for the study. Survey Design was used for the study. Census method used to collect the samples. The researcher collected data's from all the respondents who were willing to participate in the study during the period of data collection (July 2019 – December 2019). The criterion for selection of the respondents was the wives living with the alcoholics who are under treatment at de-addiction centres in Kottayam District, Kerala, India. The universe consists of 200 spouses of alcoholics who were coming to the rehabilitation centre in ADARRT- IRCA (Research Rehabilitation & Treatment Centre), Pala, Kottayam-Kerala. (Established: 1984) for treatment of their husband and use of group counselling services. The spouses of alcoholics above 20 years of age are selected for the study.

Major findings:

The simple percentage of socio demographic data reveals the following information. It is observed that 30% of the respondents are in the 20-30 years age group. Nearly half of the respondents (49%) are Christian. Majority of the respondents (55%) are from the rural area. More than half of the respondents (56%) are from the nuclear family. It is seen that 29% of respondents are Graduates and are housewives respectively. Majority

of the respondents (64%) have family monthly income above Rs.20000. Half of the respondents' husbands (50%) have above 10 years of a drinking habit.

Level of Coping Strategies

Nearly half (42%) of the respondents have a medium level of coping strategies and 32% have high and 26% have low level of coping strategies.

In this study, it is clear that the husbands drinking habits compelling the wives to adopt coping strategies to maintain marital life. In this study researcher identified that the respondents were using different types of coping techniques such as avoidance, competition, taking special actions, seeking support, adjusting their expectations, denial, self-blame. During the interaction with the respondents at the time of the interview, the researcher identified that the wives of male alcoholics adopting the coping strategies either to adjust with the drinking habit of their husbands or liberate their husband from alcoholism for the betterment of marital life and to secure their children's future. It is evident that the wives of alcoholics adopting the coping strategies for managing the marital life without breakups as the divorces will hamper the future of their children too. The respondents were bothered about the health and wealth of their husbands due to the alcoholism. Therefore they use the strategies as per their mental status, husband's character and family atmosphere. The coping used by the wives of alcoholics depends on whether their husband in a drunken state or not. Normally the wives of alcoholics are adopting rough and aggressive coping when the husbands are in a drunken state and they are converting their coping strategies into soft and kind when their husbands in a normal or non-drinking state.

Factors affecting the Coping Strategies

Table No. 1: ANOVA- Significance table for Coping Strategies and Socio demographic variables

Sl.No.	Variables	F -value	Table value	Significant/Not
1	Age	0.187	2.651	NS
2	Religion	2.607	3.042	NS
3	Area of residence	1.170	3.042	NS
4	Type of family	2.480	3.042	NS

5	Education	2.178	2.261	NS
6	Occupation	1.450	2.418	NS
7	Family monthly income	0.004	3.042	NS
8	Duration of habit in spouse	1.461	2.651	NS

NS-Not significant, * -Significant at 5% level, ** -Significant at 1% level

The above table shows that there is no significant difference between sociodemographic variables with coping strategies. In this study, it is evident that the age, religion, area of residence, type of family, education, occupation, family monthly income and duration of habit in spouse has no relation between coping strategies of the wives of alcoholics and coping strategies are connected with family circumstances of an individual or behaviour of wives of alcoholics and their husbands. The researcher identified that the coping mechanism differs from case to case even if sociodemographic variables are same in different individual due to the difference in their personality, husbands' personality or family atmosphere.

Discussion and Conclusion

Alcoholism is one of the major threats to the marital family life. In order to avoid this threat, it is to be treated timely by specialised programs like de-addiction therapy, alcohol anonymous, al-anon and family counselling. This specialised treatment helps the alcoholics to regain control over their life and maintain the life of abstinence. The success of these specialised programs is related to the co-operation of alcoholics and their wives. For this, the wives of alcoholics should know that alcoholism is a disease and can be cured with the help of all family members.

Chronic alcoholism of husbands leads the wives into the unstable mental conditions and which turns into family breakups, physical violence, divorce and suicide. In order to avoid these situations, the coping strategies of each individual need to be evaluated in detail and guided them for selecting appropriate coping strategies.

The wives of alcoholics required family therapy, couples' therapy, social skills training, parental training and psychiatric services which will help the wives of alcoholics to recognize the causes of their husbands'

alcoholism and develop good solutions to resolve them.

It is identified that feelings of wives of alcoholics are often ignored when it comes to treatment. The alcoholic husbands may get professional treatment, residential care but the problems faced by the wives are left unnoticed. Mentioned below are some ways for wives of alcoholics to get much-needed support:

- A trusted friend or family to disclose their feelings.
- Join a support group for close relatives of alcoholics by online or offline groups.
- Visit mental health workers to evaluate mental health, to get counselling and other treatments if required.
- Learn the positive coping strategies and effective use of the same depending on the situation of family life.
- Practice of Yoga, Meditations, deep breathing exercises and prayers to get better relaxation of mind and soul.
- Spend more time with friends, family and peer groups for socialising.
- Take care of the children and help them to cope up with the alcoholic father.

In this study, it is revealed that the nature of coping strategies depends on the personality of the wives and their husbands. The coping strategies of wives of alcoholics have no relation between the sociodemographic variables such as age, religion, area of residence, type of family, education, occupation, family monthly income and duration of habit in the spouse.

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