

Role of the Spouse in Addiction: Is There a Contribution

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Abstract

Drug addiction is a manifestation of serious dysfunctional relationships and interactions in the family, and is often interrelated with child and spouse abuse. Nearly all family studies of individuals who abused psychoactive substances ignored the spousal system and instead focused on the family of origin. This study was carried out with the aims of assessing the psychological profile of spouses of addicts and identifying patterns marital dysfunction among heroin addicts. Subjects were 30 heroin addicts & their spouses. Controls were matched for age, education & social class. Method: patients were subjected to Guilford aggression scale & marital satisfaction inventory. Spouses were subjected to the same scales in addition to Hamilton depression and anxiety scales. Results: All patients started abusing before marriage. The majority of spouses of addicts were house wives despite high grades of education. Spouses of addicts showed significantly higher scores on Guilford aggression scale, Hamilton depression and anxiety scales than controls. They also showed significant dissatisfaction on all parameters of marital satisfaction inventory as compared to controls. Couples of addicts showed significant agreement on traditional roles and significant disagreement on global distress as compared to controls. Conclusions: Spouses were not incriminated as a cause of their husband's addiction. Spouses of addicts showed significantly higher levels of depression, anxiety and aggression. Spouses of addicts showed significantly higher levels of dissatisfaction in all domains of marital relations. Wives of addicts prefer traditional roles.

Introduction

Drug addiction is a manifestation of serious dysfunctional relationships and interactions in the family and is often interrelated with child and spouse abuse. (Crowley, 1988). As addicts become more involved with substance use, they are less available to others in their lives. Spouses, children and others are emotionally abandoned as the substance becomes the primary interest (Fal-Stewart & Birchler, 1998). Substance abuse may precipitate behaviours that are unfamiliar and unacceptable to family and friends. Angry outbursts, rages and selfish demanding behaviours may surface. Violence toward spouse and children may occur. Physical or verbal confrontations can result, family role becomes dysfunctional. Symptoms of stress may surface in members of the family as they try to cope with the behaviours of the loved one. Spouses become angry, resentful and depressed (McCabe & Campelf, 1991). Addiction results in high rates of separation and divorces. It is estimated that the divorce rate of those couples is seven times higher than in the general population (McCabe & Campelf, 1991). Historically, wives of drug abusers have been described as having disturbed pathological personalities that were instrumental in causing and maintaining their husband's abuse. The behaviours of these women

reflect their stressful circumstances. The women reported interpersonal and intrapersonal stressors. The most frequently reported and highest ranked stressor was their relationships with their husbands (Mantogomery & Jahnsen, 1991).

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Aim of the study:

- To assess psychological profile of spouses of addicts (anxiety, depression and aggression).
- To identify patterns of marital dysfunction among heroin addicts.

Subjects and method

Subjects:

The sample consisted of 30 addict inpatients and their spouses. Patients were diagnosed according to criteria of DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). The control group consisted of 30 male adults and their spouses who were matched for age, social background and duration of marriage. The control group consisted of 30 male adults and their spouses who were matched