

# Empowerment for Families of People with Substance vs. Gambling Problems: Similarities & Differences

12<sup>th</sup> Annual Midwest Conference on Problem  
Gambling and Substance Abuse

# Addictions are tough on spouses/partners

- Effects:
  - Disruption, chaos
  - Financial
  - Legal
  - Household tasks / care-giving
  - Increased risk of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)
- Consequences:
  - Psychological distress
  - Physical/mental health problems



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# How common are addictions?

- Alcohol Use Disorders: 6.6% of population
  - Missouri: 6.2%
- Drug Use Disorders: 2.7%
  - Missouri: 2.6%
- Gambling Disorder: 1.2%
  - (+1.9% problem gamblers)



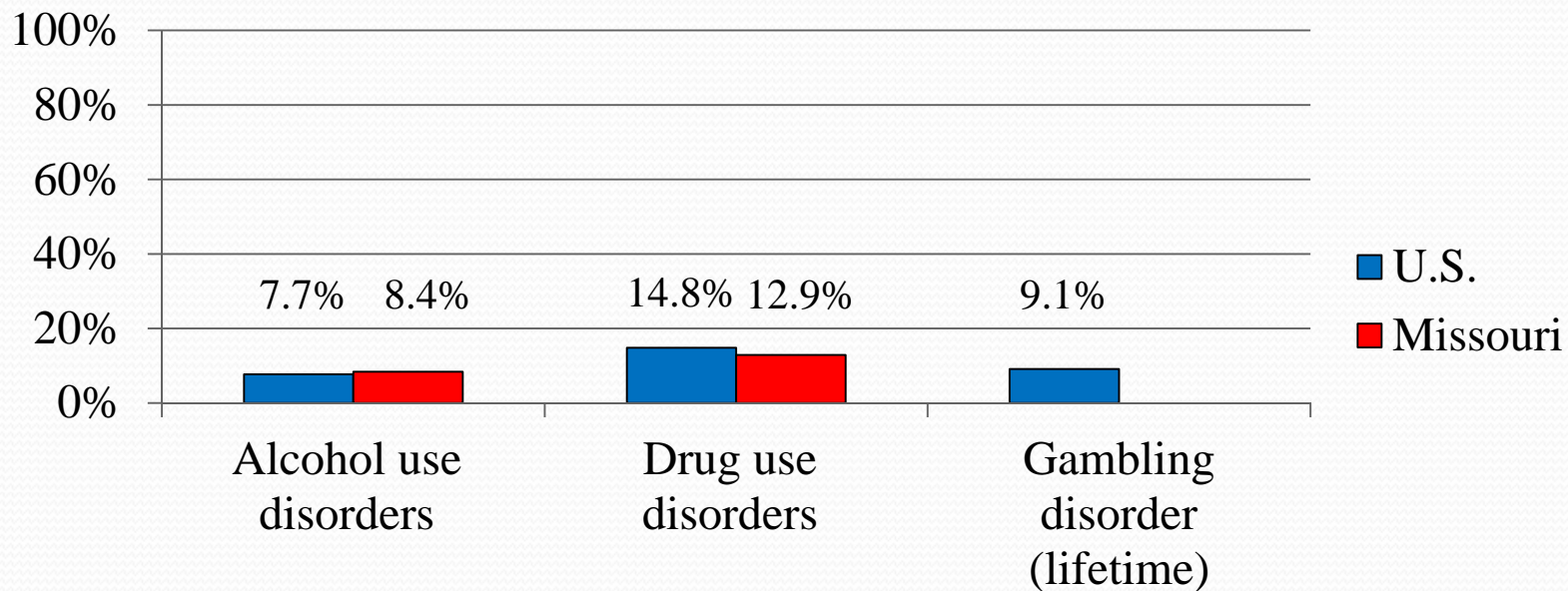
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# Addictions are long-term problems

Percent of people with SGP  
who get treatment in any year



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# Addictions and IPV

- IPV: intimate partner violence
  - Physical, sexual, emotional abuse
  - Coercive control
- Prevalence (general population) 1.3 – 13.6%
- Elevated risk with addictions
  - Substances Odds Ratio = 3-6
  - Gambling O.R. = 10.5



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# Summary of problem

- Thousands of intimate partners affected
- Effects can be severe
- Addictions are often chronic / long-term
- Increased risk for IPV
  
- This is a public health issue
  
- Yet (relatively) little help is available for intimate partners



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# What can we do about this?

- Addiction treatment providers and other human service professionals are in an ideal position to help.
  - But how?
- The Stress-Strain-Coping-Support theory (Orford et al., 2010) is one way to understand the challenge of dealing with a loved one's addiction.
  - Partners are assumed to be doing the best they can with a difficult situation.



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# Stress-Strain-Coping-Support theory

Stress



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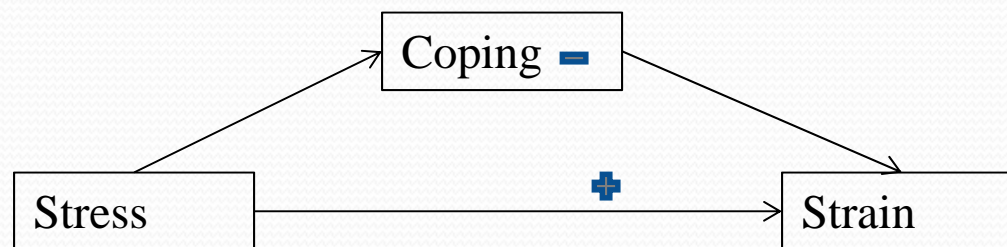
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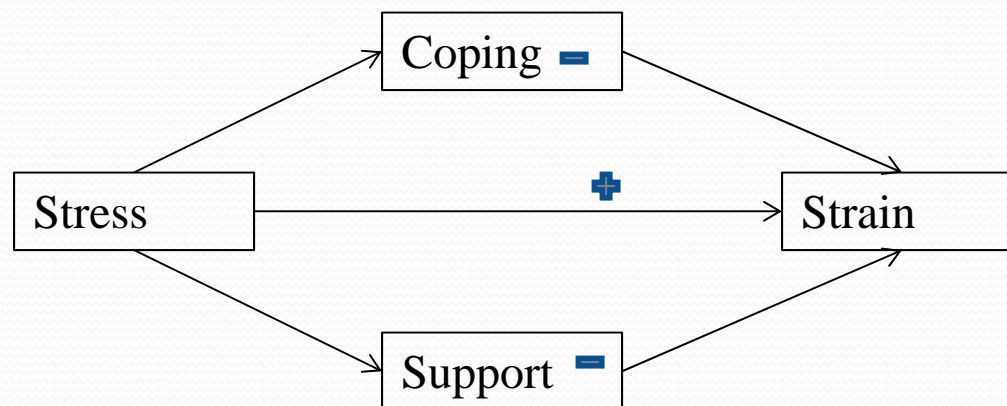
# Stress-Strain-Coping-Support theory



# Stress-Strain-Coping-Support theory



# Stress-Strain-Coping-Support theory





# Background: Stress

- The behavior of the person with the addiction is a stressor on the partner
- Measurement: Family Member Impact Questionnaire
  - Total score
  - Worrying behavior (worry about partner)
  - Active disturbance (how much the partner's addictive behavior disturbs family living/events)



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# Background: Strain

- The stress of the addiction results in partners experiencing strain
  - Psychological distress
  - Physical health problems
  - Economic insecurity
  - Poor quality of life



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# Background: Strain

- Measurement of strain
  - Psychological distress: DASS (Depression, Anxiety, Stress Scale)
  - Physical health problems: self-reported health status
  - Economic insecurity: income, sufficiency of income
  - Quality of life: PWI (Personal Wellbeing Index)



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# Background: Coping

- Engaged
  - Confronting partner via assertive, controlling, or emotional tactics
- Tolerant
  - Putting up with the addiction via use of inactive, tolerant, or supportive tactics
- Withdrawal
  - Withdrawing from the partner's addiction via use of avoiding or independent tactics
- Survey: Coping Questionnaire



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# Background: Social Support

- Informal social support (emotional or practical)
- Support from professionals
- Unhelpful “support”
  
- Measurement: Alcohol, Drugs and the Family Social Support Scale



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# Background: Intimate Partner Violence

- Violence
  - Physical abuse
  - Sexual abuse
  - Emotional abuse
- Coercive control
  
- Measurement:
  - Violence: Woman Abuse Screening Tool (WAST)
  - Coercive control: Mediator's Assessment of Safety Issues and Concerns (MASIC)



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# How can the SSCS model be helpful?

- Places focus on partners (spouses, family members) of people with addictions
- Provides a positive, strength-based understanding of loved ones of people with addictions
  - This is an alternative to codependency theory
- Elements of SSCS model may serve as intervention points



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# Research study: Inclusion criteria

- Female spouses/partners of people with alcohol, drug, or gambling problems ( $N = 222$ )
- In a current or recent relationship (dissolution within the past year)
- Age 24-65



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# Methods

- Recruitment via flyers, online announcements, & Washington University's Research Participant Registry
- Online survey
  - Screening
  - Demographics
  - SSCS model elements & IPV
- Remuneration: amazon.com e-gift certificate (if desired)
- Analysis: ANOVA, t-test,  $\chi^2$ , correlations



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# Participants

- Primarily St. Louis-area residents
- 93% were in a current relationship
- Almost all were in relationships with men
- 2/3 had children (median # children = 2)
- 77% White, 22% Black, 7% Hispanic\*
- Education: 90% went beyond high school\*\*
- Employment: 69% work full-time\*\*
- Housing: 57% own, 43% rent or stay with somebody\*\*

• \*similar to STL

\*\*different from STL



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# Income

- Median \$50-59,999/year (range \$0 to >\$100,000)\*
- >60% said income was not enough (or barely enough) to get by
- Is this income normal for your household?
  - 47% yes
  - 32% no, usually there has been more income
- “Family finances have been affected by the addiction”
  - 28% not at all / rarely
  - 33% sometimes
  - 38% often



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# Relationships

- Median relationship duration = 5 years
- 56% currently married to partner
- 75% currently live with partner
- Happiness of relationship 1-10 scale):
  - Median 3 (a little unhappy)



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# Alcohol/ drugs/ gambling behavior

- Loved one's addiction (check all that apply):
  - 70% alcohol problem
  - 37% drug problem
  - 28% gambling problem
- 30% had multiple addictions
  - Mostly alcohol/drugs or alcohol/gambling



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## Participants' alcohol/ drugs/ gambling

- Participants' behavior was associated with their loved one's behavior
  - (High association for alcohol, lesser for drugs/gambling)
- Alcohol: median frequency once/week, 2 drinks/day, binge drinking 3-6 times/year
- Drugs: median frequency once/week, 46.9% of these reported poly-drug use
- Gambling: median frequency 3-6 times/year, \$50/day



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# Stress

- Scores are comparable to published scores
- Total impact of burden of partner's addiction on participant:
  - Higher impact if partner had alcohol/gambling problem
- Worry:
  - Less worry if partner had gambling problem
  - More worry if alcohol/gambling problem
- Active disturbance:
  - More disturbance if alcohol/gambling problem



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# Strain: psychological distress

- Depression
  - ~ 2/3 of participants had moderate, severe, or extremely severe depression
  - Gambling: less depression
  - Alcohol/drugs: more depression
  - Alcohol/gambling: even more depression



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# Strain: psychological distress

- Anxiety
  - >60% of participants reported moderate, severe, or extremely severe anxiety
  - Drugs: less anxiety
  - Alcohol/drugs: more anxiety
  - Alcohol/gambling: even higher anxiety
- Stress
  - Nearly 50% of participants reported moderate, severe, or extremely severe stress
  - Gambling: less stress





# Strain: health & finances

- Health
  - Health is good overall (no differences between addictions)
  - Gambling: more satisfied with health than others
- Income & family finances
  - Drugs & alcohol/drugs: lower household income
  - Alcohol: family finances less affected by addiction
  - Alcohol/gambling: finances more affected by addiction



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# Strain: quality of life & relationship

- Quality of life
  - Average quality of life for all participants (5.6) was below U.S. norms (7-8)
  - Gambling: higher quality of life
- Relationship
  - Drugs: more likely to report arguments
  - Gambling: less likely to report arguments



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# Coping

- Engaged coping
  - Scores similar to published scores
  - Alcohol/gambling: used more engaged coping strategies
- Tolerant-inactive coping
  - Alcohol/gambling: used more tolerant coping strategies
  - Alcohol/gambling: scores were higher than published scores
- Withdrawal coping
  - No differences between addictions
  - Drugs: withdrawal coping strategies perceived as less helpful
  - Scores higher than published scores



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# Social support

- No differences in social support (total or subscales) between addictions.
- No published scores for this scale, so can't compare.



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# Intimate partner violence: WAST

- ~ 1/2 to 3/4 of participants experienced IPV
- How arguments are worked out with partner
  - Alcohol: less “great difficulty” than expected
- Arguments result in hitting/kicking/pushing
- Partner has abused participant physically
- Partner has abused participant sexually
  - Alcohol/gambling: more frequent (all 3)



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# Intimate partner violence: MASIC

- Happened at all (# questions endorsed at any frequency)
  - Alc/drugs: lower scores than single addictions
  - Alc/gambling: higher scores than single addictions
- Happened monthly
  - Alc/gambling: higher scores than alcohol, drugs, or alc/drugs
- Happened weekly
  - Alc/gambling: higher scores than single addictions or alc/drugs



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# Summary: differences between addictions

- Alcohol
  - Fewer financial effects than other addictions
- Drugs
  - Less likely to be married to partner
  - More arguments
  - Lower household income, more trouble making ends meet
  - Lower anxiety



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# Summary: differences between addictions

- Alcohol and drugs
  - Less likely to be married
  - Lower household income
  - Less coercive control
  - More depression & anxiety
- Gambling
  - Higher quality of life
  - Fewer arguments
  - Less depression & stress



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# Summary: differences between addictions

- Alcohol & gambling
  - More likely to be married
  - Arguments are not too hard to work out with partner
  - Lower household income than either alcohol or gambling alone, & large effects on family finances
  - Very high impact of addiction (stress)
  - More depression & anxiety
  - More coercive control
  - More physical & sexual abuse



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# What if it's a past relationship?

- Those who are no longer in a relationship with the person with the addiction were different in these ways:
  - Less likely to ever have married the partner
  - Less likely to still be living with the partner (though still high at 57%)
  - More likely to rent/stay with someone than to own their home
  - More likely to report trouble at work or with their supervisor



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# What does this mean for empowerment?

- Empowerment is both a process & an outcome.
- The empowerment process: set a goal, take action, reflect on outcomes/results of action, set new goal (Cattaneo & Goodman, 2014).
- Other definitions of empowerment?



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# Empowerment

- Goals:
  - Must be important to the partner.
  - This is especially important if there is IPV in the family.
- Determining which goals are best:
  - Mixed feelings about the situation & loved one are common.
  - Motivational interviewing may help the partner explore her ambivalence and determine which goal(s) are most appropriate for her and the family.



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# Empowerment

- Taking action depends on partner's skills, knowledge, self-efficacy, & community resources/supports.
- Skills
  - Help partner develop more (better) coping skills.
  - Teach partner how to support their loved one's abstinence or recovery. This may include analyzing family interactions/situations & utilizing new behavioral techniques.



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# Empowerment

- Knowledge
  - Provide information about addictions.
- Self-efficacy
  - Partners may be less overwhelmed if they know they can deal with the situation. This is another benefit to teaching coping skills.
  - Barriers to self-efficacy: partners may feel they shouldn't focus on themselves or the rest of the family (instead of focusing on the addiction).



# Empowerment

- Community resources / supports
  - Partners may have other needs that are beyond your purview.
    - IPV: all patients in treatment for addiction, and their family members, should be screened for IPV. If present, refer to community resources.
    - Psychological distress: participants were highly depressed, anxious, & stressed. Screen for these, & refer to treatment or other sources of support (e.g., NAMI).
    - Addictions: be on the lookout for addictions in partners. Provide treatment and/or refer to mutual aid (12-step) groups.



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# Group-specific recommendations

- Alcohol
  - May be the “typical” partner with above-mentioned problems.
- Drugs
  - May need financial/income help.
- Alcohol and drugs
  - High anxiety & depression, so be sure to screen for these.
  - Also may need financial/income help.



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# Group-specific recommendations

- Past partner (somebody who is no longer in the relationship)
  - This group is still at risk for fallout from the addiction. Don't assume addiction-related problems are in the past.
- Gambling
  - Screen the person with the gambling addiction for cross-addiction to alcohol, as this is a game-changer for partners.



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# Group-specific recommendations

- Alcohol/gambling
  - Family finances are likely highly impacted by the addictions. Financial/income help may be necessary.
  - High depression & anxiety, so be sure to screen/treat.
  - Highest impact of addiction of all groups; partners attempt to cope by high use of coping strategies. Coping training may be helpful, but the impact of the addictions may need to be directly addressed, too.
  - Highly likely to experience IPV (both violence and coercive control). Screening & referral is imperative.



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# Summary

- Partners (& other family members) of people with addictions experience significant problems.
- They deserve help for themselves, as well as training in how to support their loved one's recovery.
- Depression, anxiety, financial problems, and intimate partner violence are common.
- Specific impacts of the addiction may vary by type of addiction, with most severe effects experienced by partners of people with both alcohol & gambling addictions.



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