

## Relationship between Marital Conflict, Partner Abuse and Alcohol Abuse

Unmana Dutta\*

\*Amity University, Uttar Pradesh, India.

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Marriage as an institution has been studied from a long time now. Along with its positive components, what needs more detailed analysis is the study of relationship between the concepts of marital conflict, partner abuse and alcohol abuse, and to see if these components act on each other.

**Objective:** To study the relationship between marital conflict, partner abuse and alcohol abuse and if there are any gender differences between these components.

**Methods:** This study used Romantic Partner Conflict Scale (RPCS) [1], Waltz-Rushe-Gottman Emotional Abuse Questionnaire (EAQ) and Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT) [2] to collect data.

**Results:** The correlation study between the components of the study showed that there was some significant relationship between the components of Marital Conflict and Partner Abuse, between Partner Abuse and Alcohol Abuse and between Marital Conflict and Alcohol Abuse. However, there were no significant gender differences between the three variables.

**Keywords:** Marital conflict, Partner abuse, Alcohol abuse

### INTRODUCTION

Marriage as an institution has a lot of social importance, wherein two individuals come in together with different needs and desires, who follow some set of laws and rules that affects both the individuals [3]. However, this institution undergoes some major difficulties in case the individuals differ from each other on their opinions and rituals.

In case of these differences between the couple, the most likely occurrence is marital conflict, which can result from many factors. In a study done [4], it was found that four possible reasons lead to problems in a marriage. These are sex, finances, division of labor and raising children, mostly from five different cultures (American, British, Chinese, Russian and Turkish). In a research done by [5], it was found that marital conflict is most likely to occur in situations where there is a break of communication between the partners. In the initial days of the marriage, conflict is most likely to occur, however, with time their conflict goes down with more clarity between the two partners [6]. Another cause of marital conflict can be infidelity by one of the partners in the relationship, leading to divorce [7]. Other reasons for marital conflicts are financial conflict [8], dual career couples fighting for their role to take care of their children [9], sexual dysfunctions and incompatibility [10].

With regard to marital conflict, the most common form of problem in marriages is partner abuse, where on partner harms the other physically, emotionally, sexually and psychologically [11] suggested an Ecological Model of Violence (1979), wherein he underlined four factors leading to partner abuse: Individual factors (income, education, age), Relationship factors (infidelity), Community factors (school, neighborhood, etc. making one vulnerable to violence) and lastly, societal factors (cultural norms, health and social policies). In marriage, a partner can have different types of abuse, such as physical abuse [12], psychological abuse, verbal abuse [13], sexual abuse, financial abuse [14] and social abuse.

Another commonly found phenomenon around marital abuse and partner abuse in most marriages is alcohol abuse. It is most commonly defined as the habitual excessive drinking of alcohol. It is characterized by the following features such as the inability to fulfill major responsibilities at work, at home

**Corresponding author:** Unmana Dutta, PhD, Psychology, Amity University, 203, Tower-8, Lotus Panache, Sec-110, Noida, Uttar Pradesh 201305, India, Tel: +8860665642; E-mail: unmanadutta89@gmail.com

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and at school. They are also likely to drink in hazardous conditions such as driving under the influence of alcohol. Moreover, they have continued to drink despite problems in some of the important relationships and their drinking habits may lead them to various legal problems. Alcohol abuse is found to be caused by a mixture of various factors such as low social strata [15], family conflict [16], lower economic status [17] and people with high sensation seeking behavior [18].

**METHODS**

The present study was aimed at finding the correlation between Marital Conflict, Partner Abuse and Alcohol Abuse in married couples. The sample selected for the study was married couples (Male=110, Female=110) from Delhi NCR, India, who have been married for minimum of 1 year (Table 1).

**Objectives**

To find the relationship between Marital Conflict and Partner Abuse in married couples.

To find the relationship between Marital Conflict and Alcohol Abuse in married couples.

To find the relationship between Partner Abuse and Alcohol Abuse in married couples.

To study the gender differences between the components of Marital Conflict, Partner Abuse and Alcohol Abuse among married couples.

**Hypotheses**

There will be a significant relationship between Marital Conflict and Partner Abuse in married couples.

There will be significant relationship between Marital Conflict and Alcohol Abuse in married couples.

There will be significant relationship between Partner Abuse and Alcohol Abuse in married couples.

There will be gender differences between the components of Marital Conflict, Partner Abuse and on Alcohol Abuse among married couples.

**Table 1.** Name of tools.

Sl. No.	Name of Tools	Author(s)	Year of Publication	No. of items
1	Romantic Partner Conflict Scale	Zacchilli	2007; 2009	39
2	Waltz-Rushe-Gottman Emotional Abuse Questionnaire (EAQ)	Waltz, Rushe & Gottman	1995	66
3	Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT)	Babor, Higgins-Biddle, Saunders & Monterio	2001	10

**RESULTS**

As we can see here on Table 2, 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 is 33.59 and 10.338 respectively. For AUDIT, the mean is found to be 0.75 and SD to be 2.143.

In Table 3, there is a significant relationship Marital Conflict and Partner Abuse. The correlation between Compromise and Isolation is -0.250, significant at 0.01 level; between Avoidance and Isolation is -0.168, between Interactional Reactivity and Isolation 0.152, Domination and Isolation is 0.163, Submission and Isolation is 0.172: All significant at 0.05. Moreover, on Sexual abuse and Compromise is -0.254, Interactional Reactivity and Sexual Abuse is 0.224, Sexual and Submission is 0.232 and between Isolation and Sexual Abuse is 0.637, 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.

There is a significant correlation between Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT) and Sexual and Degradation Emotional Abuse (Table 4). With sexual abuse, the correlation is 0.231 and for degradation abuse, the correlation is 0.238, both are significant at 0.01 levels.

In Table 5, Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT) has no correlation with the different dimensions of Marital Conflict.

Table 6 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.

**Table 2.** 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	0.75	2.143

**Table 3.** 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
Compromise	1									
Avoidance	0.349	1								
Interactional Reactivity	0.031	0.070	1							
Separation	0.181	0.122	0.308	1						

<b>Domination</b>	0.031	-0.009	0.616	0.426	1					
<b>Submission</b>	0.185	0.245	0.437	0.312	0.514	1				
<b>Isolation</b>	-0.250**	-0.168*	0.152*	0.022	0.163*	0.172*	1			0.01**, 0.05*
<b>Sexual</b>	-0.254**	-0.077	0.224**	-0.004	0.062	0.232**	0.637**	1		0.01**
<b>Degradation</b>	-0.319**	-0.204**	0.200**	-0.007	0.190**	0.196**	0.684	0.679	1	0.01**
<b>Property Damage</b>	-0.252**	-0.232**	0.207**	0.005	0.232**	0.105	0.675	0.511	0.729	1

\*significant at 0.05 level

\*\*significant at 0.01 level

**Table 4.** Correlation between Partner Abuse and AUDIT (n=220).

Variables	Partner Abuse				AUDIT	Levels of Significance
	Isolation	Sexual	Degradation	Property Damage	AUDIT	
<b>Isolation</b>	1					
<b>Sexual</b>	0.637**	1				0.01**
<b>Degradation</b>	0.684**	0.679	1			0.01**
<b>Property Damage</b>	0.675**	0.511	0.729	1		0.01**
<b>AUDIT</b>	0.053	0.231**	0.238**	0.101	1	0.01**

\*Significant at 0.05 level

\*\*Significant at 0.01 level

**Table 5.** Correlation between Marital Conflict and AUDIT (n=220).

Variables	Marital Conflict					AUDIT	Level of Significance
	Compromise	Avoidance	Interactional Reactivity	Separation	Domination	AUDIT	
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

**Table 6.** 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	-0.233	0.816
2	Compromise	42.58	7.449	42.45	9.906	0.115	0.908
3	Avoidance	8.8	2.742	8.27	2.828	1.404	0.162
4	Interactional Reactivity	7.53	6.103	8.23	6.77	-0.806	0.421
5	Separation	12.75	4.951	12.12	4.908	0.957	0.339
6	Domination	10.55	6.587	11.35	6.772	-0.898	0.37
7	Submission	11.31	5.42	10.93	4.775	0.554	0.58
8	Isolation	33.32	10.498	32.55	11.968	0.503	0.615
9	Sexual	8.78	2.913	8.39	3.142	0.957	0.34
10	Degradation	33.87	8.864	33.31	11.662	0.404	0.687
11	Property Damage	7.78	2.083	8.21	2.793	-1.286	0.2
12	AUDIT	1.06	2.72	0.43	1.274	2.222	0.027

**DISCUSSION**

The aim of this research was to find out the correlation between marital conflict, partner abuse and alcohol abuse. This study was done using three scales: Romantic Partner Conflict Scale (RPCS) [1], Waltz-Rushe-Gottman Emotional

Abuse Questionnaire (EAQ) and Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT) [2].

In **Table 3**, as we can see, there is a significant negative relationship between Compromise of the Marital Conflict scale and Isolation, Sexual, Degradation and Property Damage components of the Partner Abuse scale, all

significant at 0.01 levels. This implies that when a partner in a marriage compromises, he/she is less likely to undergo any forms of Partner Abuse. This is similar to the results found in the research [19] which showed that compromise could solve a lot of problems in between a couple. Moreover, in a couple which has more commitment, there are significant levels of relationship dedication. The couple get more trustful of each other and compromise for each other [20]. There is also negative correlation between Avoidance of the Marital Conflict scale and Isolation, Degradation and Property Damage of the Partner Abuse scale. In a marriage when a couple tries to avoid conflict, there is more likely that there is an increase in Isolation abuse, degrading of the partner and property damage. Interactional Reactivity is the violent form of communication that the person engages in for resolving issues in a marriage. From the Waltz-Rushe-Gottman Emotional Abuse Questionnaire (EAQ), Interactional Reactivity is positively correlated to Sexual, Degradation and Property Damage sub-scale, all significant at 0.01 levels. Interactional Reactivity can occur by one partner engaging in yelling, insulting and swearing at the partner. In sexual abuse, partner is likely to have sexual contact without consent, and may have sexual degradation and assault [21]. In a study done [22], it was found that emotional abuse of a partner includes verbal assault, dominance, control of the partner, isolation, and ridicule to the partner or use of some intimate details of the partner for degradation. Moreover, a positive correlation was found between Domination of the Marital Conflict scale and Degradation and Property damage components of the Emotional Abuse Questionnaire. This was stated [23] also, who found that property damage is a symbolic violence which shows the emotional violence already attached to the circumstance. Property damage can occur in situations where there is dominance and then there will be instances of throwing of objects, destroying property, harming animals or anyone that their partner likes. Another component of Marital Conflict scale is Submission, which has significant positive correlation at Degradation and Property Damage of the Partner Abuse scale. In a marriage a partner who gives in more often, they are more likely to undergo degradation from the partner and is also likely to have property damage from their partner.

In between partner abuse and alcohol abuse, significant relationship was found between the components of partner abuse and alcohol abuse, as we can see on **Table 4**. In 1984, Kanin [24] interviewed few rapists who used alcohol as a reason to amend their punishment for the rape that they have committed. Alcohol actually changes the perception of the person taking alcohol. It just looks at the immediate gratification of the needs, without realizing the actual possibility of the behavior, future guilt and suffering of the victim. Under the influence of alcohol, if the person feels that the victim has agreed to the sexual activity implicitly also, they would engage in the behavior, regardless of the resistance they face from the victims [25]. Moreover,

significant relationship was found between degradation and alcohol abuse. Studies [26] found that alcohol use did not predict emotional abuse, but emotional abuse did predict alcohol abuse.

In **Table 5**, we can see no significant correlation between alcohol abuse and marital conflict, this relationship could be found because alcohol is not a compulsory component for marital abuse to be there. In a study done [27], we can see that they have divided women in three groups: With no alcohol abuse and marital discord, with alcohol and marital discord and marital discord without wife drinking habits. In the results it was found that women in both alcohol and no alcohol group reacted with high criticism, withdrawal and poor listening, when they had marital discord, as compared to women who had no marital discord. So, from this research as well, it is quite clear that alcohol is not needed for a marital conflict to be present.

For gender differences between the components, we did not have any significant gender difference in any of the components of the three variables used in this study. Both men and women are equally likely to suffer from marital conflict, partner abuse and alcohol abuse. Coker et al. [28] found that 13.2% of the 556 men in the sample reported to have suffered from Intimate Partner Violence, regardless of belonging to rural, urban or sub-urban areas.

In conclusion, marital conflict between couples could be found in marriages but this may or may not be caused by alcohol abuse. Moreover, partner abuse is also a common phenomenon that can be found between the couple when a couple complains of marital discord.

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