

A Qualitative Study on Psychological Distress Among Children of Alcoholic Fathers during Covid 19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

Alcoholism is a serious mental health issue that affects families as a whole. In the midst of a global pandemic, everyone is allowed to be vulnerable and stressed. During the pandemic, alcohol use has risen dramatically. The negative impact of alcohol use in the family is more significant on children. Children of alcoholic fathers are at considerable risk for mental health problems and experience more extreme tension and stress than children of non-alcoholics. The fundamental goal of this study is to learn more about psychological distress experienced by children of alcoholic fathers during the pandemic. Employing qualitative phenomenological design, the lived experiences of psychological distress of children can be summarized into 4 themes. First, challenges that children experience physically. Second is the inability of children to adapt to the emotional sphere. Third, the conflicts that children experience in the social realm. Finally, academic barriers at home and school. From these results, we discovered that children of alcoholic fathers experience psychological distress on a physical, emotional, social, and academic level in their daily lives.

Keywords: *Alcoholism, Children of Alcoholic Fathers, Psychological Distress, Covid-19*

The Covid -19 pandemic, which was proclaimed on March 11, 2020, poses substantial worldwide health, social, and economic threat. It is believed that the impact on people's mental health will be significant (Bueno-Notivol et al., 2021). The Covid-19 epidemic has severe psychological and sociological implications for the general public. According to research, children, university students, and healthcare workers are more prone to acquire anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and other distress symptoms. Children's relationships and their perceptions of empathy toward others have been influenced by social distance and security measures (Saladino et al., 2020)

The coronavirus disease can be overwhelming, leading to solid emotions and distress. Most research found that uncertainty, anxiety, and fear regarding the pandemic and post-pandemic conditions influenced mental health. Sufferers may exhibit various psychological distress symptoms (Paudel et al., 2020). Because of the magnitude of its effects and the massive stress-related burden, the Covid -19 pandemic could be considered a mass trauma. It can

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cause health behavior changes, psychological disorders, and addiction concerns, including alcohol intake (Dubey et al., 2020). In the context of the Covid-19 epidemic, alcohol use exacerbates psychological imbalance (Sugarman & Greenfield., 2021).

The Covid-19 pandemic's impact may vary by age and demographic group, with adolescents particularly vulnerable to substance abuse (Dumas et al., 2020). Parents are a second group that may be at risk due to the unique demands of managing work and having children at home all day (Dodge et al., 2021). Children's perceptions of the good and bad consequences of alcohol are influenced by parental drinking and can serve as indicators of future drinking habits. Parents' use or misuse of alcohol is linked to adolescent alcohol consumption and abuse (Smit et al., 2020). Therefore, it is essential to consider how the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted the lives of children whose fathers are alcoholics.

Children with alcoholic fathers are more likely to internalize their difficulties since they do not develop effective coping strategies. This can take many forms, including becoming withdrawn, depressed, and anxious. Externalizing disorders can emerge as anger, delinquency, violence, and legal issues. As a result, they can be classified as a public health issue because these externalizations can harm other people in society (Raitasalo et al., 2019). Compared to non-children of alcoholic fathers' peers, children of alcoholic fathers have higher levels of psychological distress and alcohol problems (Thapa et al., 2017).

Higher-than-average emotional and psychological distress, eating disorder symptomology, personality problems, and increased antisocial symptoms in children of alcoholic fathers (Mansharamani et al., 2018). Growing up in an alcoholic environment with children is a stressful situation that can lead to psychological problems (Sidhu et al., 2016). According to several studies, children of alcoholic fathers are more likely to have psychological and physical distress and emotional problems than children of non-alcoholic fathers (Harter, 2000; Lease, 2002; Scharff et al., 2004 cited in Thapa et al., 2017).

Children are the ones who struggle the most as a result of their father's alcoholism. According to studies on the children of alcoholic fathers, many children are affected by their fathers' alcoholism. It is also evidenced that children of alcoholic fathers have an array of cognitive, behavioral, emotional, and social problems, and higher levels of psychological distress (Jaisoorya et al., 2018; Wong et al., 2018; Sugaparaneeetharan et al., 2016, as cited in Omkarappa & Rentala, 2019). Therefore, this study aims to learn about the subjective experiences of psychological distress among the children of alcoholic fathers through semi-structured interviews and phenomenological analysis.

This study will help researchers better grasp the psychological distress children of alcoholic fathers face worldwide. In view of today's critical situation, one of the essential foundations of this research is determining each child's perspective on their fathers' alcoholism. The outcomes of this study will contribute to our knowledge and act as a future reference for other studies looking into psychological distress in children of alcoholic fathers.

METHODS

Research design

We employed Colaizzi's phenomenological method to qualitatively analyze the psychological distress of children of alcoholic fathers. Colaizzi's phenomenological method focuses on individuals' feelings and experiences, rather than individual characteristics, in

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order to uncover shared patterns. This scientific approach assures that the participants' collected experiences are genuine and meet scientific standards.

Participants

Using a purposeful sampling method, we chose 10 children of alcoholic fathers from three schools. The inclusion criteria included (1) Children whose father is currently alcohol dependent, diagnosed by a psychiatrist (2) Children whose age ranges from 14 to 17 and (3) Children who have lived with their alcoholic fathers for more than one year. The exclusion criteria were children of alcoholic fathers suffering from chronic physical/psychiatric problems based on the personal data sheet and the report of the guidance counselor. Interviewing children who met the inclusion criteria yielded the required number of respondents.

Interview outline

The information and responses of the respondents were gathered using a semi-structured interview guide. This study also used a consent letter that was provided to the participants and parents reviewed beforehand due to ethical concerns. Content validation was used to validate the reliability of the questions from the interview guide. The interview questions were content validated by three (3) clinical psychologists. The instrument is verified, revised, and adjusted before being used to interview ten (10) participants.

Data collection

We informed the participant about the study's goal and significance ahead of time, and we scheduled the interview at their convenience. This research was completed independently by the researcher. The one-on-one interviews were conducted online, with no interruptions. The interviews were secretly recorded and taped. Each interview took between 40 and 60 minutes to complete. If the respondent displayed signs of emotional distress throughout the interview, necessary psychological help was provided to prevent further psychological harm. The study participants could withdraw their consent at any time. The researchers collected data objectively and built positive relationships with the participants. Each participant had 1-2 phone interviews scheduled as needed to assure data collection at several time points.

Data analysis

Within 24 hours of each interview, the recordings were transcribed and examined using Colaizzi's phenomenological analysis method. Two researchers independently examined the interview materials, summarizing and extracting key statements and developing the themes that arose. A research group comprised of a clinical psychologist, a psychiatrist, and a guidance counselor discussed and settled conflicting perspectives on the contents of a theme.

RESULTS

We selected 5 males and 5 females aged 14 to 17 in our study. The demographic characteristics of the participants are listed in Table 1. Using phenomenological methodologies, we investigated the psychological distress of children of alcoholic fathers.

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Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants

VARIABLE	FREQUENCY
Gender	
Male	5
Female	5
Age	
14-15	6
16-17	4
Class level	
8 th	1
9 th	3
10 th	2
11 th	2
12 th	2

The analysis of data acquired through a semi-structured interview are presented in the following parts. The recordings were carefully transcribed into texts, with direct quotations from multiple individuals utilized to expand on each subject. Four major themes were identified in this study; namely, 1. Challenges that children experience physically. 2. Inability of children to adapt to the emotional sphere. 3. The conflicts that children experience in the social realm; and 4. Academic barriers at home and school. Each theme and subthemes are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2: Major Themes and subthemes are identified from interview

THEMES	SUBTHEMES
1. Challenges that children experience physically	Sleeplessness Body pain Headache Stomach pain Physical abuse
2. Inability of children to adapt to the emotional sphere	Self-blaming Low self-esteem Lack of self-control Stress and Anxiety Anger Worries about the future Shame and guilt Loneliness Insecurity Hopelessness
3. The conflicts that children experience in the social realm	Lack of friends Lack of Cooperation Lack of freedom Lack of communication Social isolation
4. Academic barriers at home and school	Inconsistent attendance/Delay of homework Peer blaming Lower academic performance

Lack of concentration
Exam fear
Truancy

Theme one: Challenges that children experience physically

All of the participants talked about their physical problems because of their fathers alcoholism. They claimed to be suffering from various health issues during the pandemic. The participants' diverse experiences aided in the development of the subthemes.

"I always experience a headache. Sometimes I have a severe headache. I cannot study and am not able to concentrate on anything. Therefore, I cannot control my anger. I am not able to enjoy happiness due to the headache. Sometimes I feel sad and irritated. The pain is too much for me to bear. When the pain is unbearable, it is difficult even to make the tiniest of sounds. The pains I have had in my life have provided me with more than just pain; they have also provided me with negative life experiences". (Participant 2)

Similarities were observed as the members described their lived experiences. Participants shared their experiences very painfully. Even thinking about those experiences make them sad.

"My entire body aches, and I cannot do anything due to stomach pain. I have trouble sleeping at times. Because of the terrible pain in my stomach, I cannot work. My father used to come home late at night and pull my hair out. He gives me a bad kick one day. He beats me with a wooden slab that we use to cook with. He has no feelings of love for me and is unconcerned about my health. I have the impression that he views me as an object". (Participant 5)

"I am unable to sleep. So many thoughts disturb my mind. I cannot find any peace in my life. I am even tense about my future and myself. I wonder if my father would annoy me before I go to bed. I lost my happiness and my sleep".(Participant 8)

The rest of the participants described physical abuse from their alcoholic father.

"My father would regularly come home drunk and physically injure me. He once smacked me across the face. I fainted. He has no love and care for me, and he never says anything nice to me. I think he is a bad father to me".

Through the first theme, the children of alcoholic fathers explained how their lived experiences of the physical problems caused by their father's alcoholism during the pandemic.

Theme two: Inability of children to adapt to the emotional sphere

Children of alcoholic fathers experience emotional issues in their life. All participants discussed what are the emotional problems they experience. Many participants stated that their families were unable to meet their emotional needs. Isolation, quiet, and a lack of emotional connection were significant components of the participants' interactions with their parents. Most of them have stress, anxiety, hopelessness, shame, and guilt. The general population's and high-risk groups' psychological distress has increased, as evidenced by new study on Covid-19 (American Psychological Association, 2020).

"I feel stressed every day when my father comes home after drinking. Sometimes I am frightened, and my body starts to shiver, because I cannot imagine what he is going to do. I like to be alone because it is stressful being with people. I frequently lose control of my anger. With my father, I have a strong temper. I get angry when my father gets drunk and

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starts making a scene. Then I would enter the room and shut the door. I take the book and throw it away when I am furious. When I am angry, I cannot talk to anyone". (Participant 1)

One participant shared the inability to handle the family issues, which affected him emotionally. Therefore, he is emotionally weak.

"Most of the time, I am upset and sad about what is going on in my life. My father's alcoholism saddens me. I cannot handle family issues. It breaks my heart to learn that I am the son of an alcoholic. Even in simple situations, I feel fear and anxiety. As a result, I cannot concentrate. When my father gets home drunk, I get too anxious. My stomach gets upset when I am afraid or anxious". (Participant 3)

Participants feel low self-esteem. Father's alcoholism makes them insecure at home.

"I feel insecure at my home, especially with my father. I am afraid at home. Because of my feeling of insecurity, I cannot communicate with my family. I am so scared of my father. I am not a good person and can no longer be a good one. My condition is very poor. I am not able to get out of this. In every situation, I am a failure. I cannot do anything, and I am not good at anything. I feel that he will misuse me for his own needs. I feel that nobody is there to help me". (Participant 4)

"My life with my father makes me feel hopeless, and I have no happiness in my life. As a result, I do not even want to live. I feel alone and helpless and am unsure where to turn for assistance or counsel". (Participant 5)

Because of father's alcoholism, children are incapable of seeing the bright side of life. They have not been able to recover from their negative experiences. They are unable to recognize their own strengths and limitations fully. They are frequently ashamed and remorseful of their acts. The thought of not getting a good education as a result of their home environment usually haunts them.

"I cannot see my life from a positive perspective. I will never be able to recover from my negative experiences. I am entirely unconvinced. I am unable to accept both my strengths and weaknesses as a whole. I have often felt ashamed and guilty about my actions. I feel guilty and like a bad person when I think I do not love my Father. I feel terribly ashamed to see my father as an alcoholic in front of others. The thought of not getting good education because of my home environment often haunts me". (Participant 8)

"At home, I feel terrible loneliness. When I feel lonely, I used to be in my room out of sadness. I am unable to focus properly on my academics. Then I explode with rage. I sometimes lose control because I do not know what I want to achieve or what my goals are". (Participant 10)

Theme 3: The conflicts that children experience in the social realm.

The family has a significant impact on a child's socialization. Early experiences, it is commonly believed, can affect how we connect with others later in life. Children of alcoholic fathers often struggle to recognize their own needs and struggle to maintain a healthy balance in their interpersonal relationships (Mansharamani et al., 2018). All of the participants discussed the social issues they face as a result of their fathers' alcoholism during the pandemic. The participants regularly struggled to communicate and express

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particular needs to the teachers and classmates. As a result, this theme would emphasize how communication difficulties arise in all parts of the lives of children of alcoholic fathers.

“I feel deliberately left out when reuniting with friends. I feel isolated among friends. I often sit alone, away from crowds. I avoid social gatherings on purpose. When I think of social gatherings, I get nervous”. (Participant 2)

“I have no friends. I do not have a close friend to share my personal matters. Therefore, I am alone in the class. My classmates are aware that I am the son of an alcoholic. That is why they refuse to talk to me. In class, I spend most of my time alone”. (Participant 3)

The ability of children to interact with others in the community is poor. In public, they do not feel safe. They are unable to participate in society due to their father's alcoholism, which makes them embarrassed.

“I cannot communicate well with others. I cannot adjust to my home environment, especially my father’s behavior of arguing with each other. In my life, simple issues turn out to be complicated”. Participant 5)

“My father often scolds me that I am doing only wrong things. As a result, I am not interested in getting involved with others”. (Participant 7)

Most participants were unable to participate in some activities, affecting their quality of life as students. These events made them feel socially isolated and exposed their mental health. Participants also shared they do not feel free because they feel someone or something controls their life.

“My father, will not allow me to go anywhere without his permission except at school. If I ask permission, he will not give permission; instead, he uses the bad words”. (Participant 9)

“I feel that he has no love for me. He does not give me any pocket money to spend on myself. I do not like my father, as he is badly strict. I want to lead a happy life like my friends”. (Participant 10)

Theme 4: Academic barriers at home and school.

The dispute between parents is one of the main issues that often reflects in the bad academic performance of children. The child is unable to assimilate conflicts that happen in the family. During the pandemic, these conflicts have a negative impact on the academic performance of the children.

“I can never really concentrate on anything, no matter how hard I try, particularly my studies. Even when I am in class, I remember the terrible events at home. As a result, I am unable to grasp the lessons”. (Participant 2)

Poor problem-solving and communication skills impact a child's academic success and peer relationships.

“I cannot complete any schoolwork and I have become extremely lazy. When I am about to do it, I fall asleep. I am hesitant to go to school because my homework is delayed. As a result, I have very poor school attendance. There is no peaceful atmosphere at home in the

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evenings, I cannot read, study, or complete homework. No one is willing to assist me with my homework". (Participant 5)

"Blaming and teasing from friends is very painful. I cannot tolerate it when friends blame me. Sometimes they blame me in front of others. Then I get sad. I am blamed for lagging behind in studies".(Participant 6)

Because of being immersed in the home environment, the participants stated that they were unable to concentrate on school, do homework, or participate in other extracurricular activities. It also uncovers a slew of excuses for not going to school.

"I am lazy to go to school. I, too, do not complete my schoolwork. I do not have any close friends. Exams terrify me. As soon as I think about the exam, my hands start shaking. I am sure that I will fail because I have not prepared for it. I am uninterested in doing my school works". (Participant 8)

Typically, their exam results are bad. That is why they are embarrassed to appear in public. They also have to listen to a lot of conflicts at home, and they are often frightened to communicate at home.

"Usually, I get bad result. Recently I just passed most of my examinations. But because of my poor grades, I feel embarrassed to appear in front of my classmates and teachers. My father used to scold me for my bad academic performance. As my grades are poor, I am frequently lazy and afraid to communicate at home". (Participant 10)

School failure was shown to be common among children whose fathers were alcoholics. Living with an alcoholic father is closely linked to the students' poor academic achievement (Kuppens et al., 2020).

DISCUSSION

This study explores the psychological distress among the children of alcoholic fathers due to the COVID-19 pandemic. To further explain these issues, they were divided into four categories: challenges that children experience physically, inability of children to adapt to the emotional sphere, the conflicts that children experience in the social realm and academic barriers at home and school. Furthermore, an in-depth interview was conducted to confirm the study's findings. Participants' comments subdivided these four major themes into related subthemes. In this section, the preceding section's findings will be analyzed and examined further.

In terms of psychological distress, most participants stated that they have frequently suffered physical, emotional, social, and intellectual challenges. It was clear that most individuals struggled with stress and anxiety in their familial situations. Participants also reported that they are dealing with health difficulties such as sleeplessness, headaches, and physical pain. Some of the participants have been abused physically. The challenges and worries of these individuals indicate that both the parent and the child require greater effort.

Children with alcoholic fathers are nonetheless socially isolated. Participants in this study must cope with this at school, in public areas, and even in online classrooms. The majority of children with alcoholic fathers believed that attending an inclusive school was impossible. One thing that all of the participants had in common was a sense of exclusion. It was also

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clear that several participants were having difficulties adjusting to school and at home due to their father's alcoholism.

Most of the participants struggled socially and academically as a result of the unexpected changes in their environment. They have poor academic performance, difficulty concentrating, and exam anxiety. A few participants also mentioned the difficulties brought on by their peers' opinions and blaming. They are unable to complete their assignments due to their absenteeism. It also has an impact on their school attendance. As a result, it is clear that children with alcoholic fathers require support from their peers and teachers. The participants were implying that this type of issue needed attention and awareness.

The majority of the participants also expressed feelings of insecurity, hopelessness, and loneliness. Low self-esteem, a lack of self-control, fear, and future fears significantly impact the participants' mental health. Children of alcoholic fathers are at risk for cognitive and mental health problems as a result of this. During the epidemic, participants said they were having to cope with every issue in their life due to their father's alcoholism. Some of the children of alcoholic fathers have expressed shame and guilt as a result of their father's alcoholism. A few participants also showed intense resentment and anger toward their father because of his alcoholism.

Overall, each subtheme of this study provided a look into the psychological distress experienced by children of alcoholic fathers during the epidemic. It's been a huge difficulty because the rate of alcohol intake grew as the pandemic spread. As a result, in an epidemic, psychological intervention is especially critical for children of alcoholic fathers. To facilitate improve mental health and emotional release, it is best to undertake stress assessments and provide skilled, adaptable, and ongoing psychological intervention. At the same time, early support systems for children whose fathers are alcoholics are crucial (Chung et al., 2005, Lee et al., 2005 & Smith et al., 2017).

Strengths

The participants in this study, on the other hand, developed a positive relationship. Through interviews, we gathered information from the individuals. They were able to get a complete and accurate picture of their experience as a result. Children of alcoholic fathers have been reported to suffer from psychological distress on a physical, emotional, social, and academic level.

Limitations

Because of the peculiarities of qualitative research, the sample size of this study was limited. The participants were initially school-aged children. Apart from children, the experiences of mothers and mental health providers should be investigated more. Second, we were unable to gather information from multiple locations. Furthermore, this was a brief study. Long-term research experience of the research subjects would be a promising future direction to investigate.

CONCLUSION

This study used a phenomenological approach to understand the psychological distress experienced by children of alcoholic fathers during Covid-19. We discovered that children of alcoholic fathers experience psychological distress in their daily lives on a physical, emotional, social, and academic level. For children of alcoholic fathers to retain mental

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health, they must develop a self-coping style and grow psychologically. This research gave crucial information for future psychological intervention.

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