

## Role of Socio-Demographic Factors in Codependency of Spouses of Substance Users

Ayesha Abid<sup>1\*</sup>, Ivan Suneel<sup>2</sup>**Abstract**

Codependency is considered to be a dysfunctional form infused with the extreme focus outside oneself. Spouses of male substance abusers derive the sense of purpose from the marital relationship, while neglecting their own self-esteem, personal life, self-worth and autonomy. It not only affects their psychological health but is also varied by a number of sociodemographic factors that may contribute to the functionality of spouses. The study aims to examine the relationship between demographic characteristics and codependency of spouses of substance users. Demographic characteristics included education of female spouses, types of substance abuse taken by the male spouses, family system, and profession of female spouses and socio-economic status. There was no significant correlation between the demographic characteristic however there was a significant positive correlation between age, duration of marriage and duration of substance abuse of male spouse. There was also a significant positive correlation between Education and socio-economic status, psychological and medical issue. The patterns uncovered showed to be consistent with the literature and paved way for future research.

**Keywords:** Codependency, Sociodemographic Factors, Spouses, Substance Use

Received: 29 November 2022; Revised  
Received: 31 March 2023; Accepted: 05 May  
2023

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**Introduction**

Substance use is a chronic and relapsing disorder that encompasses repetitive and compulsive intake of drugs despite the dire consequences affecting the individual's health but also impacts the entire family causing destruction and being hazardous for the relationships (Schafer, 2011). The entire family faces the consequences, but the hard-core reality is that women are more directly influenced by the addiction problem in their male counterparts. They not only face

financial instability but also social instability, criticism, handling family matters and yet being wounded by the stigma (Livingston et al., 2012; Lloyd, 2013). Despite being in a disturbed relationship, women are unable to leave their male counterparts because of various reasons amongst one and major is codependency (Sarkar et al., 2015).

Codependency inflicted in any relationship has a negative impact instead of positive. It leads to unhealthy behavior considering the self-esteem as well as emotional needs of the other partner. The more it prevails, the more it becomes toxic for the partner as the weak boundaries and consistent effort to please the other partner makes them more at a risk of vulnerability (Reyes & Duchene, 2015). The couple gets into vicious cycle, where the abusive partner makes excuses for bad behavior, puts all the blame for the problem occurred, does not accept his mistake and acts out to gain sympathy. Codependent female does not put effort to decrease or finish the addictive habit of her spouse to avoid conflict. She tends to fulfill all types of

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demands whether fair or unfair to increase her acceptance, self-esteem and worth. It also includes the need to control the other person, obsessing to an extreme level, giving up self for the other, experiencing anxiety and fear, denying being dependent and not forming a close bond with the partner (Hodgins & Riaz, 2011).

The psychoanalytical model primarily focused on the theories that explained the female notion of acquiring certain behaviors and traits. It explains the idea of projective identification that are the interpersonal dependencies and the process of interaction as a basis of defense in splitting (Meissner 1980). The conflict of good and bad self is present as the ego wants to preserve the good sense and eliminate the object or thing that is causing disturbance in the balance. The co-dependent female shifts the dependent tendencies as the basis of split-off ego function to work with acceptance along the abusive partner.

According to previous research, the reasons of codependency do not only depend on the abusive behavior but the factors that are associated with it. These include etiological factors that root back the experiences of childhood and adulthood eliciting the stressful circumstances. The results of a Mexican study depicted the 25% prevalence of codependency. Those women that lived in the culture of submissive script had eight times more codependency than those living without it. Other factors include having alcoholic partner, alcoholic father, sexual and physical abuse and history of mistreatment (Noriega et al., 2008).

Following the previous research, a comparative study was conducted to see the impact of alcohol addiction between women whose spouses were alcoholic with those that were non-alcoholic. Factors in terms of socio-demographic variables include co-dependence, marital adjustment, perceived marital power, depression, anxiety and stress.

It was also concluded that alcohol use has bad impact on the marital relationship, and it was suggested that the partners should be referred to treatment centers (Atintas & Tutarel-Kislak, 2019).

A study was conducted based on examining the impact of the alcohol use of the partner that effects the romantic relation in terms of satisfaction and commitment. An online survey predicted that the problematic drinking impacts significantly with the partner's commitment and satisfaction. Results indicated that the relationship was perceived negatively due to the drinking problem (Rodriguez et al., 2013).

Another study was conducted that assessed the perception of women in romantic relationship with their alcoholic partner. The nature of the study was qualitative that included the 10 women and their lived experiences through in-depth interviewing related to self-perception. The themes that were drawn from the interviews were deviance, fulfillment and strength based on the self-perception. Due to the drinking problem of their partners, women have adapted the role of a parent to fulfill the responsibilities of a breadwinner. This has led to the ignorance of their self and they have adapted the coping strategies as fulfillment and satisfaction while playing an active role. One of the most important aspects of women for strength is the motherhood that made them resilient and confident for the family unit (Peled & Sacks, 2008).

The indigenous literature also explains study done on the codependency and relationship satisfaction among the spouses of alcohol abusers. It was seen that there is a significant relationship between the codependency and the interpersonal satisfaction among spouse of alcohol addicts. If there is the high presence of denial, compliance, self-esteem and control, then the level of interpersonal satisfaction is less (Zaidi, 2015).

Indigenous literature also illustrates that a correlational study was conducted to find the relationship between caregiver stress, perceived stigma and mental health in female members of drug addicts. 200 participants between the age of 21-55 years were taken out of which 33% were daughters, 33% were sisters and 33% were wives of substance abusers. In the research, there was a significant impact of perceived stigma, caregiver stress in the female members of substance abusers (Rafiq & Sadiq, 2019)

### **Significance of the Study**

Substance use is a prevailing concern in Pakistan especially having a higher ratio in males. However, it is such a concern that not only influences the person being addicted to it but also to the family members involved. As explained that drug addiction is not just a habit, but it also has an influence on physical, social, psychological and financial aspects of an individual's life and this influence is not only limited to the parents but the spouse as well since they have to share the cause and consequence of addiction as well. However, in previous literature, it has not been given much attention even though there is reported increase in levels of frustration, irritability, intolerance and aggression in females in Pakistan. They not only bore this burden yet are expected to take care of their spouses, motivate them towards treatment and make them stay in the treatment. There are a lot of factors that significantly play a role in either helping the spouses or adding to their share of stressors. This needs to be identified in the present culture of Pakistan to be resolved for making the living conditions better for individuals at micro and macro levels. Therefore, the current research measures the relationship between the demographic characteristics and codependency of spouses of substance users.

## **Method**

### **Research Design**

A descriptive research design was employed to identify the traits, frequencies, trends or categories of sociodemographic factors in women who are codependent.

### **Sample Size**

170 females between the ages of 21-46 years were approached using purposive sampling strategy out of which the appropriate responses collected were 165. Further three forms were discarded ending with a data of 162 females. The sample size was obtained using G-power analysis based on the number of demographic factors, it was calculated with an estimated power of 0.2. The data was taken from the private rehabilitation centers of Lahore along with the NGOs associated with the rehabilitation centers based on the following criteria. The Spouses of those male substance abusers were included who were undergoing the treatment for second time and spouses of those substance abusers, who were divorced, in the treatment for the first time, had any physical disability and dual diagnosis were excluded.

### **Procedure**

The concerned authorities from where participants were included were the psychiatry department, addiction treatment centers, rehabilitation centers and private NGOs of Lahore. The concerned authorities were briefed about the research and its objectives. The participants were approached in the rehabilitation centers in which their spouses were already admitted for the second time. Those NGOs working for the welfare of women were approached as they were connected to the rehabilitation centers of Lahore. Written informed consent was taken and right to withdraw was given. The participants were given the choice to fill the question focusing on the best option based on their opinion. The data collected was analyzed using Descriptive and Frequencies using SPSS-26.

### Ethical Standards

The research was approved by the Institutional Review Board at Forman Christian College, in terms of being ethically sound. The participants were given informed consent to make a decision to be a part of the

research or not. They were told of their right to withdraw from the research and about maintenance of confidentiality. The aim, goal and purpose of the study were explained to them in detail. The right to withdraw and benefit to harm was explained.

### Results

**Table 1**

*Frequencies and Percentage of the Demographic Characteristic of the Participants (N= 162)*

<b>Demographic Characteristic</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Education of Female Spouse</b>		
Primary	56	34.6
Matric	43	26.5
Intermediate	18	11.1
Graduation	26	29.0
<b>Types of Substance Abuse that Male Spouse Uses</b>		16.0
Charas (Cannabis)	48	29.6
Ice (Crystal methamphetamine)	21	13.0
Powder (heroin)	19	11.7
Feem (opium)	5	3.1
Sharab (Alcohol)	41	25.3
All	28	17.3
<b>Family System</b>		
Nuclear	88	54.3
Joint	74	45.7
<b>Profession of Female Spouses</b>		
Professional	63	38.9
Housewife	99	61.1
<b>Socio-economic Status</b>		
Low	84	51.9
Middle	60	37.0
High	18	11.1
<b>Psychological Issue(s)</b>		
Yes	118	72.8
No	44	27.2
<b>Medical Issue(s)</b>		
Yes	26	16.0
No	136	84

The Table 1 shows that the majority of the females had education till primary level (f=56, %=34.6). The substance abused by the male spouses was in majority of Cannabis (f=48, %=29.6). Most of the females lived in

nuclear family system (f=88, %=54.3) as compared to joint family system (f=74, %=45.7). Furthermore, the majority of the females were housewives (f=99, %=61.1) as compared to be in any profession (f=63,

%=38.9). The majority of the females belonged to low socio-economic status ( $f=84$ , %=51.9). Most of the female spouses had psychological issues ( $f=118$ , %=72.8) but

compared to this, there was low frequency and percentage of any kind of medical issue present in female spouses ( $f=136$ , %=84).

**Table 2**

*Mean Scores and Standard Deviation of Age of Female Spouses, Duration of Marriage and Duration of Substance Abuse of Male Spouse (N=162)*

Demographic Characteristics	M	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Age of Female Spouse	31.80	5.30	19	46
Duration of Marriage	8.92	5.18	1	30
Duration of Substance Abuse of Male Spouse	10.55	6.52	2	30

The Table 2 shows that the minimum and maximum age of the female spouses was 19-46 years ( $M=31.80$  years,  $SD=5.30$ ). Furthermore, the duration of marriage of spouses was between 1-30 years ( $M=8.92$ ,

$SD=5.18$ ) and the duration of substance abuse of male spouse was between 2-30 years ( $M=10.55$ ,  $SD=6.52$ ).

**Table 3**

*Correlation among Demographic Characteristics for Spouses of Substance Abusers (N=162)*

Demographic Characteristics	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Age	-								
Duration of Marriage	.71**	-							
Duration of Substance Abuse	.53**	.49**	-						
Family System	-0.07	-0.06	.009	-					
Profession of Female Spouse	-.23**	-0.13	-.18*	-0.07	-				
Socioeconomic Status	0.06	-0.15	0.14	-.18*	-.36**	-			
Psychological Issue	-0.12	-0.14	-0.02	-0.06	-0.02	-.18*	-		
Medical Issue	-.001	-.007	0.09	0.03	-.18*	0.03	-0.11	-	
Education	-0.12	-.19*	0.04	-0.04	0.05	.32**	.42**	.20**	-

$p<0.001$ \*\*,  $p<0.05$ \*

Pearson product moment correlation was computed for demographic characteristics of codependency for spouses of substance abusers. There was no significant correlation between the demographic characteristics, however, there was a significant positive

correlation between age, duration of marriage and duration of substance abuse of male spouse. There was also a significant positive correlation between education and socio-economic status, psychological and medical issue.

## Discussion

The present research aimed to study the co-dependency of spouses of substance abusers, highlighting the issue of co-dependency that has been neglected for long as the only consideration was being given to the males in which mental and physical health of women were not been given importance. In Pakistan as a progressive country, the priority is given to males encouraging their self-respect, worth, job, education, financial status and how they make decision. In some studies in Pakistan, it is also seen that women have not been given importance even in their own marriage decision and are mostly suppressed where their only responsibility is to look after their children and home. The various studies (Ancel & Kabakci, 2009; Marks et al., 2012) on codependency of substance abusers identified that it was more among uneducated females having low socio-economic background.

According to the research, the findings are supported by the literature suggesting (Twist & Blake, 2017) the relationship between dependent person and what does he requires (Feinstein et al., 2017). According to the study investigated by Ançel and Kabakçi (2009) showing that codependency was considered as the behavioral addiction highlighting the factors of self-sacrifice, gender, number of borderline traits, subjugation schema, psychological issue, parentification and childhood history.

In the present study, the demographic status shows 56% of the female lie on just basic education having low educational background and not having much awareness that leads to drastic psychological factors where the male substance abusers were not educated as well, 88% were found of those families that were not living together and were separated from joint system consisting of much pressure as a female housewife. Previous researches conducted by Atintas and Tutarel-Kislak (2019) indicated that

majority of them had low socio-economic status, the mental issues emerged more among them than the physical problems (Neville-Jan et al., 1991).

## Limitation and Future Directions

One of the limitations of the research was to collect data in this pandemic and lockdown. Another limitation was difficult access to the required population. In future studies, more factors can be included based on the characteristics focusing on the co-dependency of female spouses of substance abusers.

## Implication and Suggestions

The study can be used to devise short term and long-term goals for the females based on skill development, problem solving, conflict resolution, emotional regulation and anger management. With the targeted questions, clinicians can understand the emotional health and psychological health of the clients' spouses. It is helpful for psychologists, doctors, medical department. The study can be well understood by students that are doing researches in the particular field.

## Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank research participants for providing the data that made this research possible.

## Contribution of Authors

Ayesha Abid: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Writing – Original Draft  
Ivan Suneel: Methodology, Writing - Reviewing & Editing, Supervision

## Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest declared by authors.

## Source of Funding

The authors declared no source of funding.

## Data Availability Statement

The datasets of the current study are not available publicly due to ethical reasons but

are available from the corresponding author [A.A.] upon the reasonable request.

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