

Extended Summary

Comparison of the Psychological Symptoms and Variables Related to Marriage in the Wives of Alcoholics and Non-Alcoholics and Factors Predicting Marital Adjustment*

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Abstract

The aim of this study is two-fold. It first seeks to compare marital adjustment, co-dependency, marital power, depression, anxiety, and stress in wives of both alcoholics and non-alcoholics. Subsequently, the study endeavors to determine those variables that predict marital adjustment of women in both groups. This study was conducted with a total of 100 women, of which 50 were wives of alcoholics and the remaining 50 were wives of non-alcoholics (i.e., the comparison group). Data for the study were collected using the Demographic Information Form, Marital Adjustment Test, Codependency Assessment Tool, Depression-Anxiety-Stress Scale, and Couple Power Scale. Hypotheses were tested using an independent samples t-test and two separate regression analyses for both groups. The findings showed there to be significant differences in all the main variables between the two groups. Participants in the group consisting of wives of alcoholics were less marital adjusted and had higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress compared to those in the comparison group. Furthermore, wives of alcoholics tended to be more co-dependent and had a lower self-perception of marital power than did those in the comparison group. The regression analyses indicated that in both groups, marital adjustment was predicted only by marital power processes. In light of the study's results, it would be beneficial to include spouses in addiction treatment.

Keywords

Marital adjustment • Codependency • Marital power • Psychological symptoms

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Alcohol addiction is a specific psychiatric disorder that detrimentally affects the individuals' functionality, damages interpersonal relationships and family life, and agitates domestic problems and spousal conflict. In addition, alcohol addiction leads to severe mental, physical, occupational, economic, and legal problems in society (Fuller & Warner, 2000; Kaptanoğlu, Yenilmez, Seber, & Tekin, 1997; World Health Organizations [WHO], 2004). Alcoholism has an influence on divorce, either directly or indirectly, in thirty countries, including Turkey (WHO, 2004). Alcohol addiction exacerbates existing economic, legal, and social problems, which, over time, undermines the functionality of marriage. Spouses of alcohol addicts might consequently develop dysfunctional behaviors and experience various psychological problems, leading potentially to changes in spouses' marital adjustment, family and spousal functionality, and the addict's drinking behavior.

The wives of alcoholics usually experience addiction's detrimental effects and live a so-called alcohol-dependent life. This is also the point of origin of the co-dependency attributed to the relatives and caregivers of alcoholics, especially their wives (Sakarya, 2008). Accepted as one of the pioneers of the co-dependency movement, Cermak (1986) stated that chemical dependencies such as alcohol and substance abuse were family diseases. He defined the concept of codependency through the family members living with the addicted person. Hughes-Hammer, Martsof, and Zeller (1998) proposed a theoretical model for codependency with one main concept (i.e., focus on the other/self-neglect) and four sub-concepts (i.e., low self-worth, hiding self, medical (psychosomatic) problems, and family of origin issues). In this study, codependency is discussed within the framework of this model. Previous studies supported the existence of codependency (Lyon & Greenberg, 1991; Panaghi et al., 2016; Wells, Glickauf-Hughes, & Jones, 1999). Codependency is associated with several psychopathological symptoms (Marks, Blore, Hine, & Dear, 2012) that indirectly influence marital adjustment and family functioning. Also, Cowan, Bommersbach, and Curtis (1995) addressed the notion that codependency may indicate a perception of weakness in women's marriages. Accordingly, the distribution of power seems to play an important role in families with alcoholic members.

Many studies have stressed the notion that power is an important factor in marital adjustment (Brezsnyak & Whisman, 2004; Gray-Little & Burks, 1983; Gray-Little, Baucom, & Hamby, 1996). Cromwell and Olson (1975) argued that power consists of three components, namely (i) power bases, (ii) power processes, and (iii) power outcomes. Power processes involve interactive techniques, such as persuasion, problem-solving, and the degree of efficiency in the relationship. Power outcomes can be defined as the degree of effectiveness in the final decision, such as who has the final word in the relationship and who determines the outcome (Byrne, Carr, & Clark, 2004). Perception of power in marriage is associated with marital

satisfaction (Brezsnyak & Whisman, 2004; Kifer, Heller, Perunovic, & Galinsky, 2013; Zimbler, 2012). Perceived low marital power appears to be associated with depression symptoms (Byrne & Carr, 2000) and low self-esteem in women (Galliher, Rostosky, Welsh, & Kawaguchi, 1999). Only a few studies in the literature focus on the relationship between alcohol use and power dynamics in marriage. In those marriages where power is not evenly distributed, since strong individuals are more resilient to change, their spouses are more likely to adapt to them (Galinsky et al., 2006). Power dynamics in marriage were also related to participation in alcohol treatment. Therefore, the question as to why addicts are resistant to treatment may be explained by his/her relatively stronger position in the family and the fear of losing this power during the treatment process (Santisteban & Szapoczik, 1994).

Interdependence theory indicates that as individuals' dependency on their spouses increases, the amount of power they have in the relationship decreases (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). From this point of view, marital power can be associated with co-dependency, which is itself thought to be present in the spouses of alcoholics. Additionally, since co-dependent individuals are expected to perceive themselves as weaker in their marriage, the amount of power women perceive themselves of having is expected to predict marital adjustment in the context of power processes and outcomes in this study.

Psychological symptoms in one of the spouses are predictors of marital adjustment (Whisman, Uebelacker, & Weinstock, 2004; Whitton & Whisman, 2010; Whitton & Kuryluk, 2012). Further, it is known that a family member's diagnosis of chronic disease and his/her struggle with this disease exert intense stress on the family. Psychiatric disorders, especially alcoholism, have been shown to be one family stress factors that may potentially reduce marital adjustment (Jacob & Krahn, 1988; Fuller & Warner, 2000; Leonard & Eiden, 2007; Whisman, Uebelacker, & Bruce, 2006). Problems in marriage were associated with depression, anxiety disorders, stress, and somatization symptoms (Dehle & Weiss, 2002; Bodenmann, Ledermann, Blattner, & Galluzzo, 2006; Neff & Karney, 2004). Based on these findings, spouses of alcoholics are expected not only to have higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress but also to report being less maritally adjusted compared to non-alcoholics.

A review of the literature revealed there to be no studies scrutinizing the role of alcoholism as a stressor in examining women's marital adjustment and its relationship with the psychological variables. As such, the relationship between marital adjustment and marital power, codependency, depression, anxiety, and stress are discussed in terms of wives of both alcoholics and non-alcoholics in this study. In short, the current study has aimed to reveal the differences between these groups and to examine how these variables are related to marital adjustment in both groups.

Method

Research Model

This study followed a correlational design.

Research Study Group

The research group consisted of two groups: (i) the spouses of alcoholics and (ii) a comparison group consisting of wives of non-alcoholics. A total of 100 women (50 wives of alcoholics and 50 wives of non-alcoholics) constituted the sample of this study. All participants agreed to participate in the study on a voluntary basis. The mean age of the group composed of spouses of alcoholics was 42.74 years ($SD=10.70$) and the mean duration of their marriage was 19.86 years ($SD= 12.10$). In the comparison group, the mean age of participants was 39.60 ($SD= 8.25$) and the mean duration of marriage was 13.62 years ($SD=9.63$).

The group composed of spouses of alcoholic' consisted of the wives of patients diagnosed with alcohol use disorder receiving treatment in the Alcohol and Substance Addiction Treatment and Training Center (AMATEM), Ankara University Medical Faculty Alcohol Polyclinic, and Numune Education & Research Hospital. These women were also reached through Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). Participants for the comparison group were selected using convenient sampling. The data of this group were obtained from women whose husbands either did not consume alcohol at all or who, while consuming alcohol, did not indicate the existence of alcohol abuse or addiction.

Data Collection and Procedure

Approval by the Ethics Committee of Ankara University was received. The necessary permissions were obtained from both Ankara University's Faculty of Medicine and the Ankara Province Public Hospitals Association in order to reach the wives of alcoholics. All participants were informed about the voluntary nature of participation through the Informed Consent Form provided to them. Five data collection instruments were used in this study, namely (i) the Demographic Information Form, (ii) the Marital Adjustment Test (Locke & Wallace, 1959), (iii) the Codependency Assessment Tool (CODAT; Hughes-Hammer et al. 1998a), (iv) the Depression-Anxiety-Stress Scale (DASS-42; Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995), and (iv) the Couple Power Scale (Day et al., ongoing). Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS 22.0.

Results

Comparison of Research Groups by Marital Adjustment, Codependency, Depression, Anxiety, Stress, Marital Power, and Life Satisfaction Scores

Table 1 presents the results of the independent t-test conducted to compare the mean values of both groups' marital adjustment, codependency, depression, anxiety, stress, marital power, and life satisfaction. As shown in Table 1, the differences between the two groups were significant in all variables. Compared to the comparison group, the spouses of alcoholics were found to have significantly higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress symptoms. These findings also indicated that women who were spouses of alcoholics tended to have more codependent characteristics as compared to those in the comparison group. Moreover, their marital adjustment and marital power scores were found to be lower than those of spouses of non-alcoholics.

Furthermore, Cohen's *d* value was calculated to determine the effect sizes, the results of which are shown in Table 1. The effect size values of life satisfaction and power outcomes were found to be over .50 and showed a medium effect size. The effect size values related to marital adjustment, power processes, codependency, depression, anxiety, and stress scores were found to be above .80 and showed great magnitude effect (Özsoy & Özsoy, 2013).

Table 1
Results of Independent t-Test

Variables	Groups	N	X	S	Sd	t	d
Life satisfaction	Spouses of alcoholics	50	3.08	1.24	92.71	3.67*	0.74
	Comparison group	50	3.90	.97			
Marital Adjust- ment	Spouses of alcoholics	50	32.70	8.17	96.79	7.94*	1.59
	Comparison group	50	45.00	7.30			
Codependency	Spouses of alcoholics	50	54.74	12.91	88.38	4.20*	0.84
	Comparison group	50	45.34	9.16			
Power processes	Spouses of alcoholics	50	24.54	7.20	97.23	7.36*	1.47
	Comparison group	50	34.70	6.59			
Power outcomes	Spouses of alcoholics	50	17.94	5.80	97.85	3.89*	0.78
	Comparison group	50	22.36	5.57			
Depression	Spouses of alcoholics	50	15.28	11.73	98	4.87*	0.97
	Comparison group	50	6.14	6.20			
Anxiety	Spouses of alcoholics	50	12.22	9.31	98	4.86*	0.97
	Comparison group	50	5.02	4.80			
Stress	Spouses of alcoholics	50	18.58	10.29	98	4.40*	0.88
	Comparison group	50	10.96	6.64			

* $p < .001$, d = Cohen standardized effect size (Cohen's d).

Intercorrelations among Study Variables

Correlations among variables were examined through Pearson correlation analyses for the two groups separately, the results of which are shown in Table 2. Specifically,

while marital adjustment was associated significantly and positively with power processes and life satisfaction, it was negatively associated with codependency and stress in both groups.

Table 2
Correlation Coefficients among Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Marital Adjustment	-	.15	.25	-.31*	.46**	-.40**	-.25	-.31*	-.34*	.56**	.52**
2. Education Level	.22	-	.68**	-.45*	-.07	-.08	.06	-.12	-.07	.50**	.37**
3. Spouse's Education	.24	.56**	-	-.42**	-.01	-.18	.08	-.13	-.13	.47**	.26
4. Duration of marriage	-.11	.01	.01	-	.03	.18	.15	.26	.16	-.40**	-.47**
5. Life Satisfaction	.46**	.27	.26	.27	-	-.35*	-.27	-.20	-.23	.11	.18
6. Codependency	-.28*	-.33*	-.39**	.07	-.50**	-	.40**	.45**	.46**	-.18	-.20
7. Depression	-.37**	-.21	-.32*	.00	-.59**	.62**	-	.80**	.79**	-.09	-.11
8. Anxiety	-.21	-.20	-.31*	.11	-.38**	.66**	.77**	-	.86**	-.22	-.24
9. Stress	-.34*	-.23	-.35*	-.02	-.54**	.59**	.81**	.81**	-	-.21	-.32*
10. Power processes	.68**	.43**	.44**	.02	.48**	-.30*	-.35*	-.31*	-.31*	-	.53**
11. Power outcomes	.23	.49**	.28*	.09	.36*	-.36**	-.41**	-.31*	-.24	.51**	-

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$.

The values representing correlations of the comparison group were made bold.

Regression Analysis to Predict Marital Adjustment

Two different multiple regression analyses were performed using the bootstrap method proposed by Preacher and Hayes (2008) to determine the predictors of marital adjustment for each group separately. Field (2018) suggests using the bootstrap method when significance tests and confidence intervals of model parameters are in doubt because it generates confidence intervals and p values in larger samples. Therefore, the bootstrap method was preferred in this study in order to obtain more reliable results in regression due to the small sample size.

The results of the multiple regression analyses conducted to predict marital adjustment are given in Table 3. The regression analyses included variables that correlated significantly with marital adjustment in both groups. Due to the multicollinearity problem between depression, anxiety, and stress, we decided to include stress scores as they were correlated with marital adjustment in both groups. Power processes, codependency, and stress entered the regression equation in a single step.

As shown in Table 3, the model explains 48% of the variance of marital adjustment in the group composed of spouses of alcoholics ($R^2 = .48$, $F(3, 49) = 14.09$, $p < .01$). Among the variables, only power processes significantly predicted this group's marital adjustment ($b = .72$, $[.46, .97]$, $p = .001$). In other words, marital adjustment increases as the perceived self-marital power increases in the group composed of spouses of alcoholics.

In the regression analysis for the comparison group, again only the power processes positively predicted marital adjustment ($b = .54$, $[.26, .91]$, $p = .004$). The regression model for this group included power processes, codependency, and stress explained 42% of the variance in marital adjustment ($R^2 = .42$, $F(3, 49) = 11.20$, $p < .001$).

Table 3

Multiple Regression Analyses Determining the Variables Predicting Each Group's Marital Adjustment

Dependent variable	Predictors	Spouses of Alcoholics (n=50)				Comparison Group (n=50)			
		R ²	Bias (SE)	b [95% CI]	p	R ²	Bias (SE)	b [95% CI]	p
Marital Adjustment	Model	.48	-.19 (5.99)	17.64 [6.98,28.44]	.009	.42	-.59 (8.26)	37.01 [20.23,50.57]	.001
	Power processes		-.00 (.13)	.72*** [.46, .97]	.001		.01 (15)	.54** [.26, .91]	.004
	Stress		.00 (.09)	-.11 [-.29, .08]	.239		.00 (.11)	-.12 [-.40, .08]	.215
	Codependency		.00 (.08)	-.01 [-.20, .16]	.915		.00 (.12)	-.21 [-.43, .04]	.071
		R = .69 R ² = .48 Adj R ² = .44				R = .65 R ² = .42 Adj R ² = .38			
		F(3, 49) = 14.09 p = .000				F(3, 49) = 11.20 p = .000			

Based on 1,000 bootstrap samples; SE: Standard error; b = unstandardized beta. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to compare psychological variables related to marital adjustment in wives of both alcoholics and non-alcoholics. The results revealed that significant differences were found in all variables among the two groups. Accordingly, the group composed of wives of alcoholics was found not only to be codependent but also more depressive, anxious, and stressful. In addition, their life satisfaction, marital adjustment, and perceived marital power were found to be lower. Another main purpose of this study was to determine the variables that predict marital adjustment for women in these two groups. The results indicated that perceived power processes played an important role in both groups' marital adjustment.

The results further indicated that the wives of alcoholics had lower levels of marital adjustment than women in the comparison group. Previous studies have emphasized that alcohol addiction may undermine addicts' marital responsibilities. Consequently, an increase in intra-family conflict might be observed, causing miscommunication and problems between spouses to remain unsolved (Howells & Orford, 2006; Jacob & Krahn, 1988). This atmosphere in the home may be detrimental to marital satisfaction. One of the more important findings of this study is that, as expected, wives of alcoholics had a higher level of co-dependent characteristics than did the comparison group. Based on this finding, it can be concluded that co-dependent women had lower self-esteem than others, hide their emotions and thoughts, had psychosomatic problems, and focused on others while ignoring themselves. In the related literature, these women were shown to be too busy dealing with their alcoholic husbands and neglecting themselves in order to keep their husbands away from alcohol. These are observed to be indicators of the dysfunctional coping styles they have developed in the process (Daire, Jacobson & Carlsson, 2012; O'Brien & Gaborit, 1992). Since

these women do not know how to deal with their own inadequacies and the feelings they have hidden, they may be moving away from themselves to address a problem that seems more concrete, which, in this case, is their husbands' alcohol addiction. Such behavioral characteristics appear to be effective in the co-dependence of spouses of alcoholics (Panaghi et al., 2016).

The findings of the present study indicate that the wives of alcoholics perceive themselves as weaker in their marriages, inadequate in their interactions with their spouses, and less effective in giving the final decision compare to spouses of non-alcoholics. Excessive alcohol intake in one's husband can cause problems in the family that remain unsolved due to communication problems (Rotunda & Doman, 2001). From this perspective, these women's perceived low power might be related to the lack of healthy interaction and decision-making in their marriage. No studies were found in the literature focusing on the marital power of spouses of alcoholics. However, in light of those studies pointing out the link between dependency on one's spouse and low power (Galliher et al., 1999; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) it can be said that this study showed consistent results in terms of both co-dependency and marital power. According to the results, it is possible to conclude that co-dependent women perceive themselves as weak in their marriages. Yet, this inference should be investigated in future studies.

The findings revealed that wives of alcoholics have more psychological symptoms compared to wives of non-alcoholics. This finding is consistent with previous studies (Howells & Orford, 2006; Fuller & Warner, 2000). The findings further revealed that women who feel inadequate and weak in their marriage and become dependent on their alcoholic husband seem to experience more depression, anxiety, and stress symptoms. In parallel with the finding that a chronic disorder in one's spouse reduces overall life satisfaction (Barber & Crisp, 1995), this study shows that living with an alcohol-addicted spouse has a negative effect on life satisfaction.

In addition, this study has also shown that perceived power processes in marriage significantly predicts marital adjustment in both groups. Accordingly, perceived power in interactions with her husband positively predicts a woman's marital adjustment. In other words, regardless of the spouses' alcohol addiction, as the amount of power that women perceive themselves of having in their interactions with their husbands increases, their marital adjustment levels tend to increase as well. In this respect, the findings of the present study are consistent with those in the literature (Brezsnyak & Whisman, 2004; Kulik, 2004; Kifer et al., 2013; Zimbler, 2012). The findings of this study also reveal that co-dependency and stress, both significantly correlated with marital adjustment, were not predictors of marital adjustment. Future studies are required to examine these insignificant relations.

Limitations and Conclusions

This study has certain limitations. Firstly, because the wives of alcoholics were very hard to reach, participants consisted of only women living in Ankara. Future studies with this group can be carried out on a larger scale. Secondly, since our study is one of a correlational nature, we cannot make any causal inferences. The inclusion of both spouses can provide a broader framework to understand the dynamics of power relations in marriage. Despite these limitations, this study offers important contributions both to the literature and to clinical applications. Based on the findings of this study, it would be beneficial to include spouses in therapeutic applications and interventions and to take perceived power in marriage relationships into account. Also, directing spouses to support groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous will empower them by providing social support in the process of combating addiction. Furthermore, this study provides useful information on issues rarely focused upon in the literature, specifically the issues of co-dependency and marital power.

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