



**STRESS AND PROBLEM OF CHILDREN OF ALCOHOLICS- THE INFLUENCE OF
COPING STRATEGIES : A COMMUNITY BASED RESEARCH**

GENESTA MARY GYSEL^{*1} AND PARAMANANTHAM²

¹*Department of Nursing, Sabari College of Nursing, Puducherry*

²*Department of Pediatrics, SRM University, Chennai*

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to investigate the stress among children of alcoholics (COAs), their level of problems and their adopted coping strategies. A sample of 400 COAs (Male = 172: Female = 228) was identified through purposive sampling technique by AUDIT questionnaire. The results of the study showed that stress of COAs had a significant positive correlation with their problems. It was also found that coping was negatively correlated with problems and stress of COAs. It was revealed that demographic variables like mother's education and mother's income of alcohol addicted parent was negatively associated with problem levels, and father's occupation was significantly associated with stress of COAs. The study therefore concluded that the parent's alcohol addiction increases stress and problem of COAs and decreases their effective coping to them. It is recommended that guidance and counseling should be provided to COAs to assist in order to enhance effective coping to stress and problems.

KEYWORDS: *Stress, Problem, Coping strategies, Children of alcohol dependent parents.*



GENESTA MARY GYSEL

Department of Nursing, Sabari College of Nursing, Puducherry

INTRODUCTION

Alcoholism is a primary, chronic disease with genetic, psychosocial and environmental factors influencing its development and manifestation. Alcohol is responsible for 3.2 percent of death (1.8 million) and four percent of the disability – adjoined life years (DALYS, 58.3 million) lost¹. Alcohol consumption has been identified as a risk factor for many health, social and economic problems of communities, and it is the fifth leading risk factor, next only to underweight, unsafe sex, blood pressure and tobacco usage². Drinking behavior may interrupt normal family tasks, cause conflict and the demand adjustive and adaptive responses from family members who do not know how to appropriately respond. In brief, alcoholism creates a series of escalating crises in family structure and function, which may bring the family to a system crisis. As a result, the members may develop dysfunctional coping behaviors³. Marital conflict and a lack of coping mechanisms were more frequent in these families and children of alcoholic (COAs) fathers represent a group at risk for the early onsets of psychiatric problems as observed by Furtado et al⁴. There is strong evidence to suggest that family dysfunction during childhood can negatively influence later life experiences and adjustment⁵. The children's physical and emotional demands are neglected in alcohol dependent family. They do not share or talk about their suppressed feelings having no opportunity and develop mistrust because of the unpredictable behavior of their parents. They take roles and responsibilities often inappropriate to their age, witness violence in different forms at home, feel guilty and responsible for their parent's behavior. Faulty role modeling of both parents furthers the damage to children^{6,7}. The impact of alcohol on the family is extensive and contributes to the overall burden of alcohol-related harm⁸. A Scottish study, based on children's accounts of living with harmful parental drinking, reported several negative impacts, including several emotional distress, physical abuse and violence and a general lack of care, support and protection⁹. Parental alcoholism has severe effects on children; many of these children have physical, physiological and psychological symptoms such as loneliness, guilt, feelings of helplessness, fears of abandonment, and chronic depression. COAs often experience high levels of tension and stress, poor academic performance, behavioral problems, neuroticism and greater psychiatric distress¹⁰. One of the major crises for these children arises once they are in college. Their interpersonal and intrapersonal skills are in function with pat interactions with their parental figure which led to their basic mistrust. Due to the dissonance in one of their aspects of self -authority is affected¹¹. It further makes the student feel a great level of stress. They will only be successful in resolving their issues with development if build enough coping skills for life¹². There has been an increasing focus on children of alcoholics seeking to understand the adverse impact of parental alcoholism on their growth and psychosocial functioning as well as their coping to stress and problems. Indian literature from this

perspective is scanty and there is a need for more comprehensive investigation to explore the consequences of parental alcoholism particularly on adolescent children. This study is aimed to assess the following objectives among the children of alcohol dependent parents.

1. To determine the association between stress and selected demographic variables of children and their parents.
2. To find out the association between problems and selected demographic variables of children and their parents.
3. To correlate between stress, problems and coping strategies of children of alcohol dependent parents.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants

A sample of 400 adolescent COAs was identified through non probability, purposive sampling technique using Alcohol Use Identification test (AUDIT). The inclusive criteria for children were: parents diagnosed with alcohol dependence; having no psychiatric problem; age between 12 and 18 years and should live with their parents as the coping scales adopted can only be applicable to 12 - 18 age group according to the author of the scale. The exclusion criteria were: parents with multiple drug addiction, and children addicted to alcohol and other drugs.

Measures

Stress was measured by Perceived stress scale developed by Cohen(1965). Coping Strategies were measured by Adolescent coping scale II, developed by Erica Frydenberg (2011) and problems were assessed using structured checklist having academic, family and social aspects.

Tool development

Problem checklist was developed by administering 80 items that were theoretically identified regarding various aspects of COAs referred from literatures, community health workers and from COAs themselves. All the items were formulated as statements to measure different aspects of problems experienced by the COAs with a three point Likert scale ranging from 0 (Absent) to 2 (Severe). A pilot study was conducted by 100 COAs and the data were analyzed with exploratory factorial analysis. Principal Component factor analyses confirmed 24 items with three dimensions such as academic, family and social. Content validity was availed from experts and the Cronbach's alpha for the whole scale is found to be 0.87.

Statistical Analysis

Data was analyzed using descriptive, univariate and bivariate statistical methods by SPSS. Demographic variable in categorical / dichotomous were expressed in frequencies and their percentages.

RESULTS

Our analysis assessed the stress and problems experienced by children of alcoholics and the various coping strategies adopted by them. The results revealed that the children experienced high level of stress and

moderate level of academic, family and social problems which are influenced by father's occupation and by mother's education and income. Children's gender, educational status and birth order also influenced their stress and problems.

Table 1
Association of stress of children of alcohol dependent parents with their demographic variables..

VARIABLE	N	%	STRESS (χ^2)	PROBLEM (χ^2)
Age				
12 years	53		13.25	
13 years	45		11.25	29.52(NS) 6.08 (NS)
14 years	100		25	
15 years	33		8.25	
16 years	45	11.25		
17 years	44		11	
18 years	80		20	
Gender				
Female		227	56.75	11.14* 0.31(NS)
Male		173	43.25	
Educational status				
Middle school certificate	91		22.75	
High school certificate	106	26.5	21.27*	3.08
PostHigh school		74	18.5	
Graduate			129	32.25
Birth order of the child				
1			158	39.5
2			149	37.25
3			76	19
4			14	3.5 37.81* 1.09
5			2	0.5
6				
	1			
				0.25

The table 1 shows, out of 400 samples majority of COAs are 14 years old (100, 25%) and 80 (20%) of them are 18 years old, 53 (13.25%) are 12 years old. Remaining of them are almost equally distributed in 13 years (45, 11.25%), 16 years (45, 11.25%) and 17 years (44, 11%). Only 33 (8.25%) are 15 years old. Among the children of alcoholics included in the study, 227 (56.75%) were females and 173(43.25%) were male samples. Chi-square test was used to find out the association between demographic profile with stress and problem of children of alcohol dependent parents. The association between stress and age of the COAs was found to be non-significant (Chi-square = 29.52, p = 0.20) and there was a non-significant association found between problem

and age (Chi-square = 6.08, p = 0.41) of COAs. The results showed a significant association between stress and gender (Chi-square = 11.14, p = 0.02) of the children of alcoholics. The association was non-significant for problem and gender (Chi-square = 0.31, p = 0.57). The table showed that the demographic variable educational status had shown statistically significant association with level of stress (Chi-square = 21.27*, p = 0.04) among children at p<0.05 level and the demographic variable birth order of child (Chi-square =37.81**, p = 0.01) had shown statistically significant association with level of stress among children at p<0.001 level. But Education status and Birth order of the children are not significantly associated with their problems.

Table 2
Association between stress, problem, coping and demographic variables of parents

VARIABLE		STRESS (χ^2)	PROBLEM (χ^2)	COPING (χ^2)
Father's occupation				
Unemployed	51			
Unskilled worker	172			
Semi skilled worker	110	57.48**	4.17(NS)	4.92(NS)
Skilled worker	37			
Clearly shop owner farmer	28			
Semi profession	2			
Mother's Education				
Illiterate	145			
Primary school certificate	147			
Middle school	67	35.33(NS)	17.91*	7.75(NS)
High school certificate	32			
Post High school diploma	7			
Graduate or post graduate	2			
Mother's Income				
< 5000 Rs	350			
5001-10000 Rs	31	17.22(NS)	12.50**	2.963(NS)
10001-15000 Rs	6			
> 15000 Rs	13			

Table 2 depicts association between demographic variables of parents and stress problem and coping of children. Father's occupation had significantly associate with stress (Chi-square= 57.48, $p < 0.001^{**}$) of their children, but problem (Chi-square= 4.17, $p < 0.07$) and coping (Chi-square= 4.92, $p < 0.6$) of children was not significantly associated. Mother's education had significantly associate with problem (Chi-square= 17.91, $p < 0.001^{**}$) of their children, but stress (Chi-square=

35.33, $p < 0.07$) and coping (Chi-square= 7.75, $p < 0.6$) of children were not significantly associated. Mother's Income also had significant association with problem (Chi-square= 12.50, $p < 0.001^{**}$) of their children, but stress (Chi-square= 17.22, $p < 0.07$) and coping (Chi-square= 2.963, $p < 0.6$) of children were not significantly associated.

Table 3
Correlation between stress, problem and coping strategies adopted by children of alcohol dependent parents. N = 400

S. No.	Variables	Correlation Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed)			
		Stress	Coping	Problem	AUDIT
1.	Stress	1			
2.	Coping	-0.31**	1		
3.	Problem	.15**	-.12*	1	
4.	AUDIT	0.047	-0.074	0.031	1
		0.346	0.139	0.541	

correlation is significant at the level (2-tailed)
correlation is significant at the level (2-tailed)

A fairly negative correlation was observed between coping and stress ($r = -0.31^{**}$) which was found to be statistically significant at $p < 0.01$ level. This clearly indicates that when the level of stress among children of alcohol dependent parents an increases their coping level decreases. There is a positive correlation was found between problems faced by the children and stress ($r = 0.15^{**}$) which was found to be statistically significant at $p < 0.01$ level. This clearly indicates that when the children's problem resulting from their alcohol dependent

parents increases their stress level also increases, and a negative correlation was observed between problems faced by the children and coping ($r = -0.12^*$) which was found to be statistically significant at $p < 0.05$ level. The correlation between AUDIT score of alcohol dependent parents and stress ($r = 0.047$, $p = 0.34$) and problem ($r = 0.03$, $p = 0.54$) are positively correlated but not significant. The correlation between the AUDIT score of parents and coping of children was negatively correlated and non-significant. ($r = -0.07$, $p = 0.13$).

DISCUSSION

Of the many significant cost alcoholism exacts upon family, one of its most detrimental may be its negative effects upon the children who grow up with the alcoholic parents. Butler¹³ suggests that the impact of problem of parental drinking on children can manifest itself in broad social and psychological disorders such as withdrawal and shyness, acting out in more aggressive ways under performing at school or regressing back to earlier behaviors. In the present study, the researcher wanted to elicit the relationship between problems, stress and coping among COA. The results of the socio demographic details show that the age range between 12-18 years of children of alcoholics are very much vulnerable for getting various aspects of problems in their lives which lead them to experience different levels of stress. The adopted coping strategies to overcome these stress and problems are equally productive and non-productive in nature. The difference in gender among COA indicates that both sexes had experienced stress resulting from their parental alcoholism, most importantly the findings reveals girls were highly stressed than boys. Cohen, Kaplan & Salonen¹⁴ have found that there is an association between the stress and increased health problems of COAs. In support of previous study, we understand that stress influenced problems such as social, academic and family aspects of the children of alcoholics. Children of alcohol Foundation¹⁵ also states that the children of alcoholics have more problem, especially the academic performance of socio of addicted parents scored worse on all domains

measuring school achievements¹⁶. It was identified, COA do less well on academic measure & they also have higher and one more highly to leave school¹⁷. The AUDIT score of parents indicates the severity of parental addiction to alcohol. When the parents are dependent to alcohol then they were unable to interact normally with their children as they were always pre occupied with alcohol. Such consequences often have both immediate and long lasting effects on children. For example, Ross and Hill¹⁸ reported significantly higher scores (less predictability in the behaviors and regulatory systems of the family) on scales of nurturance, finances and discipline in their clinical observations of alcoholic compared to non-alcoholic families, hence resulting in stress and problems. The parental alcoholism was negatively associated with stress and problem in children. While lot of research reflecting the increased risk of stress and problem of adult children of alcoholics, there is a need to focus on the younger population.

CONCLUSION

This study begins to examine the adolescence population of alcohol dependent parents to determine the risk they face from their parent's drinking behavior. The findings of the current study clearly insists that the children of alcoholics have more problems in the aspects of academic, family and social and also have higher stress. In the further study the researcher has to reexamine the same in different settings and the rehabilitation modalities for the children.

REFERENCES

1. Low Enfels AB, Epidemiological studies of alcoholism in the 20th century. *Journal of epidemiology and Biostatistics*. 2000 7(2):134-140.
2. World health organization. www.who.int/entity/alcohol/report/msb.gsr. (2014).
3. Ranganathan, Shanthi. Families in Transition: Victims of Alcoholism and new challenges ahead. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counseling*. 2004 26(4): 403-405.
4. Furtado EF, Laucht M., Schmidt MH, Psychiatric problems in children of alcoholic fathers. *Journal for child and Adolescent psychiatry and Psychotherapy*. 2002 30(4): 241-250.
5. Werner LJ, Broida JP, Adult self esteem and locus of control as a familial alcoholism and dysfunction. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*. 1991 52(3): pp. 24-252.
6. European Commission, *Alcohol problems in the family: Report to the European union*, United Kingdom: Euro care, 2000.
7. Velleman R, and Templeton L. Alcohol, drugs and the family: Results from a long running research programme within the UK. *European Addiction Research*. 2003 9(3); 103-112.
8. Prime Minister's Strategy Unit, Alcohol harm reduction strategy for England. Cabinet Office, London, 2004.
9. Walsh and Gillan E, Untold damage; Children accounts of living with harmful parental drinking, Scottish Health Action on Alcohol problem (SHAAP), Edinburgh and child-line, Glasgow, 2009.
10. Aravind T, problems Of Children Of Alcoholics: Identification And Intervention. 2002. [Internet] Available from: mgutheses.in.
11. Baxter Magolda M. Making Their Own Way: Narratives for Transforming Higher Education to Promote Self-Development. First ed. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing; 2001. 137-48.
12. Erikson EH. Identity and Life Cycle. First ed. New York, Norton; 1968. p. 146-48
13. Butler S. Promoting the welfare of children of problem drinkers. *The Journal of Barnardos Training and Resource Service*. 2009; 5: 32-38.
14. Cohen S, Kaplan GA, and Salone, JT, The role of psychological characteristics in the relation between socioeconomic status and perceived health. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*. 1999; 62(1): 445-468.

15. Children of alcoholics. American Academy of child and adolescent psychiatry, (2011), Down loaded from: [aacap.org/children of alcoholic 17.aspx](http://aacap.org/children_of_alcoholic_17.aspx).
16. Moss HB, Vanyukov M, Majumder PP, Kirisci L, and Tarter RE, Pre-pubertal sons of substance abusers: influences of parental and familial substance abuse on behavioral disposition, IQ, and school achievement. *Addictive Behaviors* 1995; 20 (3): 345-358.
17. Sher KJ. Psychological characteristics of children of alcoholics. *Alcohol Health and Research World*. 1997; 21(3): 247-254.
18. Ross LT, and Hill EM. Comparing alcoholic and non alcoholic parents on the family unpredictability scale. *Psychological Reports* 2004; 9: 1385-91.