

# Impact of Guided Imagery on Depression, Stress and Anxiety among Wives of Patients with Alcohol Use Disorder

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## Abstract

The purpose of this article is to evaluate the impact of Guided Imagery (GI) on Depression, Stress and Anxiety among wives of patients with Alcohol Use Disorder (AUD). Many studies have examined the protective factors associated with individual's mental illness. In some studies, consumption of Alcohol had an inverse relationship to mental health problems, whereas in other studies, it leads to serious effects on the family members of the AUD patients. If not properly managed, stress can lead to disturbances in cognitive functioning, mood-related problems, obesity, and heart disease. Guided imagery has been shown to be an effective technique to help people recover from stress. The literature on guided imagery, however, does not take the theme of the guided imagery script into account. Additionally, there are gaps in the research regarding any interaction between rurality and mood, stress, and guided imagery. Guided Imagery describes techniques that use visualizations and draw on the participants' active imagination and mental imagery. It typically involves a person directing the mental exercises and the participants are guided through suggestions to evoke specific images. It is used as psychotherapy, as a relaxation or meditation technique, or experimentally to evoke specific emotional states. Guided Imagery is cost effective, noninvasive, non-pharmacological complementary and alternative therapy to reduce the level of depression, stress and anxiety among wives of AUD patients.

**Keywords:** Guided imagery, Depression, Stress, Anxiety, wives of AUD patients

## Introduction

Alcohol use is widely prevalent in Indian society and consequently results in widespread losses in the form of injurious physical health outcomes like cirrhosis of liver, heart disease, diabetes as well as leads to absenteeism, road traffic accidents and various mental health and behavioral problems<sup>1</sup>. Alcoholism is considered as a major health as well as a social problem. Often the family members of patient with alcohol use disorder suffer intense psychological, physical and social trauma due to the core drinking problem of the family member<sup>2</sup>. Most deeply affected are the wives of patient with

alcohol use disorder. The problems faced by patient with alcohol use disorder have often wedged the attention in society yet finding and applying effective interventions to reduce the pain and suffering of being a partner of patient with alcohol use disorder is still a challenge. The wives of alcohol-dependent individuals experience high levels of stress from dual problems: husband's alcoholism and domestic violence by the husband and are thus a high-risk group. It is urgently required to study these aspects like the stress, coping & domestic violence experienced by them<sup>2</sup>. One study found that women who lived with a substance-abusing partner tended to have much worse states of health, with more anxiety, stress, physical illness, and significant impairment of their overall quality of life as indicated by lower family incomes and higher levels of domestic abuse<sup>3</sup>. Stress in wives of patient with alcohol use disorder leadsto many consequences in wives of patient with alcohol

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use disorder and the remedial action was not effectively taken<sup>4</sup>. There was thus a need to provide information regarding stress management and it is very important to note that a high degree of empathetic understanding is needed to help the wives of patient with alcohol use disorder in better coping.<sup>5</sup>

Adults who are living close to a person with alcohol problems are mostly affected by the problems such as alcoholism causes stress in the relationship, and being exposed to this kind of stress is highly detrimental. Alcohol misuse affects couples' relationships in a variety of negative ways like increased conflict, communication problems, poor sexual relations and domestic violence<sup>6</sup>. Historically wives of AUD patients have disturbed pathological personalities that were instrumental in maintaining their husband's drinking. More recently researches have tended to support the view that the behaviour of these women reflects their stressful circumstances. The women in the study reported interpersonal, extra personal and intra personal stressors.<sup>7</sup> The most frequently reported and highest ranked stressor was their relationships with their husbands. The wives used all sorts of coping, they themselves were more quarrelsome, they felt angry, they felt helplessness on other occasions, they adopted a strategy of withdrawing, or avoiding the husband altogether, they had tried to get drunk themselves to show them what it was like or they had locked the husband out of the house.<sup>8</sup> An experimental study to investigate the relationship between guided imagery technique on stress reduction among 89 wives of alcoholics residing in the Salvation Army Harbor Light suggested that GI is potentially promising instruments for reducing the stress level among the wives of alcoholics<sup>8</sup>. Another descriptive study to identify the contribution of the husband's alcoholism on the spouse's stress proneness in 118 wives of alcoholic patients admitted in community de-addiction centre, Yeshwantpur, the stress level of wives of chronic alcoholics, occasional drinkers and new drinkers were compared. The study results showed that spouse's stress level wives of chronic alcoholics ( $t_{46}=5.48$ ,  $p=0.037$ ), occasional drinkers ( $t_{32}=3.21$ ,  $p=0.04$ ) and new drinkers ( $t_{40}=2.42$ ,  $p=0.03$ ) is directly related to the severity of husband's drinking.<sup>9</sup>

## 2. Guided Imagery and its mechanism of action

A broad definition of guided imagery might be: any internal work that is done which involves thoughts (uses the "mind") and has a positive effect on health. This can range from "thinking positive" to elaborately structured processes involving relaxation, meditation, and body postures. It can include biofeedback and various enhancements of mood via music, electrical or vibrating stimulation, massage, acupuncture, magnetic (or other) fields, or ingested supplements of drugs and herbs. The common denominator is thoughts, and their effects on body function. Words have powerful positive and negative effects on the human mind and body.<sup>10</sup> Guided imagery provides a powerful psychological strategy that enhances a person's coping skills. Imagery involves all the senses, as well as one's whole body and emotions. It is a way of viewing the ideas, feelings, experiences and interpretations. Imagery can stimulate changes in bodily functions such as heart rate, blood pressure and respiratory patterns. It can help tap inner strengths to find hope, courage and other qualities that helps cope with a variety of conditions<sup>11</sup>. Among integrative modalities, Guided Imagery (GI) is considered a "relaxation modality" by the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health, because it can profoundly activate the body's natural relaxation response as characterized by slower breathing and lower blood pressure as well as increased feelings of well-being<sup>12</sup>. Imagery's effectiveness relies on using all the senses<sup>13</sup>. It includes relaxation, focused breathing, and a variety of multisensory images to promote reduction of stress, depression and anxiety as well as to restore levels of energy. The multiple styles of imagery include (1) feeling state imagery designed to shift the participant's mood to one of peace and calm, (2) end state imagery suggesting that participants see themselves the way they wish to be, and (3) energetic imagery focusing on restoring normal levels of energy.

## 3. Stress and Guided Imagery

Stress is considered as the body's reaction to a change that requires a physical, mental or emotional adjustment or response. It can come from any situation or thought that makes frustrated, angry or nervous. Stress, being the most common problem among the wives of patients with alcohol use disorder demands some intervention to reduce it if not alleviate.

A study in Korea evaluates the effects of guided imagery on stress and fatigue in patients undergoing radioactive iodine therapy after thyroidectomy. Participants were 84 individuals (44 for experimental group and 40 for control group) with thyroid cancer. The experimental group listened to a guided imagery CD once a day for 4 weeks. There were significant decreases in stress ( $F = 28.45$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ) and fatigue ( $F = 26.17$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ) over time in the experimental group compared to the control group. The study recommended guided imagery as an effective intervention to thyroid cancer patients with stress and fatigue<sup>14</sup>.

In another study, where Guided imagery as an intervention was given for stress in hospitalized pregnant women by using pre- /posttest design, the effects of guided imagery on maternal stress in 19 hospitalized pregnant women were examined. Mean stress and systolic blood pressure measurements at post intervention were significantly lower than mean levels before listening to the guided imagery CD. The study provides preliminary evidence that a guided imagery intervention may be effective in reducing maternal stress in hospitalized pregnant<sup>15</sup>. Jing, X., conducted a quantitative true experimental study to investigate the immediate effects of guided imagery for reducing stress in centrifuge training on 12 healthy young men and measured changes in heart rate during centrifuge training, in heart rate variability before and after centrifuge training, and also evaluated the relaxation and stress in three phases: before intervention, after intervention and following centrifuge training. The change in the pattern of stress was different in the two groups over the three phases. Guided imagery was capable of decreasing stress, pre- or post- centrifugation<sup>16</sup>. Elizabeth Carter, Registered Psychologist, conducted an experimental study into the use of pre-packaged compact discs (CDs) which incorporate Guided imagery (GI) with suggestions and affirmations, indicates that the use of these CDs results in quick reduction of stress related issues for selected consecutive samples of 100 spouse of alcoholics. Marked improvements were identified in general feelings of well-being (91%), positive thoughts (82%) and ability to cope in stressful situations (73%). Decreases in incidence of ratings were greatest for insomnia, anger and 21 negative thoughts. Most commonly the first benefits people noticed were increased relaxation, decreased negative

thoughts and decreased stress<sup>17</sup>.

#### 4. Anxiety and Guided Imagery

According to American Psychology Association, anxiety refers to persistent, excessive and unrealistic worry about everyday events or things such as financial crisis, domestic issues, health care problems and worrying about the future and is considered as one of the major emotional health problems found in wives of patients with alcohol use disorder.

A general systematic review of the literature including 46 studies that here is preliminary evidence for the effectiveness of guided imagery in the management of stress, anxiety and depression, and for the reduction of blood pressure, pain and the side effects of chemotherapy.<sup>18</sup> Tusek's overview article citing 7 studies concluded that Guided Imagery can increase self-esteem independence, and control and decreases length of stay, pain, narcotic consumption and anxiety.<sup>19</sup> A meta-analysis of 10 Guided Imagery studies concluded that although the number of studies prevented statistical analysis, immediate results from Guided Imagery are possible and practice does increase the effectiveness of the intervention.<sup>20</sup> A systematic review on meditative therapies which included Guided Imagery approaches concluded some efficacy of meditative therapies in reducing anxiety symptoms but noted that most studies measured only improvement in anxiety symptoms, not anxiety disorders as clinically diagnosed<sup>21</sup>.

#### 5. Depression and Guided Imagery

A person who is depressed usually experiences several of the following symptoms: feelings of sadness, hopelessness, or pessimism; lowered self-esteem and heightened self-depreciation; a decrease or loss of ability to take pleasure in ordinary activities; reduced energy and vitality; slowness of thought or action; loss of appetite; and disturbed sleep or insomnia. Besides stress and anxiety, depression is the undiagnosed symptom that has been found in the wives of patients with alcohol use disorder. Currently, it is thought that good body functioning is accompanied by positive thoughts, whereas pathological body functioning is accompanied by negative and repetitive thoughts<sup>22</sup>. In the brain, a thought, idea, or mental image work as "emotionally

competent stimuli.” These stimuli, whether prescribed by biologic evolution or learned have the capacity to produce certain patterns of homeostasis. The state of sadness is accompanied by a reduced number of positive mental images and by more excessive attention to those images. When persons have the experience of positive thoughts, their mind represents more than well-being; it also represents well-thinking. On the contrary, feeling sadness is associated not only with sickness but also with an inefficient way of thinking, concentrated around a limited number of ideas of loss.<sup>22</sup>In GI, positive mental images and positive affective experiences can counteract the depression rumination spiral.<sup>23</sup> This process works as an adaptive alternative to decompensation, raising the mood, and relieving depressive symptoms. Therefore, GI contributes to antirumination strategies that are debilitating.<sup>24</sup>Positive mental images have a relaxing effect and, consequently, a psychophysiologic and cognitive effect<sup>25</sup>. When depressed individuals have access to positive mental images and to a state of body relaxation, they are able to reorient their thoughts away from unpleasant stimuli. Thus, positive thoughts contribute to an improvement in feelings about oneself and the world. Results from the empirical literature indicated that GI was effective in improving mood states in individuals with a variety of illnesses. A community-based nursing study in 56 people with advanced cancer. Progressive muscle relaxation and GI training revealed significant decreases in depression.<sup>26</sup> McKinney, Antoni, Kumar, Times, and McCabe (1997) used GI combined with music with 28 healthy adults and reported significant decreases in depression, fatigue, and total mood disorders between pretest and postsessions.<sup>27</sup> Identical outcomes were revealed in the study with a sample of 148 healthy adults, using relaxation and positive mental images. After two sessions, positive mood increased, and negative mood decreased.<sup>28</sup>

### Conclusion

The alcoholism is though identified as a medical problem has large spectrum of psychosocial difficulties for the family members of alcoholics, especially their spouses. The problems faced by the wives of patients with alcohol use disorder range from physical to emotional to social domains. Guided imagery significantly reduces depression, anxiety, and stress among wives of

patients with alcohol use disorder and increases their satisfaction. Guided imagery is a simple, cost effective, noninvasive, non-pharmacological complementary and alternative therapy to reduce the level of stress, anxiety and depression among wives of patients with Alcohol Use Disorder.

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