

Relationship between Marital Conflict, Partner Abuse, and Alcohol Abuse

Unmana Dutta^{1*}, Dr. Anuradha Sharma²

ABSTRACT

Marital Conflict, Partner Abuse, and Alcohol Abuse are found to be most common in a marriage, where there is marital dissatisfaction. This study aims to find out the correlation between Marital Conflict, Partner Abuse, and Alcohol Abuse, and also to see if there are any gender differences between these three components. 220 married participants were chosen for this study from Delhi NCR. Romantic Partner Conflict Scale, Waltz-Rushe-Gottman Emotional Abuse Questionnaire (EAQ) and Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT) were used to collect data from the participants, for Marital Conflict, Partner Abuse and Alcohol Abuse, respectively. The correlation results of this study found that there is a significant correlation between some components of Marital Conflict and Partner Abuse, between some components of Partner Abuse and Alcohol Abuse and between Marital Conflict and Alcohol Abuse. However, there were no significant gender differences between the genders, in all the three variables.

Keywords: *Marital Conflict, Partner Abuse, Alcohol Abuse*

Marriage as an institution has been considered most important to start a family and carry the legacy. Terms like marital satisfaction, courtship, divorce, effects of conflict on the children, etc. have been a constant area of research for decades now for many researchers who understand its dynamics and the role the marital partners play for each other.

In any relationship that the couple enters, one of the most common phenomena found is conflict. Conflict may consist of anger, aggression and even violence in the worst case. In cases of exceptions, it may also include cooperation and common agreement between the partners who are in conflict, before it soars into something serious. According to Peterson (1983), Conflict is an interpersonal process that occurs when the actions of one person interfere with the actions of the other person. Incompatible goals and expectations interfere with the ways of each other and thus, there are the most chances of developing a conflict. So, for a couple who entered into marriage and plans for a child, may develop into a conflict, if the wife is planning for a job promotion, which may interfere for a husband's wishes to have a child. Thus, incompatible goals escalate into a marital conflict between the two partners.

¹ Project Assistant, National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development, New Delhi, India

² Associate Professor, Amity University, Noida, India

[*Responding Author](#)

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Fincham & Beach (1999) reported that the source of conflict in all marital relationship differs from couple to couple. The abuse and conflicts that the couples undergo may range from verbal to physical abuse. Unequal division of labor, spousal extra-marital affair, alcohol abuse, and relationship violence may lead to marital conflict in couples.

The power of decision making in a couple is one of the major factors why couples get into a conflict in their marriage. This is even worse than in couples where the couples enter into conflict due to problems of intimacy (Storaasli & Markman, 1990).

Partner Abuse may be defined as the harm that an individual may be suffering or may be vulnerable to suffering, in a close relationship. Partner Abuse could be of different types such as physical, psychological, verbal, sexual, financial or social abuse. This could result in significant harm such as injury and physical health, mental health problems, sexual and reproductive problems and can also cause effects on children.

Sugarman & Hotaling (1989) found that there is a greater relevance to emotional abuse among dating couples. Also, males and females both have experienced a greater amount of physical abuse in their dating relationship. Molidor (1993) found that emotional abuse was highest when the participants have experienced physical abuse. When men and women both undergo emotional abuse, Migeout & Lister (1996) found that these participants report the highest amount of scores on the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI). The women scoreless on internal locus of control.

According to the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, Alcohol Abuse is characterized by the following features: Failure to fulfill major responsibilities at home, work or school, drinking in hazardous situations, such as driving under the influence of alcohol, drinking that leads to recurring legal problems and continued drinking despite ongoing relationship problems that are caused or worsened by drinking.

Alcohol abuse could be caused by the social strata, genetic factors, family conflict, and sensation seeking and income levels of an individual. In the study done by Chakravarty and Ranganathan in the year 1985, it was found that the wives of alcoholics husband adopt avoidance and fearful withdrawn when dealing with their husbands. These factors depend on a lot of factors such as the age, neurotic and extraversion traits of the wives, during the periods when the husband abused alcohol. Leadly et al (1999) showed that different levels of alcohol consumption between the couple would lead to a problem in marriages and would likely to report an increase amount of physical violence. Kahler et al (2003) reported that women with alcoholic male partners would report lower marital satisfaction, with the presence of domestic violence, lower social support and constant struggle to keep up with the drinking patterns of the partner. This also reported that there was a high correlation between psychological and relationship distress between the non-alcoholic wives and alcoholic husbands.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The sample chosen for this study is married couples from Delhi, in the age category of 22-60 years. The couples have been married for a minimum of 1 year.

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Sl. No.	Gender	N(220)
1	Males	110
2	Females	110

Instruments

Three measures were used in this study,

- 1. Romantic Partner Conflict Scale:** Romantic Partner Conflict Scale was given by Zacchilli (2007; 2009), which includes 39 items with six subscales: Compromise, Avoidance, Interactional Reactivity, Separation, Domination, and Submission. The scale measures everyday conflict experienced by individuals in a romantic relationship.
- 2. Waltz-Rushe-Gottman Emotional Abuse Questionnaire (EAQ):** This questionnaire assesses the level of emotional abuse that the partners undergo when they are in a marital or romantic relationship. In this questionnaire, there are 4 sub-scales: Isolation, Sexual, Degradation and Property Damage.
- 3. Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT):** Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT) describes how a person drinks and is used to identify persons with a hazardous amount of drinking. It was being developed by the World Health Organization (WHO) in the year 2001 and it is simply used as a screening tool for excessive drinking and for a brief assessment. The authors of this scale are Babor, Higgins-Biddle, Saunders, and Monteiro.

Procedure

Once the sample and questionnaires were decided by the researcher, the participants were given the questionnaires to fill up, after a brief rapport formation with the clients. Once the questionnaires were filled, they were thanked for their participation and were given feedback, if they asked for any details.

RESULTS

Table No. 1 Descriptive Mean and SD for different components of the Scales, for married males and females (n=220).

Sl. No.	Scales and Sub-scales	Mean	SD
1	Romantic Conflict Partner Scale	93.02	22.224
2	Compromise	42.51	8.744
3	Avoidance	8.54	2.792
4	Interactional Reactivity	7.88	6.440
5	Separation	12.44	4.929
6	Domination	10.95	6.677
7	Submission	11.12	5.099
8	Isolation	32.94	11.238
9	Sexual	8.59	3.029
10	Degradation	33.59	10.338
11	Property Damage	8.00	2.467
12	AUDIT	.75	2.143

As we can see here in Table 1, the total mean and SD of Romantic Partner Conflict Scale is 93.02 and 22.224 respectively. Likewise, the mean and SD of Compromise is 42.51 and 8.744 respectively. For separation, the mean is 12.44 and SD is 4.929. In the Partner Abuse scale, the mean is 32.94 and SD is 11.238 for Isolation and for Degradation, the mean and SD

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is 33.59 and 10.338 respectively. For AUDIT, the mean is found to be .75 and SD to be 2.143.

Table No. 2 Correlation between different components of Marital Conflict and Partner Abuse (n=220)

Variables	Marital Conflict						Partner Abuse			Level of Significance	
	Compromise	Avoidance	Interactional Reactivity	Separation	Domination	Submission	Isolation	Sexual	Degradation Property Damage		
Compromise	1										
Avoidance	.349	1									
Interactional Reactivity	.031	.070	1								
Separation	.181	.122	.308	1							
Domination	.031	-.009	.616	.426	1						
Submission	.185	.245	.437	.312	.514	1					
Isolation	-.250**	-.168*	.152*	.022	.163*	.172*	1			0.01**, 0.05*	
Sexual	-.254**	-.077	.224**	-.004	.062	.232**	.637**	1		0.01**	
Degradation	-.319**	-.204**	.200**	-.007	.190**	.196**	.684	.679	1	0.01**	
Property Damage	-.252**	-.232**	.207**	.005	.232**	.105	.675	.511	.729	1	0.01**

*significant at 0.05 level,

**significant at 0.01 level

On this Table, there is a significant relationship between Marital Conflict and Partner Abuse. The correlation between Compromise and Isolation is -.250, significant at 0.01 level; between Avoidance and Isolation is -.168, between Interactional Reactivity and Isolation .152, Domination and Isolation is .163, Submission and Isolation are .172: all significant at 0.05. Moreover, on Sexual abuse and Compromise is -.254, Interactional Reactivity and Sexual Abuse is .224, Sexual and Submission is .232 and between Isolation and Sexual Abuse is .637, all significant at 0.01 levels. Degradation correlated significantly correlated with Compromise, Avoidance, Interactional Reactivity, Domination and Submission, all significant at 0.01 levels. For Property Damage, there was a significant correlation with Compromise, Avoidance, Interactional Reactivity, and Domination, at 0.01 levels.

Table No. 3 Correlation between Partner Abuse and AUDIT (n=220)

Variables	Partner Abuse			Property Damage	AUDIT	Levels of Significance
	Isolation	Sexual	Degradation			
Isolation	1					
Sexual	.637**	1				0.01**
Degradation	.684**	.679	1			0.01**
Property Damage	.675**	.511	.729	1		0.01**
AUDIT	.053	.231**	.238**	.101	1	0.01**

*significant at 0.05 level,

**significant at 0.01 level

Here, there is a significant correlation between Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT) and Sexual and Degradation of Emotional Abuse. With Sexual abuse, the

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correlation is .231 and for Degradation abuse, the correlation is .238, both are significant at 0.01 levels.

Table No. 4 Correlation between Marital Conflict and AUDIT (n=220)

Variables	Marital Conflict					AUDIT	Level of Significance
	Compromise	Avoidance	Interactional Reactivity	Separation	Domination		
Compromise	1						
Avoidance	.349**	1					0.01**
Interactional Reactivity	.031	.070	1				
Separation	.181**	.122	.308**	1			0.01**
Domination	.031	-.009	.616**	.426**	1		0.01**
AUDIT	-.064	.086	.100	-.004	.027	1	

*significant at 0.05 level,

**significant at 0.01 level

On this Table, the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT) has no correlation with the different dimensions of Marital Conflict.

Table No. 5 Sex differences in Marital Conflict, Partner Abuse & AUDIT (n=220)

Sl. No.	Variables	Male		Female		t-value	P-value
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
1	Marital Conflict	92.67	21.367	93.37	23.144	-.233	.816
2	Compromise	42.58	7.449	42.45	9.906	.115	.908
3	Avoidance	8.80	2.742	8.27	2.828	1.404	.162
4	Interactional Reactivity	7.53	6.103	8.23	6.770	-.806	.421
5	Separation	12.75	4.951	12.12	4.908	.957	.339
6	Domination	10.55	6.587	11.35	6.772	-.898	.370
7	Submission	11.31	5.420	10.93	4.775	.554	.580
8	Isolation	33.32	10.498	32.55	11.968	.503	.615
9	Sexual	8.78	2.913	8.39	3.142	.957	.340
10	Degradation	33.87	8.864	33.31	11.662	.404	.687
11	Property Damage	7.78	2.083	8.21	2.793	-1.286	.200
12	AUDIT	1.06	2.720	.43	1.274	2.222	.027

This Table shows the mean and SD of male and female participants, with the t-values and p-value of the various dimensions, with no significant difference in t-values for the different genders.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this research was to study the correlation between marital conflict, partner abuse, and alcohol abuse. This study has used the Romantic Partner Conflict Scale (RPCS) by Zacchilli, Hendrick & Hendrick (2012), Waltz-Rushe-Gottman Emotional Abuse Questionnaire (EAQ) and Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT) by Babor et al (2001).

As shown in Table 2, the correlation between Compromise from Romantic Partner Conflict Scale (RPCS) and Isolation from Waltz-Rushe-Gottman Emotional Abuse Questionnaire (EAQ) is -.250, which is significant at 0.01 levels. One more sub-scale of Romantic Partner Conflict Scale (RPCS) is Avoidance which has a significant negative correlation with Isolation of the Waltz-Rushe-Gottman Emotional Abuse Questionnaire (EAQ) at -.168, significant at 0.05 levels. There is also a significant correlation on Domination and Isolation

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at .163, where the level of significance is at 0.05. So, for a partner who does not trust the other partner, in fact, dominates him/her. Submission and Isolation also has a positive correlation at .172, significant at 0.05 levels. On the Emotional Abuse Questionnaire (EAQ), the second sub-scale was Sexual sub-scale, which had items such as their partner pressures each other to have sex after an argument, his/her partner intentionally hurts him/her during sex. With relation to the Romantic Partner Conflict Scale, there was a significant correlation with Compromise, Interactional Reactivity, and Submission. Between Sexual sub-scale and Compromise, there is a negative correlation of .254, significant at 0.01 levels. For Interactional Reactivity and Sexual Abuse, there is a high correlation of .224, with a level of significance at 0.01. Moreover, for Sexual Abuse and Submission, there is a positive correlation of .232, significant at 0.01 levels. In the Degradation sub-scale of Emotional Abuse Questionnaire (EAQ), it was noticed that there is a positive correlation between Interactional Reactivity (.200), Domination (.190) and Submission (.196) of the Romantic Partner Conflict Scale, all significant at 0.01 levels. In a study done by Follingstad et al (2005), similar findings were found that emotional abuse includes verbal assault, dominance, control of the other partner, isolation, ridicule to the partner, or use of intimate details of the partner, for degradation. For the Property Damage sub-scale of Emotional Abuse Questionnaire (EAQ), there was a strong correlation found between Interactional Reactivity (.207) and Domination (.232), significant at 0.01 levels.

In Table 3, as we can see, there is a significant correlation between Sexual Abuse and Alcohol Abuse (.231) significant at 0.01 levels. Moreover, there is also a significant relationship between Degradation form of Emotional Abuse and Alcohol Abuse (.238), which is significant at 0.01 level.

In the results section, in Table 4, we can see that there is no correlation between alcohol abuse and marital conflict. Similar findings have been reported by Kelly and colleagues (2002) where they formed three groups according to marital distress and wives' drinking problems. The three groups were: a. neither marital distress nor wife drinking alcohol, b. marital distress along with no wife drinking problems, and c. marital distress and wife drinking. A problem-solving task was done while they were videotaped on how they had completed the task. Out of all the three groups, the women in the marital distress situations (both alcohol and non-alcoholic groups) reacted with high criticism, withdrawal, and poor listening than a woman in the non-distressed group. Thus, alcohol abuse may not be always a compulsory condition for marital conflict to be present.

On Table 5, we can see that there are no significant gender differences found between any of the scales and sub-scales of the three variables used in this study. This implies that regardless of many studies stating that women in a marriage are more likely to suffer from marital conflict, partner abuse, and alcohol abuse; men have been suffering equally in marital discords. In Coker and colleagues study (2000), 13.2% of 556 men in their sample had reported that they had suffered from Intimate Partner Violence and these results do not differ much in a rural, urban and suburban area.

Implications

- Studying the Alcohol pattern and their types of Conflict resolution in marriage can strengthen ways in which marriage counseling could be done.
- Studying the patterns of Partner Abuse in marriage is significant in knowing its relationship to Marital Conflict and Alcohol Abuse.

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- This research could be an eye-opener to many researchers who are doing research on what leads to partner abuse and how is it related to alcohol abuse.

Limitations

Firstly, the data collected was comparatively very small and so, the findings could not be generalized to the entire population.

Secondly, the tools used in this study are mostly screening tools, so diagnosing someone with these scales would not be possible.

Thirdly, the data collected had questionnaires about their marital relationship, violence, and abuse in marriage and also about alcohol consumption. So after filling up two questionnaires about their relationship, it was noted that most people were not very enthusiastic about the alcohol consumption questionnaire.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors carefully declare this paper to bear not a conflict of interests

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