

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Living with Substance Abused Spouse: A Phenomenological ApproachSABA TOUSEEF¹, RABIA IFTIKHAR², SYED MESSUM ALI KAZMI³, AYESHA MAJEED⁴^{1,2}Clinical Psychology Unit, Department of Psychology, Government College University, Lahore³Assistant Director Colleges, Higher Education Department, Punjab⁴Clinical Psychology Unit, Department of Psychology, Government College University, LahoreCorresponding author: Rabia Iftikhar, Email: rabia.iftikhar@gcu.edu.pk**ABSTRACT****Introduction:** Substance abuse is social problem throughout the world due to which not only the life of addicted person but also his families especially his spouses are also affected.**Aim:** The current study aimed to explore the lived experiences of the spouses of substance abused men and the impact of their husband addiction problem on different aspects of their lives.**Material and Method:** The design of this study was a cross sectional study design and this study was conducted at Mayo Hospital Lahore. A sample size of eight (N=8) were recruited. Interview guide consists of open ended questions which were developed for the purpose of data collection. Semi structured interview approach was employed for conducting interview. Interpretative phenomenological analysis was used to analyse the interviews.**Results:** Results from analysis yielded eleven super ordinate themes. These includes social support, challenges on societal level, unhealthy home environment, unhealthy relationship supportive wife, financial instability, physiological problems, psychological complaints, change in personality, concerned mother and religious coping.**Conclusion:** The results will contribute to understanding the impact of substance abuse of men on their spouses. It will help in developing an educational program for those people who are the risk by increasing their awareness and changing their behavior for preventing addiction problem and will also aid in developing counseling plans for the spouses of substance abusers.**Keywords:** Substance abuse, Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, Financial Instability, Religious Coping**INTRODUCTION**

The increasing distribution, production and easy access to substances along with the change in society's values resulted in increased problem related to substance abuse. Psychiatrists, sociologists, social workers, politicians, educators and mental health professionals are identifying more substance abuse and use as a critical public health problem (1). Despite the attempts to limit the assess to psychoactive substances, these are common among adolescents, adults and growing in some groups A "substance" can be defined as a psychoactive compound which has the potential to cause social and health problems, including addiction. These can be legal (e.g., tobacco), illegal (cocaine and heroin) or controlled for use for medical purposes by the licensed prescribers i.e. oxycodone and hydrocodone (e.g., Vicodin, Oxycontin & Lortab) (2). Substance abuse has been described as a "chronic relapsing disease" with extremely high rate of relapse ranging from 56.8% to 81.8% (3). It refers to hazardous and harmful use of psychoactive substances including illicit drugs and alcohol (4).

Individuals who are substance dependence generally causes serious harm to his own self, his family, society and also creates high cost for his family and society (5). The presence of drug addict in the family affects the psychological wellbeing, economic condition, social life, physical health and relationships of whole family. Parents, spouses and children of substance abusers suffers from the negative effect of substance abuse in the family (6) and they may feel frustrated, angry, fearful, anxious, frustrated, ashamed, worried, guilty and depressed (7). They are depressed and anxious because of the economic problems caused by substance abused husband's unemployment, homework and lack of intimate and close relationship with each other. Research has shown that higher level of drug and alcohol use and higher level of substance related problems increases aggression in their spouses (8). Due to change in system, marital violence and husband's addiction shows significant relationship and this also provides a source for conflict and violence among members of family (9). Partner's substance abuse results in a high risk for one's own substance use. It also increases the risk of divorce. The husband addiction problem also has a psychological impact. The causes of depression for the wives of substance abusers include social isolation, shyness and shame. The substance abuse problem of their husband causes lower tolerance and aggressive behavior in them which affects behavior of their wives (10).

Having a spouse with substance use disorder develops tension and stress in relationship (11). A vicious cycle starts when

the substance use become one of the major reason for arguing and fighting, in which substance use causes conflict which leads to more substance use as a way of reducing conflict and tension about the substance use escalates, more drinking and drug use occurs and so on. The couple in which a partner is substance abused has a difficult time getting out of the downward spiral (12). The spouse of person with substance abuser has difficult time getting along with their husband as they behavior like substance use and drinking, staying out late, money problems and showing irresponsible behavior towards home. The partner makes excuses to cover up and hide her partner's drinking and drug abuse (13). The husband also reported that he drinks or abuse substances to reduce stress and tension related to fights in the home and arguments about alcohol and drug use. There are also episodes of angry touching and domestic violence by either partner when spouse has been abusing substances. Psychiatric morbidity is also common among such women (14).

METHOD

Research Design: The aim of the current study was to examine psychological, emotional, social, physical, behavioral and financial aspects of spouse's life of substance abused men, to determine how the substance abuse of men affect the lives of their spouses and the problems faced by their spouses. Phenomenological research design was applied in order to investigate lived experiences and perception of the spouses of men who were indulged in substance abused behavior. Additionally, interviews were used to gather in-depth information from participants.

Sample: Sample of the study consisted of 8 participants. Data was collected through purposive sampling technique.

Table 1: Frequency of Demographic Variables of Participants (N=8)

Demographics	F
Age	
20-30	4
31-40	4
41-50	
Religion	
Muslim	8
Non-muslim	
Education	
Nil	1
Matriculation	2
Intermediate	2
Graduation	3
Family system	

Joint nuclear	6
Years of marriage	2
1-5	3
6-10	3
11-15	2
15-20	
No of children	
1	1
2	2
3	2
4	3
Socioeconomic status	
Low	2
Middle	6
High	

Research Measures: Semi structured interview was established for the collection of data and to explore the lived experiences and perception of wives of substance abused men. Interview questions were formulated in semi structured open ended format. The questions inquired the participants about their coping strategies as well as psychological, emotional, social, physical, behavioral and financial aspects of their lives.

Procedure: Open ended questions were developed to investigate psychological, emotional, social, physical, behavioral or financial aspects as well as to gather thorough information from the participants. Interview schedule consists of 16 questions. Rational of the study was told to participants. Consent for the audio recording was taken from them and they were ensured about the confidentiality by assuring them that their information would be used only for research purposes. After conduction of each interview in order to strengthen the reliability of research, obtained content was discussed in summary form to ensure authenticity. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was applied to get information of women lived experience, perception and current world of emotion while living with substance abused spouses.

RESULTS

Eight spouses were interviewed in a semi structured interview protocol to acquire broad understanding of experience the evaluation was conducted case by case according to interpretive phenomenological analysis standards. Emergent themes emerged from initial coding of verbatim. Sub ordinate themes and super ordinate themes arise from the clusters of emergent themes. Super ordinate themes were emerged that were social support, challenge son societal level, unhealthy home environment, unhealthy relationship supportive wife, financial instability, physiological problems, psychological complaints, change in personality, concerned mother and religious coping.

Table 2: Master Table

Superordinate Theme	Sub ordinate Theme
Social support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moral support from people Financial and emotional support from close relatives
Challenges on societal level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social stigma Non assisting mates Limited social interaction
Unhealthy home environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discordant home environment Fragile relationship of father with children
Supportive wife	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Considerate wife Caring wife
Unhealthy relationship with spouse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Distant spousal relationship Being abused Neglectful behaviour of husband Aggressive behaviour of husband
Financial instability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financial loss Financial damage
Physiological problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Somatic complaints
Psychological complaints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deteriorating mental health Hopelessness

Change in personality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positive change in personality Negative change in personality
Concerned mother	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Worry about children
Religious coping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Religious faith

Social Support: The first theme that emerged from the analysis is social support. The spouses of the substance abusers reported that their social relations were unaffected despite their abuse addictive behavior. Participants reported that they also get support from their in-laws.

“my relation with my in-laws are very good my brother in-law supports me. My parents also support me a bit”

Participant 7: Participants also reported that their husband does not provide basic necessities due to which they found it hard to manage their home expenses. For this they get financial support from their parents and close relations.

“he does not go to work he does not fulfill house expenses. my parents help me in this”

Participant 2: Challenges on Societal Level

The first master theme that emerged from the analysis is challenges on the societal level. The wives of substance abusers have to face social problems. People are not supportive to such female and label them and their husband. Due to such problems, the spouses of drug abusers limit their social interaction with the people.

“I am afraid I myself stay away from relatives and do not want anyone to come at my house and see brabble in the house”

Participant 2: The spouses of such men have to face negative comments from people. They have fear of insult and embarrassment due to which they used to avoid people.

Unhealthy Home Environment

The third theme that emerged is unhealthy home environment. The home environment of substance abusers is mostly conflicting. All the participants reported quarrel at their home due to their husband’s behavior.

“there is always quarrel in the home”

Participant 2: Substance abusers also had distant relationship with their children. They do not give attention to them and also have weak bonding with them.

“he does not pay attention to his children”

Participant 4: Supportive Wife

Another theme that emerged was supportive wife. The spouses of substance abusers try to secure their relationship with the husband. They try to adjust to the circumstances and avoid conflict with the husband. They are concerned for their husband safety and try to hide his addiction problem from the people. They tolerate their husband behavior and tried to change themselves to adjust to their husband behavior problems. The spouses of substance abusers stay quiet to not disturb their home environment and hope for the reward for being patient.

“I used to forbade him may Allah guide him to the right path. I try to bring changes in myself for him”

Participant 1: Unhealthy relationship with Spouse

Another superordinate theme that emerged was unhealthy spousal relationship. All participants reported that substance abuse had an effect on their husband’s behavior causing lowered tolerance, anger and aggressive behavior i.e. shouting which affected their spouse and family members.

“he used to beat and shout and quarrel every time at home”

Participant 4: The spouses of substance abusers reported irresponsible behavior of their husband. They said that their husbands are unemployed and they do not care about their wives and children and does fulfill the needs of family members.

“he does not go to work and does not fulfill expenses. He is irresponsible towards his wife and children”

Participant 4: The participants also reported the effect of their spouse addictive behavior on their marital relationship. Most of the participants reported weak bonding with their husband.

“I feel abhorrence. He used to ask why I do not talk to him. I do not want to talk to him”

Participant 2: Change in Personality

Change in personality also emerged as a super ordinate themes. The spouses of the substance abusers reported that they have observed changed in their personality due to their husband addiction. Some of the participants reported positive change in their personality such as becoming strong and resilient.

"I feel that this has made me very strong. I have developed patience now I am not bothered by anything I do not get afraid of problem and can tackle them efficiently"

Participant 5: Some of the participants also reported negative change in their personality.

"I cannot help my fortune"

Participant 5: "I used to be very fun loving but now I stay quiet. I have changed a lot due to him. I use to quarrel and stay tense a lot now"

Participant 7: Financial Instability

Another superordinate theme that emerged was financial instability. Due to unemployment of husband, the spouse of substance abusers found it difficult to manage home expenses.

"I have faced financial damages multiple times as I have to pay his debt I do not like when someone comes to my door and ask for this"

Participant 2: Physiological Problems

The super ordinate theme also included physiological problems. Many of the participants reported that they experience somatic complaints. They experience headache, fatigued and body pain. They also had muscle pain and had shivering in their body.

"I experience head ach and muscle tension I have body ach due to stress I also to go to work and worry about him"

Participant 2: "I experience body ache and tension in the body. I had muscle tension and heat in the head I had shivering in the body I could not sleep and had weakness. I also feel dizziness even sitting idle.

Participant 4: Psychological Complaints

Another super ordinate theme that emerged was psychological complaints. The spouse of substance abusers experienced sadness due to their spouse addiction problem. They feel stressed, disgusted and humiliated. Participants stated that they used to cry due to their husband disturbing behavior. Many of the participant experience confusion and some of them had depression.

"I got depressed due to this"

Participant 3: "I used to feel stressed and still do. He used to abuse drugs and cigarette at home and in the room which is unbearable for me"

Participant 4: Participant reported that they did not want to work but they are helpless as they have to manage their home expenses because of unemployment of their husband.

"like there is some tension in the house he is unable to fulfill expenses I long to stay at home like other women do staying at home and do nothing just spending their lives"

Participant 8: Concerned Mother

Another super ordinate theme that emerged was concerned mother. The participants reported that they are concerned for their children future due to their father's addictive problem

"I used to forbade him. May Allah guide him to the right path may he leave this not for himself but for his children because their future depends on their father"

Participant 1: "I used to get worried when I thought about children"

Participant 6: Religious Coping

The list of super ordinate themes also included spiritual coping. Most of the participants reported the use of their religious belief to cope with the stressful events in their lives. Some of the participants stated that during hard times, they only found God who helped them to deal with the suffering caused by the addiction of their spouses.

"no one ever helped me except God"

Participant 2: "Allah has helped me He is the one who helps"

Participant 5: "Allah has helped me who made me strong and developed patience in me"

Participant 6**DISCUSSION**

The current study aimed to explore the experiences of women who lived with substance abused spouses. The spouses of men with substance abuse suffer about themselves, their lives and their family member's future. The results of the study seemed to be similar to the previous literature. The wives of substance abusers face problem during their social interaction. They tried to hide their husband addiction problem. They had fear of embarrassment and insult if anyone of the people in their surrounding know about it. They avoid meeting people and restrict their social interaction. They experience labeling from the people due to their husband addiction problem and do not get support from them. Research has also shown that social problems of wives of addicted men is related to their social perspective and states that most of the spouses experiences social repression. They try their best to hide the problem of their husband (15). They think that everyone in their surrounding knew about their husband abuse and they choose to stay away from the community. According to Nikbakht and his colleagues, the addiction stigma tend to hurt the social as well as personal identity of the drug abuser spouses and society's negative attitude towards them restrict social communication due to addiction (16).

The participants of the study reported that their home environment is mostly conflicting. They have discordant home environment. There is always quarrel in the family due to aggressive behavior of the substance abuser. The substance abuser has weak bonding with their children. They do not give attention to their children and the children fear their father. The children of substance abusers also show disrespectful behavior towards father (17). The children of such parents have low quality of life which coincides with a study reporting that the quality of life of children of father who are involved in heavy drinking was lower than the quality of life of light substance abuser (18,19).

Many of the participants in the study mentioned that their spousal addiction problem also affected their marital relationship. They also suffer from their irresponsible behavior. Substance abuser show negligence towards their family and also show aggressive behaviors like yelling and shouting. Such behaviors negatively impact their spouses and disturb the home environment. They have developed weak bonding with their husband and feel disgusted due to their addictive behavior (19). This seem to be in agreement with the literature comparing spouses of non-alcoholics and alcoholics and found that spouses of individuals with alcohol use disorder reported lower level of marital satisfaction that is marital adjustment (20). It has also been reported that spousal drinking and alcohol use is an important factor as a predictive of divorce. They also experience lower marital quality, distrust, and marital instability (21). This study also found that the spouses of substance abusers experience physical as well as verbal abuse from their husband. Wife battering is another consequence of spouse addiction. Johnson et al. reported that substance abuse is one of the main reason for wife battering (22). Similar results of physical abuse were reported by researchers (23). They alone with addicted husband face the most pressures from all sides and alone bear overall responsibility of troubled family.

The participants of the study reported that they sometimes got praised for tolerating their husband behavior. They receive moral support from the people due to which they can handle the stresses of their lives. They also get financial support from their close relatives. This is consistent with the findings of experts who report that socially rewarding experiences and relationship are protective factors against drug-seeking behavior (24). The results of the present study have how substance abusers expressed various positive transformation in self such as being more strong, becoming independent and learnt how to tackle with the life problems. They had become resilient to their spouse addictive

problem. While some of the negative transformation that occurred due to their husband addictive problem were becoming quarrelsome. They initiate conflict with their husband and disturb the home environment. They no longer want to continue their job and want a life like other women. The positive transformation brought about by stressful life event overshadows the negative one as positive one are life long and persistent while negative one are temporary.

The participants of the study also reported about the financial difficulties due to their husband addictive behavior. The unemployment of their husband creates trouble for their wives and they found it hard to manage their home expenses. Such women also face financial damages as their husband sold their things to fulfill their needs of addiction. They also have to pay debt to the people because of their husband. This relates with the study of Salonia et al. that cost of substance abuser drugs ad a significant impact on the functioning of family and wellbeing as it can be seen in the change in the family earning. The substance abuser is very often unemployed and sell household items (25). The participants of the study also expressed the impact of their husband substance abuse on their physical health. They experience physiological changes due to their husband addictive behavior. They experience muscle tension, headache, fatigue and body pain. They also experience shivering in their body and nerves. This is consistent with the study by Aksian et al. that reported that spouses of such men experience that drinking regulation attempting failure (26).

The present study has also established how wives of substance abusers expressed worry for their children due to their father addiction problem. They concern about the future of their children and the negative impact of the father's behavior on their children. The children of father with substance abuse spouse experience adverse psychosocial problems who observe parental illness, conflict and financial upset cause the improvised living condition that the family must endure as shown in research (27).

Limitations: The research has some limitations attach to it. The study was conducted in only one city. The study consisted of only female participants. It can be replicated to understand the experiences of both genders in dealing with their spouse addiction problem and to obtain diversified set of experiences across different cultures.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The study explored the problems faced by the spouses of substance abusers. Substance abuse is a problem with large spectrum of psychosocial difficulties for their spouses. The detailed analysis of different domains of lives of substance abusers gives an insight about the sufferings and stresses of their lives. The problem faced by the spouses of substance abusers range from physical, emotional to social domain. They employ various coping strategies to curb the ill effect of their partner's substance abuse. They experience psychological as well as physiological problems. They receive financial and moral support from the people. They also suffer from labeling and social stigmas from society due to their husband addictive behavior. Many of the findings of this study is consistent with the previous literature. The results will contribute in understanding the impact of substance abuse of men on their spouses. It will help to develop educational programs for people at risk by increasing awareness and changing their behavior in the process of preventing addiction problems. It can also aid in developing counseling plans for the spouses of substance abusers.

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