

A Comparative Study on Psychological Morbidity and Adjustment among Wives of Alcoholics and Non-Alcoholics

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Abstract: *This study explores the differences in psychological morbidity and adjustment patterns among wives of alcohol-dependent men and wives of non-alcoholics. The sample comprised 60 married women aged between 35 and 40 years, recruited using purposive sampling techniques. Thirty participants were wives of individuals clinically diagnosed with Alcohol Dependence Syndrome (ADS) as per DSM-5 criteria, and thirty were wives of non-drinkers. Participants were married for a minimum of five years. The General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-28) was administered to measure psychological morbidity, while the Bell's Adjustment Inventory (Adult Form) assessed adjustment across home, health, and emotional domains. Statistical analyses revealed that wives of alcoholics exhibited significantly higher levels of psychological morbidity and maladjustment across all domains compared to wives of non-alcoholics. These differences were significant at the 0.01 level. The findings emphasize the emotional vulnerability and psychosocial strain experienced by spouses of individuals with alcohol dependence and highlight the urgent need for targeted psychosocial interventions.*

Keywords: Alcohol Dependence Syndrome, Psychological Morbidity, Adjustment, GHQ-28, Bell's Adjustment Inventory

1. Introduction

Alcohol dependence remains a pressing public health issue, exerting multifaceted psychological, social, and economic consequences on families. Beyond its detrimental effects on the individual, alcohol misuse disrupts family harmony, induces emotional strain, and impairs the psychological well-being of close relatives—most notably, the spouse. Within the Indian sociocultural context, wives often bear disproportionate emotional and practical responsibilities, leading to chronic stress and mental health concerns when living with alcohol-dependent partners.

Previous research indicates that spouses of individuals with Alcohol Dependence Syndrome (ADS) frequently report elevated anxiety, depression, irritability, and psychosomatic complaints (Nambi et al., 2017). In contrast, wives of non-alcoholics typically experience greater emotional balance and marital satisfaction. The current study seeks to systematically compare psychological morbidity and adjustment levels in both groups, providing empirical support for targeted family-based mental health initiatives.

2. Review of Literature

Empirical findings across studies consistently demonstrate a link between a partner's alcoholism and the spouse's psychological distress. Suresh and Prasad (2016) observed higher depressive tendencies and anxiety among wives of alcoholics. Similarly, Sathyanarayana et al. (2018) found that these women experience reduced emotional control and lower quality of life. Girish and Murthy (2019) noted that ongoing exposure to domestic tension and erratic partner behavior significantly deteriorates psychological health.

Further, George and Mathew (2020) identified emotional maladjustment and strained family relationships among

spouses of alcoholics. Dixit and Sharma (2021) concluded that persistent stress may result in subclinical psychiatric conditions in family members, even when they are not directly involved in alcohol use. These findings collectively underscore that alcohol dependence impacts not only the user but also profoundly disrupts the emotional equilibrium of the family system.

Objectives

- 1) To compare psychological morbidity among wives of alcoholics and non-alcoholics.
- 2) To examine differences in home, health, and emotional adjustment between the two groups.

Hypotheses

- **H₀:** There is no significant difference in psychological morbidity or in home, health, and emotional adjustment between wives of alcoholics and non-alcoholics.
- **H₁:** Wives of men diagnosed with Alcohol Dependence Syndrome exhibit higher psychological morbidity than wives of non-alcoholics.
- **H₂:** Wives of alcohol-dependent men show poorer home, health, and emotional adjustment compared to wives of non-alcoholics.

3. Method

Sample

The study included 60 married women aged 35–40 years, recruited through purposive sampling. Thirty participants were wives of men diagnosed with Alcohol Dependence Syndrome (ADS) based on DSM-5 criteria and undergoing treatment for at least one year. The control group comprised 30 wives of teetotallers. All participants had been married for at least five years.

Instruments

- 1) **General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-28)** (Goldberg & Hillier, 1979): Used to measure levels of psychological morbidity including anxiety, depression, and social dysfunction.
- 2) **Bell's Adjustment Inventory (Adult Form)** (Bell, 1962): Evaluates adjustment in home, health, and emotional areas. Higher scores indicate poorer adjustment.

Procedure

Participants were approached individually, and data were collected after obtaining informed consent. Confidentiality was maintained throughout. Independent samples t-tests were applied to compare mean differences between the two groups.

4. Results

Table 1: Psychological Morbidity among Wives of Alcoholics and Non-Alcoholics

Group	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Significance
Wives of Alcoholics	30	5	2.25	3.29**	p < 0.01
Wives of Non-Alcoholics	30	2.3	2.16	—	—

Interpretation:

Wives of alcoholics exhibited significantly higher levels of psychological morbidity, validating Hypothesis H₁.

Table 2: Adjustment Scores among Wives of Alcoholics and Non-Alcoholics

Domain	Group	Mean	SD	t-value	Significance
Home Adjustment	Alcoholics	18.2	3.43	6.20**	p < 0.01
	Non-Alcoholics	9.7	—	—	—
Health Adjustment	Alcoholics	20	0.81	6.42**	p < 0.01
	Non-Alcoholics	8.7	—	—	—
Emotional Adjustment	Alcoholics	18.4	2.58	7.86**	p < 0.01
	Non-Alcoholics	4.86	—	—	—

Interpretation:

All three adjustment dimensions—home, health, and emotional—showed significantly poorer outcomes among wives of alcoholics compared to their counterparts, confirming Hypothesis H₂.

5. Discussion

The analysis reveals that wives of alcohol-dependent men are more vulnerable to psychological morbidity and exhibit lower adjustment levels across multiple life domains. Continuous exposure to marital discord, emotional neglect, and social stigma contributes to heightened stress and reduced coping capacity.

These findings parallel previous studies by Kumar and Nair (2019) and Verma and Reddy (2022), which demonstrated that unpredictable marital environments and chronic tension in alcohol-affected families severely compromise the spouse's mental health. The results are also consistent with family systems theory, which postulates that dysfunction in one family member disrupts the emotional stability of the entire household.

Emotional exhaustion, financial instability, and caretaking responsibilities may collectively explain the poorer home and emotional adjustment observed in this group. These insights reinforce the need for couple-based and family-centred therapeutic programs that integrate the spouse's well-being into alcohol recovery interventions.

6. Limitations

- 1) The study employed a small, purposive sample from a limited geographic region, which restricts generalizability.
- 2) The cross-sectional design limits insights into long-term psychosocial changes following recovery or intervention.
- 3) Data relied on self-report instruments, which may be influenced by subjective bias or social desirability effects.

7. Conclusion

The study demonstrates that wives of alcohol-dependent men experience significantly greater psychological distress and poorer adjustment in home, health, and emotional domains compared to wives of non-alcoholics. The findings highlight the necessity for structured psychosocial support and counselling for spouses, emphasizing the integration of family welfare in alcohol rehabilitation programs.

Implications

- Family counselling and marital therapy should be integral to alcohol recovery interventions.
- Community mental health initiatives must prioritize the emotional needs of spouses of alcoholics.
- Skill-building workshops on coping and resilience can improve adjustment and enhance family stability.

8. Scope for Future Research

- 1) Larger and more demographically diverse samples could improve the representativeness of findings.
- 2) Longitudinal and intervention-based studies may explore the trajectory of psychological morbidity following treatment.
- 3) Examining moderators such as coping style, resilience, and social support could deepen understanding of protective mechanisms.
- 4) Qualitative methods could provide nuanced insights into the lived experiences of affected spouses.

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