

Complicated Grief among Alcohol Users and Drug Users

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ABSTRACT

The present study was conducted to find the relationship between complicated grief, alcohol use and drug use. The sample consisted of 100 individuals residing in all parts of India. The tools used for this study were Inventory of complicated grief, Alcohol use disorder identification test and Drug abuse screening test. Correlation was employed to evaluate the relationship between complicated grief and alcohol use and complicated grief and drug use and t-test was employed to evaluate the difference between alcohol use and drug use among males and females. In the present study, Spearman Correlation, Independent sample t-test were performed. A non-experimental correlational design with a quantitative approach was used in this study. The findings indicated that there was a positive correlation between complicated grief and alcohol use and a positive correlation between complicated grief and drug use. The findings also indicated that there was no difference in alcohol use and drug use among males and females.

Keywords: *Complicated Grief, Alcohol Use, Drug Use*

Emerging evidence suggests a connection between substance abuse and grief (Zuckoff et al., 2006). Between the ages of 6 and 18, children who have lost both of their parents appear to be more likely to use drugs in the future (Heg et al., 2017; Kaplow et al., 2010). Even birth-related deaths may make substance abuse more likely in later life. In comparison to children of non-bereaved mothers during pregnancy, those whose mothers experienced the death of a spouse during pregnancy have shown a nearly fourfold increase in later substance consumption (Liang et al., 2013). According to Pfefferbaum and Doughty (2001), the loss of a loved one is linked to an increased risk of alcohol abuse, particularly among men. This is supported by studies conducted by Kopp et al. (2012) and Schut et al. (2007). Furthermore, Gayman, Cislo, and Hansard (2016) found that young adults who have experienced multiple deaths in a short period of time have nearly double the likelihood of developing a substance use disorder (SUD).

Substance abuse has been recognized as a risk factor for Complicated Grief (CG) in explanation frameworks such as the integrative risk factor framework and the cognitive behavioural model (Boelen, 2006). However, there is limited research on the dynamics and directionality of the relationship between CG and substance abuse. This could be attributed to the fact that many studies examining the efficacy of CG treatments use a substance use

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disorder (SUD) diagnosis as an exclusion criterion, leading to a lack of research attention (Zuckoff et al., 2006).

The current approaches to SUD treatment may be significantly affected by understanding the connection between CG and substance abuse. Notably, comorbid diagnoses of SUDs and mental health disorders have been linked to more adverse effects than either condition alone (Compton III, Cottler, (2012); Jacobs, Ben-Abdallah, & Spitznagel, 2003; Drake, Wallach, and McGovern, 2005).

In an overview of 1,053 Swedish widows, Grimby and Johansson identified a connection between alcohol consumption as a coping mechanism for grief. Despite its risks, alcohol consumption is generally recognized as maladaptive for coping and stress reduction (Veenstra et al., 2006; Veenstra et al., 2007). Early risk assessments may help improve behaviors that can be modified or avoided (Grimby & Johansson, 2009). However, it is unclear which drinking habits bereaved individuals prefer and how they relate to mental health conditions such as Complicated Grief (CG). If changes in drinking habits, whether they are increasing or decreasing, are connected to Complicated Grief, one of the simplest and most useful clinical assessments for bereaved mental conditions could be taken into consideration.

Like alcohol, marijuana has an opiate and calming influence that people a portion of the time use to ease physical or up close and personal torture. use reduces anxiety and depression in the short term, but it worsens symptoms over time. When marijuana and grief combine, the emotional work required to emerge from the acute grief phase can take longer and be slowed down. (Zuckoff et al., 2006).

Stimulant drugs such as cocaine, methamphetamines, and prescription amphetamines like Adderall are often associated with increased energy, sociability, and productivity. However, it is important to recognize that many individuals turn to these drugs to alleviate emotional pain. Unfortunately, using stimulants to cope with depression or other emotional issues can increase the risk of addiction, complicating the underlying mental health condition and leading to long-term suffering. Withdrawal from stimulants is also known to cause depression, which can be a persistent and worsening symptom (Zuckoff et al., 2006).

Need of the study

In the modern world availability of drugs and alcohol among the population of young adults is very easy and at hand. The study explores the choices or preferences of the population as a coping mechanism to go through complicated grief and the difference of the use of the substance among males and females. There are a few researches on the population of young adults experiencing complicated grief. The research on substance use and complicated grief is required to improve our comprehension of the connection between the two conditions, identify risk factors, develop effective interventions, provide guidance for clinical practice, and to reduce the stigma.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Parisi et al. (2019) conducted a systematic review of 12 peer-reviewed journal articles to explore the relationship between substance abuse and CG. The findings of their review revealed that people with CG or substance abuse are more likely to develop the other condition later on. This suggests a bidirectional relationship, where substance abuse can contribute to the development of CG, and vice versa. The findings of this review emphasize

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the need for a comprehensive and integrated approach in addressing both substance abuse and CG in clinical practice.

Laura (2015) conducted a study on drug-dependent patients and found that a significant proportion (83.2%) reported an increase in drug use following the death of a significant other. Interestingly, only 12.3% of those who increased their drug use reported a subsequent relapse, and more than half (54%) did not perceive any connection between their drug use and the loss. Parents were found to be the most frequently lost individuals, and over a third (34.2%) of the participants experienced signs of difficult grief. This study highlights the potential impact of bereavement on drug use behaviours, with a significant proportion of individuals reporting increased substance use as a coping mechanism following the death of a significant other.

The findings from these studies collectively suggest that there is a significant association between substance abuse and CG. Substance abuse may contribute to the development or exacerbation of CG, and individuals with SUD may be at an increased risk of experiencing CG symptoms. Bereavement, particularly the loss of a significant other such as a parent, may also trigger increased substance use behaviours as a coping mechanism. However, it is noteworthy that a considerable proportion of individuals may not perceive a connection between their drug use and the loss, underscoring the complex interplay between substance abuse and CG.

The co-occurrence of substance abuse and CG presents unique challenges in clinical practice, as addressing both conditions may be necessary for effective treatment outcomes. A comprehensive and integrated approach that takes into consideration the bidirectional relationship between substance abuse and CG may be warranted. Further research is needed to better understand the underlying mechanisms that contribute to the association between substance abuse and CG, and to develop evidence-based interventions that effectively address both conditions.

METHOD

Objectives

The objectives are as follows:

- To identify the relationship between complicated grief and alcohol use
- To identify the relationship between complicated grief and drug use.
- To understand the relationship between complicated grief among alcohol users and drug users based on gender differences.

Hypotheses

- Ho1: There is no significant relationship between complicated grief and Alcohol use.
- Ho2: There is no significant relationship between complicated grief and Drug use.
- Ho3: There is no significant difference of alcohol use among males and females.
- Ho4: There is no significant difference of drug use among males and females.

Participants

The sample of the present study consisted of 100 young adults residing in all parts of India, who fall in the age group of 18-25 years at the time of data collection. The data was collected using convenience sampling method.

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Materials

Three measures were used in the study-

1. **Inventory of Complicated Grief (ICG) 19-** first person statements was devised by Prigerson, et al. (1995) to assess indicators of pathological grief, such as anger, disbelief, and hallucinations. The instrument consists of 19 first-person statements concerning the immediate bereavement-related thoughts and behaviours of the client. There are 5 response options, ranging from “Never” to “Always.” Test- retest reliability is 0.80.
2. **Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT)**-Self report version is a 10-item screening tool developed by the World Health Organization (WHO) to assess alcohol consumption, drinking behaviours, and alcohol-related problems. A score of 8 or more is considered to indicate hazardous or harmful alcohol use. The AUDIT has been validated across genders and in a wide range of racial/ethnic groups and is well-suited for use in primary care settings. Reliability- 0.93 and Validity-0.96.
3. **Drug Abuse Screening Test (DAST-10)** a 10-item brief screening tool that can be administered by a clinician or self-administered. Each question requires a yes or no response, and the tool can be completed in less than 8 minutes. This tool assesses drug use, not including alcohol or tobacco use, in the past 12 months. Reliability- 0.92 and Validity- 0.76.

Data Collection

Data was collected through the Google form with the informed consent of the participants. Confidentiality- was assured. 100 young adults participated in the study and all met the inclusion criteria.

Ethical Consideration

The anonymity of the respondent was maintained by not taking their name during the data collection. Participants received an explanation of the study's purpose and potential dangers and risks associated with it. The participants were also provided with the mail id, in case of any concerns. Additionally, an informed consent was taken before the collection of data from the participant.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 Socio-demographic data of the participants

Demographic Data	N	%
Age		
18-21	26	26
22-25	74	74
Gender		
Male	30	30
Female	70	70
Period of grief		
1 year	68	68
2 years	19	19
3 years	6	6
More than 3 years	9	9

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the participants in terms of their age, gender, and duration of grief. The table displays the total number of participants (N) and the percentage (%) of participants in each category. The results indicate that the highest

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numbers of participants were in the age group of 22-25 years, and the majority of them were females.

The percentage of participants belonging to 18-21 years is 26% and to 22-25 years is 74%. The proportion of males among the participants is 30%, while the proportion of females is 70%. This indicates that the majority of participants in the study were females, with males comprising a smaller proportion. Participants who experienced complicated grief for one year were 68%, for two years were 19%, for three years were 6% and for more than three years were 9%. Most of the participants experienced complicated grief for a period of one year.

Table 2 Descriptive statistics for Complicated Grief, Alcohol use and Drug use

Scales	M	SD
Inventory of Complicated Grief	36.505	17.5531
Alcohol use disorders identification test	25.76	5.4256
Drug screening questionnaire	6.89	2.752

Table 2 presents the average (mean) and variability (standard deviation) scores for complicated grief, alcohol use, and drug use. The mean score for complicated grief is 36.505 with a standard deviation of 17.5531. For alcohol use, the mean is 25.760 with a standard deviation of 5.4256, and for drug use, the mean is 6.890 with a standard deviation of 2.7520.

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between complicated grief and Alcohol use.

Table 3 shows the results for Spearman Correlation test on Complicated Grief and Alcohol use

Variable	n	r	p
Alcohol user	100	0.208**	0.039

**p < 0.05 level

Table 3 shows the relationship between complicated grief and alcohol users. Correlation coefficient and the corresponding p-value of complicated grief with respect to alcohol use is given. Analysis of the table shows that for alcohol use, correlation coefficient ($r = 0.208^*$) and the corresponding p value (< 0.05) with relation to complicated grief which is significant at 0.039 level hence, there is a positive correlation. It is shown that alcohol use has positive relationship with complicated grief.

There is a statistically significant positive correlation between the two variables therefore; there is a significant relationship between complicated grief and alcohol use among young adults.

Thus, the null hypothesis “There is no significant relationship between complicated grief and alcohol use” is rejected.

The result of this study shows that complicated grief and alcohol use are correlated among young adults. The result is supported by previous studies. According to one study, 14% of respondents reported increased alcohol consumption while 17% reported decreased alcohol consumption after bereavement. Additionally, 46-61% of respondents experienced insomnia from 3.5 months to 2.5 years after the loss. The study also suggested that monitoring sleep

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conditions and alcohol consumption may help prevent severe psychological issues in bereaved individuals. Notably, both increased and decreased alcohol consumption were linked to complicated grief (CG) and major depressive disorder (MDD) as well as insomnia. This new finding suggests that clinicians should pay attention to both increased and decreased alcohol consumption when assessing possible CG or MDD, rather than focusing solely on increased consumption which is widely regarded as unhealthy behavior (Aoyama et al., 2020).

Ho2: There is no significant relationship between complicated grief and Drug use.

Table 4 shows the correlation between Complicated Grief and Drug user

Variable	n	r	p
Drug user	100	0.205*	0.036

* $p < 0.05$ level

Table 4 shows the relationship between complicated grief and drug use. Correlation coefficient and the corresponding p-value of complicated grief with respect to drug use is given. Analysis of the table shows that for use, correlation coefficient ($r = 0.205^*$) and the corresponding p value (< 0.05) with relation to complicated grief which is significant at 0.036 level hence, there is a positive correlation. It is shown that drug use has a positive relationship with complicated grief.

There is a statistically significant positive correlation between the two variables therefore; there is a significant relationship between complicated grief and drug use among young adults.

Thus, the null hypothesis “There is no significant relationship between complicated grief and alcohol use” is rejected. The result is supported by previous studies. In one study the most intriguing finding was that only 5% of the general population (control group) had CG symptoms, whereas 34.2 percent of the bereaved SUD sample had them. The fact that 83.2% of all study participants reported an increase in drug use following a significant other's death is another important finding. (Boix, L.M. (2017). Many previous studies also suggests that both complicated grief and substance consumption are related to coping with potentially threatening situations.

Ho3: There is no significant difference of alcohol use among males and females.

Table 5 shows the difference of alcohol use among males and females

Variable	Category	N	Mean	SD	t	p
Alcohol Use	Males	30	26.133	5.3994	1.064	0.291
	Females	35	24.714	5.3113		

$p < 0.05$ level (2-tailed)

In table 5 shows the difference in alcohol use among males and females. The mean value for alcohol use is 26.133 for males and 24.714 for females, with corresponding standard deviation of 5.3994 for males and 5.3113 for females. To determine whether the observed difference in means is statistically significant for the population, a t test was conducted. The calculated t value for alcohol use is 1.064 with corresponding ‘p’-value of 0.291. Since this

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value is not statistically significant at the 0.05 level, the null hypothesis was accepted, indicating that there is no significant difference in alcohol use among males and females.

Research has found that individuals who struggle with complicated grief may also be at higher risk for developing alcohol use disorders. While gender differences in complicated grief and alcohol use disorders have been identified separately, there is limited research on the intersection of gender, complicated grief, and alcohol use disorders. However, women are more likely to experience complicated grief than men. But it is unclear whether gender differences exist in the co-occurrence of complicated grief and alcohol use disorders.

Women may be more likely to use alcohol as a way of coping with grief and loss, while men may be more likely to engage in other risk-taking behaviours or avoid seeking help for emotional problems.

Women may also face more barriers to accessing treatment for complicated grief and alcohol use disorders, such as social stigma and lack of gender-sensitive treatment options.

The intersection of gender, complicated grief, and alcohol use disorders is complex, and there is a need for more research in this area. Treatment for individuals struggling with complicated grief and alcohol use disorders should be individualized and sensitive to gender and cultural factors.

Ho4: There is no significant difference of drug use among males and females.

Table 6 shows the difference of drug use among males and females.

Variable	Category	N	Mean	SD	t	p
Drug Use	Males	30	6.033	3.0904	2.047	0.45
	Females	35	7.457	2.4052		

p<0.05 level (2-tailed)

In table 6 shows the difference in drug use among males and females. The mean value for drug use is 6.033 for males and 7.457 for females, with corresponding standard deviation of 3.0904 for males and 2.4052 for females. To determine whether the observed difference in means is statistically significant for the population, a t test was conducted. The calculated t value for drug use is 2.047 with corresponding 'p'-value of 0.45. Since this value is not statistically significant at the 0.05 level, we accept the null hypothesis, indicating that there is no significant difference in drug use among males and females.

Studies have shown that women are more likely than men to experience complicated grief and to turn to drugs as a way of coping with their grief. Women may also be more likely to seek out professional help for their grief and drug use than men. Men, on the other hand, are more likely to engage in high-risk behaviours, such as substance abuse and alcoholism, as a way of coping with their grief. They may also be less likely to seek professional help for their grief and drug use. Overall, both men and women can be affected by complicated grief and may turn to drugs as a way of coping.

CONCLUSION

The study aimed to investigate the association between complicated grief, alcohol use, and drug use. Additionally, the study aimed to determine if there are any notable gender differences in alcohol use and drug use among young adults. The findings of the study revealed a significant positive relationship between complicated grief, alcohol use, and drug

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use, as indicated by statistically significant correlation coefficients and p-values. However, no significant difference in alcohol use and drug use was found based on gender among young adults. Thus, the initial hypothesis that there is no significant difference in alcohol use and drug use between males and females was rejected based on the non-significant t-values and p-values obtained from t-tests. In conclusion, the study results suggest that complicated grief is associated with increased alcohol and drug use among young adults, regardless of gender. The findings do not support the notion of significant gender differences in alcohol use and drug use among young adults, as demonstrated by the statistical analysis.

These findings underscore the importance of further research on the relationship between experiencing loss and substance dependence, and the potential benefits of incorporating complicated grief psychotherapy and psychopharmacological treatment as needed in the management of drug or alcohol dependence, particularly when complicated grief symptoms are present. Loss has been identified as a potential barrier to abstinence, and several researchers have highlighted the importance of adaptive coping strategies and recovery tools, including grief psychotherapy, in addiction treatment.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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