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## Psychological distress and marital satisfaction among the spouses of patients with alcohol dependence syndrome attending Patan Hospital

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** Alcohol dependence is considered an ongoing stressor for individuals and families. Among them, spouses are primarily affected because of the intimate nature of their relationship. Spouses play an important role in treatment programs related to alcohol. Thus, this study aims to identify the prevalence of psychological distress and marital satisfaction among spouses of ADS patients.

**Method:** This cross-sectional study was conducted at Patan Hospital in Nepal. A total of 92 spouses of patients with alcohol dependence syndrome were selected by purposive sampling and were assessed using a self-administered questionnaire. Psychological Distress and Marital Satisfaction were assessed using DASS 21 and the Marital Satisfaction Scale respectively. The descriptive statistics were calculated for socio-demographic and association and the correlation between marital satisfaction status and psychological distress was done using the Chi-square test and Spearman's rank correlation coefficient respectively.

**Result:** Majority of respondents had anxiety 59(64.13%) followed by depression 52(56.52%) and 19(20.65%) perceived stress. There was a significant association between psychological distress (Depression, Anxiety, and Stress) and marital dissatisfaction in spouses ( $p$ -value =  $<0.05$ ) whereas there was a negative correlation with each other.

**Conclusion:** Psychological distress in spouses of alcohol-dependent patients is high, with marital satisfaction being low. Addressing these issues will be beneficial as spouses have an important role in the prompt treatment of alcohol dependence syndrome and also prevents from deterioration of the spouse's mental state.

**Keywords:** Marital satisfaction status, psychological distress, spouses of men with alcohol dependence

## Introduction

Globally, the harmful use of alcohol is one of the leading risk factors for health of people resulting in millions of deaths including hundreds of thousands of young lives lost.<sup>1</sup> The magnitude of the problem is considerable even in South East Asia.<sup>1</sup> According to the report by World Health Organisation, it is also a matter of concern that the annual rise in consumption is substantial.<sup>2</sup> The higher the consumption of alcohol, the greater will be the prevalence of alcohol dependence syndrome (ADS) and more stress to the individual and family members as well.<sup>3,4</sup>

The course of alcohol use disorders of any family member influences the entire family functioning and developmental outcomes of the family system including its members.<sup>5</sup> The broad distortion of the family process increases the domestic violence and other social problems causing negative effects on his or her marital life which later results in disharmonious relationship.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the quality of life of both individual and family members is adversely affected.<sup>6</sup> The continuous exposure and stressful life events may trigger the biological, psychological and behavioural responses and thus increasing the chances of psychological problems. Among the family members, spouses are particularly affected because of the intimate relationship and constant exposure to the behaviour of the alcoholic spouse. Various studies show the high rates of domestic violence, marital separation and divorce, maladaptive coping skills, low marital satisfaction and poor social support among the spouses of alcoholic men.<sup>4</sup>

The early and accurate detection of mental health problems in spouses of men with alcohol dependence followed by an appropriate recovery and return to work plan would help reduce the global burden of mental illness.<sup>7</sup>

This study aims in understanding and addressing the mental health issues of spouses of alcoholics, which would help

decrease their burden, improve their coping skills and overall quality of life.

## Method

This was a cross-sectional study done in outpatient department of Patan Hospital, Lalitpur, Nepal, a tertiary care teaching hospital from January 2019 to February 2020. The female spouses of patients with alcohol dependence syndrome attending outpatient department of Patan Hospital aged 18 y and above and willing to participate and provide verbal informed consent were included in the study. The study was done after getting approval from Research Committee of School of Nursing and Midwifery (Lalitpur Nursing Campus) and ethical approval from Institutional Review Committee (IRC) of Patan Academy of Health Sciences.

The instrument used for data collection consisted of three sections (i) Personal information related to social demographic variables of spouse like age, educational level, and patient's information (clinical variables) like, duration of alcohol intake and duration of diagnosis of ADS was included; (ii) Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS21),<sup>8</sup> a validated tool (Cronbach's alpha 0.93)<sup>9,10</sup> Nepali version consisting of 21 items, 7 items for anxiety and 7 for depression and 7 for Stress; (iii) Marital Satisfaction Scale (MSS), a self-administered tool (Cronbach's alpha 0.96) consisting of 30 questions designed to measure level of marital satisfaction.<sup>11</sup> The responses were recorded in the form of three categories, never, sometimes, often and scored as 0, 1, and 2 respectively. Some items were scored in opposite direction whose scoring is 2-1-0 scored. To find satisfaction level total score were summed up. The maximum possible score on the scale was 60 and lowest 0, and 30 as midpoint. Higher the score, higher the satisfaction.

The tool was translated in Nepali language and back translation was done in English by the professional translator.<sup>12</sup> Face validity was checked after finalization of translation by

research advisor and peer researcher. Data thus collected was analyzed using statistical software SPSS version 16.

Descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation were calculated. The association between variables depression, anxiety, stress and marital satisfaction status was analyzed using Chi-square test. Data was tested for normality using scatterplot and Shaphiro-Wilk test (Appendix E). Since p value of Shaphiro-Wilk test of one variable (DASS score) was less than 0.05, correlation between variables depression, anxiety, stress and marital satisfaction status was done using non-

parametric Spearman's rank correlation coefficient test.

## Result

There were 92 respondents (spouses); mean age  $40.23 \pm 8.17$  y and most of the spouses of patients were educated up to primary level (1-5), Table1.

There were 39(42.39%) patients who had been consuming alcohol for duration of 16-25 y and 36(39.13%) had been diagnosed with alcohol dependence syndrome since 1 y, Table 2.

**Table 1. Socio-demographic variables related to the spouses of patients with alcohol dependence syndrome attending Patan Hospital (N=92)**

Variables	N	%
Age (y) Mean $\pm$ SD.40.23 $\pm$ 8.17		
23- 32	13	14.13
33- 42	49	53.26
43- 52	25	27.17
53-62	4	4.35
$\geq$ 63	1	1.09
Educational Status		
Primary (1-5 class)	63	68.48
Secondary (6-8 class)	16	17.39
More than Secondary (>8 class)	13	14.13

**Table 2. Clinical variables related to patient with alcohol dependence syndrome attending Patan Hospital (N = 92)**

Variables	N	%
Duration of alcohol intake (y)		
$\leq$ 5	11	11.95
6-15	23	25.00
16-25	39	42.39
> 25	19	20.65
Duration of Diagnosis of ADS (y)		
<1	36	39.13
1-2	27	29.34
3-4	13	14.13
5-6	7	7.60
>6	9	9.78

Moderate level of depression was seen in 27(29.34%) spouses, moderate level of anxiety in 25(27.17%) and 9(9.78%) perceived mild level of stress, Table 3. Spouses had low marital satisfaction status among 50(54.35%) and high marital satisfaction among 42(45.65%), with a mean $\pm$ SD 28.34 $\pm$ 6.45 indicating lesser degree of overall marital satisfaction, Table 4.

Chi square test showed statistically significant association between depression, anxiety and stress level and marital satisfaction status at 95% confidence interval,  $p < 0.05$ , Table 5. Spearman rank correlation showed that depression ( $r = -0.469$ ) and anxiety ( $r = -0.455$ ) had a weak negative correlation with marital satisfaction status. Likewise, stress and marital satisfaction status had average negative correlation ( $r = -0.528$ ), Table 6.

**Table 3. Level of psychological distress among the spouses of patients with alcohol dependence syndrome attending Patan Hospital (N = 92)**

Psychological distress	Level	N	%
Depression	Normal (0-9)	40	43.48
	Mild (10-13)	19	20.65
	Moderate (14-20)	27	29.34
	Severe (21-27)	3	3.26
	Extremely severe (28+)	3	3.26
Anxiety	Normal (0-7)	33	35.87
	Mild (8-9)	15	16.30
	Moderate (10-14)	25	27.17
	Severe (15-19)	10	10.87
	Extremely severe (20+)	9	9.78
Stress	Normal (0-14)	73	79.35
	Mild (15-18)	9	9.78
	Moderate (19-25)	8	8.70
	Severe (26-33)	1	1.09
	Extremely Severe (34+)	1	1.09

**Table 4. Marital satisfaction status among the spouses of patients with alcohol dependence syndrome attending Patan Hospital (N = 92)**

Level of Marital Satisfaction	N	%
Low	50	54.35
High	42	45.65
Mean $\pm$ SD 28.34 $\pm$ 6.45		

**Table 5. Association between depression, anxiety and stress and marital satisfaction status among the spouses of patients with alcohol dependence syndrome attending Patan Hospital (N = 92)**

Psychological Distress	Marital Satisfaction		p value
	Low N(%)	High N (%)	
Depression			
No Depression	15(37.50)	25(62.50)	0.006
Mild to Extremely Severe	35(67.31)	17(32.69)	
Anxiety			
No Anxiety	10(30.30)	23(69.70)	0.001
Mild to Extremely Severe	40(67.80)	19(32.20)	
Stress			
No Stress	34(46.58)	39(53.42)	0.004
Mild to Extremely Severe	16(84.21)	3(15.79)	

p-value  $< 0.05$  (Fisher Exact Test)

**Table 6. Correlation of overall psychological distress, depression, anxiety and stress with marital satisfaction among spouses of patients with alcohol dependence syndrome (N = 92)**

	Psychological distress	Depression	Anxiety	Stress	Marital satisfaction Status
Psychological distress	1				
Depression	0.923*	1			
Anxiety	0.924*	0.768*	1		
Stress	0.921*	0.768*	0.796*	1	
Marital satisfaction status	-0.525*	-0.466*	-0.470*	-0.521*	1

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (2 tailed)

## Discussion

In the present study, we found that the majority of spouses of alcohol dependent men had anxiety followed by depression and stress when evaluated using DASS-21. Majority of them had moderate level of anxiety and depression and mild level of stress. There have been very few studies in Nepal and even fewer have specifically examined the presence of psychiatric morbidity in spouses.

The finding of the present study is consistent with the study conducted in Tamil Nadu, India which revealed 14(28%) of the spouses with moderate level of depression among 50 spouses.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, 21(43%) and 52(33.3%) had major depressive disorder in a study done in Karnataka, India and Sri Lanka respectively.<sup>4,14</sup> Similarly, 39(65%) of spouse were assessed to have mild to moderate level of depression and 11(18.3%) had severe depression in a study done in Uttarakhand, India.<sup>15</sup>

However, 13(28.26%) of spouses had depressive disorder from the study from Chitwan, Nepal and 4(10%) of spouses had only mild level of depression in study from Gujarat, India respectively.<sup>16,17</sup> The variation in the rate of depression among spouses in comparison to the present study may be due to the higher educational status of spouse as well as short duration (3-10 y) of alcohol consumption by majority of husband in that study.

In the present study, 33(35.87%) spouses had no anxiety and 59(64.13%) had some level of anxiety (from mild to extremely severe),

among which 25(27.17%) had moderate level of anxiety. Similar finding was observed in study done in Tamil Nadu, India which showed 12(24%) spouses with moderate level of anxiety.<sup>13</sup> However in one of the study carried out in Maharashtra<sup>18</sup> India, among 60 spouses only 9(15%) had anxiety disorder and in another similar study in Assam<sup>19</sup> India showed 5(7.24%) spouses with anxiety disorder. The lower rate of anxiety in these studies may be due to the higher level of educational status in majority of the spouse than the present study and also may be due to the short duration of alcohol intake by majority of alcoholic husbands in those studies.

The present study also shows that majority of the respondents 73(79.35%) had no stress and 19(20.65%) had some level of stress (from mild to extremely severe) among which 8(8.70%) had moderate level of stress. This finding was consistent with the study carried out in India among 50 spouse which revealed stress in 11(22%) spouse<sup>13</sup> and similarly another study showed 11(36.6%) of spouse with severe stress, 10(33.33%) with moderate stress and 9(30%) with mild level of stress respectively.<sup>20</sup> However, in a study conducted in Uttarakhand, India showed that more than half of the wives of alcoholics i.e., 33(55%) had moderate level of stress and every fourth of them 16(26.7%) had severe stress.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, in a study conducted in Patiala, India among 200 wives of alcoholics 168(84%) were having moderate level of stress, 27(13.5%) were having severe level of stress and 5(2.5%) were having mild level of stress.<sup>21</sup>

Although there are some differences in the depression, anxiety and stress level, it is seen

that spouses of ADS patient have some level of psychological distress.

The present study showed 50(54.35%) of the spouse had low marital satisfaction status whereas 45.65% had high marital satisfaction status with Mean  $\pm$  SD 28.34 $\pm$ 6.45 indicating lesser degree of marital satisfaction. This finding was similar to the study conducted in Southern Assam, India among 69 spouses with mean $\pm$ SD 27.17 $\pm$ 4.68.<sup>18</sup> The similarity in the marital satisfaction status may be due to the similarity in sample age-group, and cultural background of both countries. However, in a study conducted in Tamil Nadu, India among 50 spouses reported that 41(82%) of wives fell under category of poor marital satisfaction status.<sup>13</sup> In a study conducted in Ahmednagar, Maharashtra, India showed that some degree of marital distress was present in wives of men with alcohol dependence with mean score 11.47 $\pm$ 4.4 and had moderate level of burden with mean score of 47.87 $\pm$ 18.1.<sup>22</sup> The differences may be due to the difference in sample size and this finding cannot be generalized in every population

The present study shows that there is statistically significant association between psychological distress level and marital satisfaction status ( $p$  value  $<$ .05). Similarly, the current study also shows that there is negative correlation of depression, anxiety and stress with marital satisfaction, with  $r$  value = -0.469, -0.455, -0.528 respectively. This finding is similar to a study done in Kancheepuram, India in 2017 revealed that psychological distress and marital satisfaction have significant association as well as a negative correlation ( $r = -0.583$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) which indicates higher psychological distress is correlated with lower marital satisfaction.<sup>23</sup> One possible reason for the low marital satisfaction status and high psychological distress is that, heavy drinking leads to low marital satisfaction which may in turn leads to psychological distress on the spouse and vice versa.

There is an increased risk of committing criminal offenses against family members,

including domestic violence, divorce, marital rape, and physical and sexual assault, when one abuses alcohol. In addition to disrupting routine family life, an alcoholic can also result in lifelong harm. Many studies and anecdotal reports suggest that women whose husbands are dependent on alcohol have poor overall physical and mental health. The women are usually the primary caregivers in these cases. Psychiatric problems in the spouses are often given insufficient attention or overlooked altogether. It is therefore crucial to understand the mental health issues of spouses of alcoholics. By detecting psychiatric morbidity or psychological distress among spouses early and intervening early, it can improve treatment outcomes.

The findings of the present study draw attention to the fact that the distress among the spouses is considerable and warrant attention. Thus, the high rates of psychological distress and morbidity among women whose partners have alcohol problems, need to be addressed either as part of alcohol treatment programs or independently. They need to be addressed not only to improve outcomes for the dependent individuals, but also as potential reversible risk factors that could significantly impact women's outcomes. Hence, it is important that treatment programs for patients with alcohol dependence should also include a formal assessment of mood and anxiety disorders in their spouses. Through such an initiative, the treatment process will not only be enriched, but also the needs of this often marginalized population will be addressed.

## Conclusion

The present study shows high prevalence of psychological distress (most common was anxiety followed by depression and stress) and low marital satisfaction status. There was significant association as well as negative correlation between psychological distress and marital satisfaction status indicating as the psychological distress increases, the

marital satisfaction decreases. Similarly, decrease in psychological distress leads to increase in marital satisfaction status.

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### Conflict of Interest

None

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**Supplements**

**Part I: Socio-demographic Data Related to Spouse**

1. Age (in completed years) .....
2. Educational Status
  - a. Primary
  - b. Secondary
  - c. More than secondary

**Related to patient**

3. Duration of alcohol intake .....
4. Duration of Diagnosis of Alcohol Dependence Syndrome .....

**Depression, Anxiety, Stress Scale (DASS 21)**

Please read each statement and circle a number 0, 1, 2 or 3 which indicates how much the statement applied to you over the past week. There is no right or wrong answers. Do not spend too much time on any statement. The rating scale is as follows:

- 0 Did not apply to me at all
- 1 Applied to me to some degree, or some of the time
- 2 Applied to me to a considerable degree, or a good part of time
- 3 Applied to me very much, or most of the time

SN	Statement	0	1	2	3
1.	I found it hard to wind down				
2.	I was aware of dryness of my mouth				
3.	I couldn't seem to experience any positive feeling at all				
4.	I experienced breathing difficulty (eg, excessively rapid breathing, breathlessness in the absence of physical exertion)				
5.	I found it difficult to work up the initiative to do things				
6.	I tended to over-react to situations				
7.	I experienced trembling (eg, in the hands)				
8.	I felt that I was using a lot of nervous energy				
9.	I was worried about situations in which I might panic and make a fool of myself				
10.	I felt that I had nothing to look forward to				
11.	I found myself getting agitated				
12.	I found it difficult to relax				
13.	I felt down-hearted and blue				
14.	I was intolerant of anything that kept me from getting on with what I was doing				



15.	I felt I was close to panic				
16.	I was unable to become enthusiastic about anything				
17.	I felt I wasn't worth much as a person				
18.	I felt that I was rather touchy				
19.	I was aware of the action of my heart in the absence of physical exertion (eg, sense of heart rate increase, heart missing a beat)				
20.	I felt scared without any good reason				
21.	I felt that life was meaningless				

### Marital Satisfaction Scale

Given below are a number of questions related to different aspects of married life. Please read each statement and choose one of the responses given below in the statement. There is NO right or wrong answer. Be frank and choose an answer that describes your feelings, experiences and thoughts.

1.	Do you and your partner have friends in common? a. None    b. a few    c. Many
2.	Do you feel that your partner understands you? a. Yes many times    b. At times    c. No, rarely
3.	Do you visit your friend and relatives together? a. Rarely    b. Occasionally    c. Always
4.	Do you engage in outside hobbies and interests together? a. Always, often    b. Occasionally    c. Rarely
5.	Are your needs being fulfilled in your married life? a. Very few    b. Some of them    c. None of them
6.	Do you like your partner's friend? a. Most of them    b. Some of them    c. Often, always
7.	Do you share with your partner the responsibility of looking after your child/children? a. Never share    b. Occasionally    c. Often, always
8.	Compared to your life before marriage, is life at present.... a. Happier    b. Same as before    c. Unhappier
9.	Are there things done by your partner you dislike? a. a few    b. Some    c. Many
10.	Does your partner actively try to make married life more harmonious? a. Never, not bothered    b. At time    c. Always
11.	Do you derive satisfaction from sexual relations with your partner? a. Often, always    b. At times    c. rarely
12.	Do your parent-in-law have a holdover your partner? a. No    b. At times    c. Yes. often
13.	Do you get as much affection from your partner as you desire? a. Yes    b. Cannot say    c. No
14.	If you could live your life all over again, would you like to marry the same person to whom you are married now? a. No, never    b. Cannot say    c. Yes
15.	Are you frank regarding your sexual matters with your partner? a. Often, always    b. Occasionally    c. No, never
16.	When you compare your family life with those of other do you feel disturbed? a. Never    b. Sometimes    c. Often
17.	Have you ever wished you were not married? a. Very often    b. Occasionally    c. No never
18.	Has your partner been unfaithful to you? a. Never    b. Cannot say    c. Often
19.	Do you feel that your partner cares for his/her relatives than for you? a. Very often    b. At times    c. Never
20.	Have you ever wished you were married to someone else? a. Never    b. At times    c. Often
21.	Do you confide your personal problems with your partner?

	a. Rarely	b. Occasionally	c. Always
22.	Do you have frictions with your partner over the use of money? a. Rarely      b. Sometimes      c. Often always		
23.	Do you have frictions with your partner on essential matters related to your children (e.g., their schooling, career, friends, marriage etc.) a. Disagree often      b. Agree sometimes      c. Agree most often		
24.	Has your partner ever caused physical harm or injury to you? a. Never      b. Occasionally      c. Often		
25.	Have you ever caused physical harm or injury to your partner? a. Never      Occasionally      c. Often		
26.	Is your partner sensitive to your sexual needs and satisfaction? a. Not sensitive      b. At times      c. Always sensitive		
27.	Do you feel that your partner depends on you rather than his/her relatives for advice on family members? a. Depends on me      b. Cannot say      c. Depends on relatives		
28.	Have you had disagreements with your partner about having children? a. Often      b. At times      c. Never		
29.	Have you ever felt like leaving or divorcing your partner? a. Often      b. At times      c. Never		
30.	Considering everything, would you say that your married life is..... a. Not satisfactory      b. Neither satisfactory nor unsatisfactory      c. Very satisfactory		