

# Communication Apprehension and Danger Assessment in Wives of Alcoholics and Non-alcoholics (A Comparative Analysis)

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**Abstract**—This study compared 150 wives of alcoholics with an equal number of women married to non-alcoholics. Communication apprehension and the assessment of danger in their marital relationships were the dimensions investigated using standardized instruments. The findings indicate greater levels of apprehension and danger perceived by women married to alcoholics than in the reference group. This indicates areas that warrant therapeutic intervention while dealing with marital dyads that involve an alcoholic husband to improve their interactional dynamics.

**Index Terms**—Communication apprehension, danger assessment, wives of alcoholics, alcoholic family.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The alcoholism literature is replete with evidence that excessive and problematic alcohol consumption has a deleterious effect on marital quality and satisfaction. Alcoholic husbands and their wives generally agree that the major aspects of marital happiness dealt with the quality of interpersonal relations and "undesirable vices (excessive gambling, drinking, etc.)" ranked first as contributing to marital unhappiness [1]. Women married to alcoholics, report several interpersonal, extrapersonal, and intrapersonal stressors and the most frequently reported and highest ranked stressor was their relationships with their husbands [2].

Drug and alcohol use has been found to be a consistent risk marker for use of violence toward a female partner [3]. Substance abuse among perpetrators of domestic violence ranges from 40% to 92%, depending on the study examined [4]. Alcohol abuse in particular has been associated with the perpetration of marital violence in a number of studies (e.g., [5]). Studies indicate that men with diagnosable alcohol problems are at substantially increased risk for spouse abuse. For example, reference [6] shows that rates of marital aggression in men diagnosed with a current alcohol problem (44%) is about three times greater than in men without an alcohol use disorder (15%).

Evidence from experimental, survey, longitudinal, and event-based research suggests that alcohol intoxication contributes to violence [7]. While there is agreement that those who engage in intimate partner violence (IPV) often drink and that intoxication often accompanies violence, there is considerable debate as to whether or not alcohol use

simply covaries with partner violence, is inherently facilitative or a contributing cause of IPV, or is simply an "excuse" for aggression [8]. The body of research is clear that IPV and substance abuse are directly related [9] and the evidence supports a causal relationship between substance abuse and IPV [10].

Common problems experienced by couples with alcohol involved spouses are codependency, sexual identity conflicts, violence, role confusion, communication difficulties, unhealthy sexual and intimacy attitudes and values, and sexual dysfunction and essentially they experience intimacy dysfunction and lack intimacy skills [11]. It has also been evidenced that communicational dimensions are frequently impaired in these marital relationships. Communication difficulties and difficulties in affective relationships in wives of alcoholics have been reported in five major problem areas which include difficulties surrounding communication, affective responses, reinstatement into family roles, disruptive traits and behavior of husband and handling situations involving alcohol or alcohol related problems [12]. Alcoholic families differ from non-alcoholic families in affective expression, as reflected in lower rates of positive affect and higher rates of negative affect than control families [13]. Communication patterns within alcohol involved dyads have been a much under-researched area in the literature. This is true not only of the Western literature but also of the alcohol literature in India. Communication Apprehension as a variable has been explored in the general communication literature, for instance in relation to public speaking in terms of shyness and reticence, but less frequently dealt with in interpersonal contexts or in alcohol complicated marriages. It has been defined as an "individual level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons" [14]. Given the vitiated marital environment and the often tense and strained interpersonal relationships, marred by conflict and violence that is indicated by the marital literature in alcohol involved marriages, it is possible that wives of alcoholics experience a heightened feeling of apprehensiveness relating to communication with their alcoholic spouses and also perceive a greater element of danger. This study hence seeks to answer if women with alcoholic and non-alcoholic husbands differ in their perception of danger and extent of communication apprehension in their marital relationships?

## II. SAMPLE SELECTION PROCEDURE

### A. Study Group

The study group comprised of 150 wives of alcoholics

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who were contacted at a de-addiction facility run by a NGO in Tiruchirappalli, India and were selected according to the following criteria:

- The husband should be registered for in-patient treatment after being diagnosed by the psychiatrist according to DSM-IV criteria.
- Should be married for at least three years and living with the spouse.
- Should not be the wife of a relapsed or recovering alcoholic visiting the centre for follow-up services.

### B. Reference Group

An equal number of wives of non-alcoholics were identified through the study group respondents, each of whom were asked to provide two addresses of friends,

neighbors or relatives where the husband was not an alcoholic and who had a more or less similar socio-economic background as theirs. Home visits were made and the family, which resembled the referrer study group respondent's profile more closely, was short listed for data collection. The wife was included as a reference group respondent only if her husband scored less than seven (indicating non-alcoholic status) on the AUDIT (Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test) [15] and if she herself had no known history of psychiatric illness.

The two groups of respondents thus identified were comparable and matched on the variables listed in Table I, with the alcoholism of the husband being the major differentiating factor.

TABLE I: DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS BY MATCHING SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES

VARIABLE	*GROUP	MEAN	SD	**STATISTICAL SIGNIFICANCE
Present Age-Husband	1.00	43.60	8.37	t=0.265
	2.00	44.17	8.19	<b>p&gt;0.05</b>
Age-Husband At Marriage	1.00	27.13	4.29	t=0.443
	2.00	26.73	4.71	<b>p&gt;0.05</b>
Present Age-Wife	1.00	37.10	7.99	t=0.970
	2.00	39.20	8.76	<b>p&gt;0.05</b>
Age-Wife At Marriage	1.00	21.81	3.03	t=0.723
	2.00	21.68	3.16	<b>p&gt;0.05</b>
Duration of Marriage	1.00	15.97	9.67	t=0.185
	2.00	15.50	9.87	<b>p&gt;0.05</b>
Monthly Income-Wife	1.00	921.33	1666.75	t=0.101
	2.00	630.77	1374.89	<b>p&gt;0.05</b>
Monthly Income-Husband	1.00	4553.33	4060.63	t=0.273
	2.00	4780.00	2034.59	<b>p&gt;0.05</b>
Number of Children	1.00	1.79	0.89	t=0.947
	2.00	1.80	0.83	<b>p&gt;0.05</b>
Size of Family	1.00	4.86	2.58	t=0.839
	2.00	4.92	2.54	<b>p&gt;0.05</b>

\*Group 1.00= Wives of Alcoholics; \*Group 2.00=Wives of Non-alcoholics

\*n = 150; \*\*df = 298

### III. RESEARCH DESIGN

This is a cross-sectional comparative study based on the presumption that the effect if any, of living with an alcoholic (study group) or non-alcoholic (reference group) spouse would have already manifested itself on the marital experience of both groups. The groups being matched on certain key socio-demographic variables, the study is only an attempt to determine and compare the manifestation of major subject variables such as conflict and communication apprehension in these wives as reported by them at the point of data collection and to understand their perception of danger and psychological maltreatment in their marital relationship. This quasi-experimental study thus used an ex-post facto research design.

### IV. INSTRUMENTS

#### Personal Report of Spouse Communication Apprehension

[16] is a 15 item likert type scale with responses ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree' and measures the apprehension experienced towards communicating with one's spouse. It yields a composite score.

*The Danger Assessment Scale* [17] is an instrument to assess the danger perceived from one's partner in an intimate relationship. It is a fifteen-item scale which is scored in terms of 'yes' or 'no' responses indicating the occurrence of events perceived as posing a threat by the other partner.

The choice of these instruments was determined by the fact that no indigenous tools to measure the dimensions of interest in this study were available locally. They were translated into the vernacular (Tamil) before being administered after ascertaining their translation validity by comparing correlation values of the Tamil and English versions (PRSCA-  $r=0.88$ ,  $p<0.01$ ; DAS-  $r = 0.86$ ) and the English (original) and re-translated versions (PRSCA-  $r=0.92$ ,  $p<0.01$ ; DAS-  $r = 0.82$ ). All the translations and re-translations were carried out by mental health professionals

who were familiar with methodological issues and the nature of the study.

## V. GENERAL BACKGROUND OF THE RESPONDENTS

The majority of respondents in both the groups were Hindu housewives. Most of the wives in both groups had studied up to the higher secondary school level. The majority in both groups had one or two children, had an arranged marriage and lived in a nuclear family. The majority had a family size of up to 5 members. Other background information pertaining to both groups is provided in Table 1.

## VI. RESULTS

### A. Perception of Husband's Drinking

The data presented in this section was obtained through a self-prepared questionnaire mostly through open ended questions asked only to the subjects of the study group. This would provide a context to the reader about the perception of the subjects as they see their partner's alcohol abuse impacting their lives. They opined that the duration of drinking ranged from four to thirty five years with a mean of 12.9 years while the period of problem drinking was reported from one to fifteen years with a mean of 3.8 years. They reported alcohol consumption during all times of the day (43.3 per cent) and 26.7% said there was no fixed time for drinking. The majority said their husband consumed one full bottle of liquor every day. The mean expenditure on drinking according to the wives was Rs. 7076/- and ranged from Rs. 1500/- to 20,000/- per month. They also said that their husbands frequently borrowed money (30 per cent) and sold property (13.3%) to meet their drinking expenditure. Quarrelling with the relatives under intoxication was reported by all, while quarrels with the neighbors were reported by 50% of them. Verbal abuse (96.7%), wife beating (90 per cent), beating children (50%), were frequently reported events consequent to drinking reported by the study group respondents. Being involved in accidents (26.7 per cent), getting into problems with the police (30%), blacking out in public places (43.3%) and getting involved in accidents (26.7%) were other behaviors reported. Economic hardships faced by the family were attributed to the drinking by the majority of respondents (63.3%). The majority (83.3%) said that at the time of their marriage they did not know if their spouse to be had the habit of drinking and half of them came to know of this habit within two years of marriage. On hindsight, 43.3% were of the opinion that their husband was an alcohol user even before their marriage.

### B. Subject Dimensions

There is a significant statistical difference between respondents of both groups on both the subject dimensions of communication apprehension and danger assessment. The mean scores on these dimensions indicate a greater manifestation in wives of alcoholics than the reference group subjects (Table II).

TABLE II: T TEST FOR RESPONDENTS ON SUBJECT DIMENSIONS

DIMENSION	*GROUP	MEAN	SD	** t value
COMMUNICATIO N	1.00	16.44	5.31	t= 9.29
	2.00	10.82	5.15	<b>p &lt; 0.001</b>
DANGER ASSESSMENT	1.00	10.64	2.66	t= 26.61
	2.00	1.91	3.00	<b>p &lt; 0.001</b>

\*Group 1.00= Wives of Alcoholics;

\*Group 2.00=Wives of Non-alcoholics; \*\*n=150; df=298

A series of ANOVA tests were then carried out by reclassifying the respondent groups. Consanguinity (blood relationship prior to marriage) is a common feature in several marriages in India. The ANOVA results based on the consanguinity of the respondents shows a highly significant statistical difference among the four groups compared (wives of alcoholics-consanguineous and non-consanguineous *versus* wives of non-alcoholics-consanguineous and non-consanguineous) for the communication apprehension ( $F=28.95$ ;  $p<0.001$ ) and danger assessment scores ( $F=34.9$ ;  $p<0.001$ ). The highest mean was obtained by wives of alcoholics (Consanguineous) for both these dimensions (Communication Apprehension, Mean=16.6; Danger Assessment, Mean=10.9) and the lowest by wives of non-alcoholics (Consanguineous-Communication Apprehension, Mean=10.0; Danger Assessment, Mean=1.7).

Most marital unions in India tend to be 'arranged' which means that it is based on parents selecting the partner for their children as against what are termed to be 'love' marriages' that are based on self-selection. The ANOVA results based on the type of marriage of the respondents (love versus arranged) shows a highly significant statistical difference among the four groups compared (wives of alcoholics-love and arranged versus wives of non-alcoholics-love and arranged) for the communication apprehension ( $F=28.83$ ;  $p<0.001$ ) and danger assessment scores ( $F=235.07$ ;  $p<0.001$ ). The highest mean has been obtained by wives of alcoholics in love marriages (Communication Apprehension, Mean=17.0; Danger Assessment, Mean=11.0) for both these dimensions and the lowest by wives of non-alcoholics in love marriages for Communication Apprehension (Mean=10.5) and by wives of non-alcoholics in arranged marriages for Danger Assessment (Mean=1.7).

The next ANOVA was calculated based on the age difference between the respondents and their husbands (0 to 5 years, 6 to 10 years and 11 to 15 years). A highly significant statistical difference is seen among the six groups compared for the communication apprehension ( $F=18.26$ ;  $p<0.001$ ) and danger assessment scores ( $F=144.29$ ;  $p<0.001$ ). The highest mean has been obtained by the wives of alcoholics who had an age difference of 0 to 5 years for Communication Apprehension (Mean=16.68) and by those with an age difference of 6 to 10 years for Danger Assessment (Mean=10.82). The lowest mean scores were obtained by wives of non-alcoholics with an age difference of 0 to 5 years for Communication Apprehension (Mean=10.31) and for Danger Assessment by wives of non-alcoholics with an age difference of 11 to 15 years

(Mean=1.2).

The final ANOVA compared the respondents according to their occupational status (employed versus housewives). This was considered an important variable in terms of greater financial autonomy and perhaps lesser dependence on the male spouse, and can significantly alter the dynamics between partners. Results show a highly significant statistical difference among the four groups compared (wives of alcoholics- employed and housewives *versus* wives of non-alcoholics- employed and housewives) for their communication apprehension ( $F=31.15$ ;  $p<0.001$ ) and danger assessment scores ( $F=236.86$ ;  $p<0.001$ ). The highest mean score was obtained by wives of alcoholics who were housewives (Communication Apprehension, Mean=16.6) and by those who were employed (Danger Assessment, Mean=11.1), while the lowest scores were for the wives of non-alcoholics who were housewives (Communication Apprehension, Mean=8.9) and those who were employed (Danger Assessment (Mean=1.6).

## VII. CONCLUSION

The findings reveal that wives of alcoholics experience a greater degree of communication apprehension in their interaction with their spouses and perceive a higher element of danger in their marital relationships than those with non-alcoholic spouses. It was also seen that wives of alcoholics who were in consanguineous relationships, in love marriages and who were housewives and had a smaller age difference with their husbands (0 to 5 years) manifested higher levels of communication apprehension and perceived greater danger in their marital relationships. The findings indicate that wives of alcoholics merit therapeutic intervention to deal with these deficits experienced in their interaction with their alcoholic husbands. Couple focused counseling strategies and other therapeutic adjuncts need to be considered in dealing with such couples to improve their interactional dynamics and consequently promote better marital adjustment.

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