How do loved ones of people with addictions cope?
Use & perceived helpfulness of coping strategies

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Addictions are tough on families

- **Effects:**
  - Disruption, chaos
  - Financial
  - Legal
  - Household tasks / care-giving
  - Associated problems (e.g., family violence)

- **Consequences:**
  - Psychological distress
  - Physical/mental health problems
How common are addictions?

- Alcohol Use Disorders: 6.4% of population (20.7 million)
  - Midwest: 6.7%

- Drug Use Disorders: 2.7% (8.7 million)
  - Midwest: 2.4%

- Substance Use Disorders: 8.1% (26.2 million)
  - Midwest: 8.1%

- Gambling Disorder: ~2.3% (7.4 million)
  - Midwest: ???
% of SUD or GD treated/year

- Alcohol use disorder: 7.6%
- Drug use disorder: 14.6%
- Gambling disorder: 0.2%
Increased risk for violence

- Intimate partner violence (IPV) includes:
  - Physical, sexual, emotional abuse
  - Coercive control

- Prevalence (general population) 1.3 – 13.6%

- Elevated risk with addictions
  - Substance Use Disorders Odds Ratio (O.R.) = 3-6
  - Gambling Disorder O.R. = 10.5
Summary of problem

- Thousands of families affected by addictive disorders
- Effects can be severe
- Addictions are often chronic/long-term
- Increased risk for IPV

- How do families deal with the problem?
Understanding family coping

- The Stress-Strain-Coping-Support (SSCS) theory (Orford et al., 2010) is one way to understand the challenge of dealing with a loved one’s addictive disorder.

- Spouses/family members are assumed to be doing the best they can with a difficult situation.
Stress-Strain-Coping-Support theory

- The behavior of the person with the addiction (the partner) is a stressor on the spouse/loved one
Stress-Strain-Coping-Support theory

- This results in spouses experiencing elevated strain
Stress-Strain-Coping-Support theory

- Spouses can lower their strain via use of effective coping strategies
Stress-Strain-Coping-Support theory

- Receipt of social support by spouses can also be effective in reducing the strain they experience.
SSCS views on coping

- Engaged coping: engaging with partner via assertive, emotional, or controlling tactics
  - Not a good idea
- Tolerant-inactive coping: putting up with addiction via inactive, tolerant, or supportive tactics
  - Not a good idea
- Withdrawal coping: withdrawing from the addiction (& partner) via use of avoidant or independent tactics
  - This is the way to go
Other views: stress/coping theory

- Problem-focused coping: trying to fix the problem
  - Helpful if problem can be fixed
- Emotion-focused coping: adjust how you feel about problem
  - Only functional if problem can’t be solved
- Avoidance coping: “think about it tomorrow”
  - Not a good idea
- Withdrawal coping: remove yourself from the problem
  - Probably good
Other views: 12-step theory

- Bad idea to actively try to fix addiction – can’t be done & just makes you miserable/ codependent

- “Detach with love” is best way to cope with a loved one’s addiction
Family views of coping

- But how do family members of people with addictions feel about coping strategies?
  - Which are used more/less often?
  - How helpful are various strategies?
  - Can we predict use or helpfulness of coping?
The current research study

- Inclusion criteria:
  - Female spouses/partners of people with alcohol, drug, and/or gambling problems \((N = 222)\)
  - Relationship must be current or recent (dissolution within the past year)
  - Age 24-65
Study methods

- Recruitment online (betsoff.org), Washington University’s Research Participant Registry, flyers
- Online survey
- Incentive: amazon.com e-gift certificate
Study participants

- Primarily St. Louis-area residents
- 93% were in a current relationship (median 5 years)
  - Almost all relationships were with men
  - 56% married
  - 75% living together
- 2/3 had children (median # children = 2)
Participant demographics

- 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**
- Income: median $50-60,000/year†
  - >60% said income not/barely enough to get by
  - 71% said family finances affected by addiction

† similar to STL  ** different from STL
Partners’ addictive behavior

- Partner’s addiction (check all that apply):
  - 70% alcohol
  - 37% drugs
  - 28% gambling

- 30% of partners had multiple addictions
  - Mostly alcohol/drugs or alcohol/gambling
Study measures: stress

- Family Member Impact Questionnaire
  - 16 questions
  - Answers: not at all (0), once/twice (1), sometimes (2), often (3)
Study measures: coping

- Coping Questionnaire
  - 30 questions
  - Answer options: never (0), once/twice (1), sometimes (2), often (3)
  - Engaged, tolerant/inactive, withdrawal subscales
  - (Plus total coping score)

- Helpfulness of coping: for each coping strategy used,
  - Not at all helpful (0), a little helpful (1), helpful (2), very helpful (3)
Study measures: support

- Social Support Scale
  - 25 questions
  - Answer options: never (0), once/twice (1), sometimes (2), often (3)
- Informal support subscale (from friends/family)
- Formal support subscale (from professionals)
- Negative ‘support’ subscale
Study measures: IPV

- **Women Abuse Screening Tool**
  - 8 questions
  - Scored either 0/1 or 0/1/2 (various answer options)
  - Add together scores, cut-point for scores indicating no IPV/yes IPV

- **Mediator’s Assessment of Safety Issues & Concerns (coercive control subscale; MASIC)**
  - 14 questions
  - Answer options: frequency from never – daily
  - Scoring: # tactics experienced at all in past year
Results: use of coping strategies

- Average use of specific coping strategies ranged from 1 (once/twice) → 2 (sometimes)

- Overall average use of all strategies = 1.6
Helpfulness of coping strategies

- Average helpfulness of specific coping strategies ranged from 0.6 – 1.75
  - 0 = not at all helpful
  - 1 = a little helpful
  - 2 = helpful

- Overall average helpfulness of all coping strategies = 1.03
Assoc’n between use & helpfulness

- Specific coping strategies
  - ~ half of coping strategies: no association
  - ~1/3 of coping strategies: positive association
  - ~1/6 of coping strategies: negative association

- Overall relationship between use & helpfulness:
  - $r(203) = -.14, p = .046$
  - (Small negative correlation)
Plotting use vs. helpfulness
Complex (multiple) associations?
Bugs bunny?
Strategy for analysis

- Look at each type of coping separately, both specific coping strategies & overall for that type
  - Use
  - Helpfulness
  - Association between use & helpfulness
Engaged coping strategies

- Refused to lend partner $
- Talked about what could be done about addiction
- Argued
- Pleased
- Said addiction upset you & it had to change
- Made rule about addictive behavior
- Encouraged an oath to not use/gamble
- Got moody/emotional
Engaged coping strategies cont.

- Watched/checked up on partner
- Said you wouldn’t accept excuses or cover up for addictive behavior
- Made clear expectations about partner’s contributions to family
- Accused partner of not loving you
- Sat down together to deal with financial situation
- Searched for/hid/disposed alcohol/drugs/gambling stuff
Engaged coping use

- Middle-of-the-road use, “sometimes” is really common

- Mean use = 1.7 (btw. once/twice & sometimes)

- Higher use:
  - talked together about addiction, said it upset you & had to change, made clear expectations, got moody/emotional

- Lower use:
  - encouraged partner to take an oath, searched for/hidden/disposed of alc/drugs / gambling stuff
Engaged coping helpfulness

- Not very helpful. “Not at all helpful” & “a little helpful” most common.

- Mean helpfulness = 1.0 (a little helpful)

- More helpful strategies:
  - said you won’t accept excuses/cover up addiction, made clear expectations(++)
  - sat down together to deal with financial situation

- Less helpful strategies:
  - argued, got moody/emotional(+-)
Engaged: use & helpfulness

- ~70% of strategies: no association
- ~30% of strategies have significant associations
  - Mostly negative assn’s: high use despite low helpfulness

Engaged overall: no association between use & helpfulness
Tolerant-inactive strategies

- Put yourself out for partner (i.e. took care of problems)
- Gave partner $ though knew s/he’d use it for addiction
- Felt too frightened to do anything
- Felt too helpless to do anything
- Made threats you didn’t mean to carry out
- Got in state where couldn’t make decisions
- Accepted situation couldn’t be changed
- Made excuses, covered up for, took blame yourself
- Pretended all was fine / covered up addiction
Tolerant-inactive: use

- A little more commonly used, though “sometimes” is still most given answer

- Mean tolerant use = 1.4

- Higher use:
  - Put yourself out for partner

- Lower use:
  - Gave $, felt frightened, couldn’t make decision, made excuses/covered up addiction
Tolerant-inactive: helpfulness

- Not very helpful: still lots of “not at all” or “a little”

- Mean tolerant-inactive helpfulness = .76 (less than “a little helpful”)

- More helpful strategies:
  - (none)

- Less helpful strategies:
  - Felt frightened(--), felt helpless, couldn’t make a decision(--), made threats
Tolerant: use & helpfulness

- ~1/3 of strategies: no association
- ~2/3 of strategies: association btw. use & helpfulness
  - Mostly positive associations: less helpful strategies aren’t used much, more helpful strategies are used more

- Overall tolerant-inactive: no association
Withdrawal coping strategies

- Put interests of other family members before partner
- Sat down & talked about addiction (reverse-scored)
- Left partner alone when drunk/high/gambling
- Pursued your own interests
- Avoided partner because of the addiction
- Went about your own business/acted as if partner wasn’t there
- Stuck up for partner when criticized (reverse-scored)
- Put yourself first/ took care of self
Withdrawal: use

- Used a little more often, though lots of “sometimes”

- Average use = 1.6

- Used more often:
  - Put interests of others before partner’s, talked about addiction, left partner alone when drunk/high/gambling, pursued your own interests

- Used less often:
  - (none)
Withdrawal: helpfulness

- More helpful overall: lots of “helpful” or “very helpful”

- Mean helpfulness of withdrawal = 1.4 (btw. “a little” & “helpful”)

- More helpful strategies:
  - Pursued own interests(++), put self first, acted as if partner wasn’t there

- Less helpful strategies:
  - (none)
Withdrawal: use & helpfulness

- ~half of strategies: no association
- ~half of strategies: association
  - Associations all positive: more used & pretty helpful

- Overall withdrawal: strong positive correlation
  - $r(192) = .54, p < .0001$
How to explain these results?

• Lots of variation in use, helpfulness, & relationship btw. use & helpfulness for each type of coping. Why?

• What might explain this?

• Look at IPV, burden of addiction (strain), type of addiction, severity of addiction, whether spouse & partner live together, all 3 types of social support, etc.
How much IPV was there?

- **WAST**: sum of score for all questions (range 0-13)
  - Mean = 5.6, median = 5

- **Cut-point for IPV**:
  - 4+ points = experienced IPV
  - 0-3 points = insufficient evidence of IPV (so no IPV)

- **How many participants experienced IPV?**
  - 72% yes
  - 28% no
How much coercive control?

- MASIC: # questions that happened in past year (0-14)

- How many forms of coercive control experienced?
  - Past year: mean = 7.2, median = 7.0
  - Monthly: mean = 3.0, median = 0.5
  - Weekly: mean = 1.5, median = 0
  - Daily: mean = 0.4, median = 0
IPV & coping use/helpfulness

- Strategy: split IPV (abuse) into 2 categories: no IPV & yes IPV, see what happens with correlations

- Outcome: no consistent pattern of results.
  - Sometimes associations are the same btw. no IPV & yes IPV groups, sometimes they differ

- Conclusion: actual violence isn’t influencing relationship between use & helpfulness of coping
IPV & coping use/helpfulness

- Focus on coercive control

- Strategy: split participants into 3 groups: low/medium/high coercive control (MASIC)

- Outcome: this appears to matter
Total coping & coercive control

- Remember the bunny plot? Label points by MASIC.
Total coping: low coercive control

MASICsplitThirds = 0 (lower third coercive control at all)
Total coping: medium coercive control

MASICsplitThirds = 1 (middle third coercive control at all)
Total coping: high coercive control

MASICsplitThirds = 2 (upper third coercive control at all)
Total coping & coercive control

- What did we see?
  - Low & medium coercive control: negative association
    - So higher use despite lower helpfulness (or vice versa)
    - Low: $r(65) = -.46, p = .0001$
    - Medium: $r(66) = -.45, p = .0001$
  
- High coercive control: no association at all
  - High: $r(74) = .001, p = .94$
Engaged coping & coercive control

- Same pattern here:
  - Low & medium coercive control: negative association
    - Low: $r(63) = -.28, p = .03$
    - Medium: $r(64) = -.29, p = .02$
  - High coercive control: no association at all
    - High: $r(72) = .02, p = .84$
Tolerant coping & coercive control

- Nearly the same pattern here:
  - Low coercive control: no association
    - Low: $\rho(0.61) = -0.21, p = 0.10$
  - Medium coercive control: negative association
    - Medium: $r(0.64) = -0.47, p = 0.0001$
  - High coercive control: no association at all
    - High: $\rho(0.72) = 0.18, p = 0.13$
Withdrawal coping & coercive control

- Different pattern here

- Positive correlation between use & helpfulness of withdrawal coping for all levels of coercive control
  - Low: $r(57) = .62, p = .0001$
  - Medium: $r(62) = .56, p = .0001$
  - High: $r(69) = .40, p = .0001$
Summary

- Overall coping, engaged coping, & tolerant-inactive coping:
  - Negative associations EXCEPT for high coercive control (no ass’n there)

- Why?
Summary, continued

• Maybe negative associations because:
  • People are overwhelmed, & will try anything though they don’t think much will help
  • Tolerant: some aren’t strategies you choose → you end up there when overwhelmed (e.g., feeling helpless)
  • Engaged: some are healthy communication strategies we tell people to use. Maybe people aren’t willing to give up on relationship, keep trying even if they don’t think it’ll help
Summary, continued

• Why no associations under high coercive control?

  • Maybe people can’t choose what to do if they’re being controlled. They use whatever is available, regardless of how helpful they think it will be.
Summary, continued

- Withdrawal coping:
  - Positive association regardless of coercive control level

- So withdrawal coping works as we’d hope: when people consider it helpful, they use it more
What else is involved?

- This is complex. Which conditions predict higher use (or higher perceived helpfulness) of coping strategies?

- Use regression
  - Do separately for use & helpfulness of each type of coping (plus overall coping)
  - Start with many predictors, drop non-significant predictors that don’t improve the model fit
## Use: effect direction/strength

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor (IV)</th>
<th>DV: use of total coping $R^2 = .61$</th>
<th>DV: use of engaged coping $R^2 = .50$</th>
<th>DV: use of tolerant coping $R^2 = .51$</th>
<th>DV: use of withdrawal coping $R^2 = .34$</th>
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<td>+/- Impt.</td>
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<td>Stress/ burden of addiction</td>
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<td>Negative “support”</td>
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<td>Live apart</td>
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<td>Helpfulness</td>
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Regression highlights: use

- More severe burden of addiction predicts more use of all types of coping
- Living apart predicts less use of engaged, tolerant, & total coping
- Use of tolerant coping also predicted by higher coercive control & more unhelpful “support”
- Withdrawal coping only predicted by helpfulness (& burden of addiction)
## Helpfulness: effect direction/strength

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Predictor (IV)</th>
<th>DV: helpful. total coping $R^2 = .28$</th>
<th>DV: helpful. engaged coping $R^2 = .27$</th>
<th>DV: helpful. tolerant coping $R^2 = .39$</th>
<th>DV: helpful. withdrawal coping $R^2 = .28$</th>
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</table>
Regression highlights: helpful.

- For engaged, tolerant, & total coping, lower helpfulness is predicted by higher burden of addiction.

- For engaged, tolerant, & total coping, higher helpfulness is predicted by:
  - Higher coercive control
  - More negative “support”
  - A partner with both alcohol & gambling problems

- Helpfulness of withdrawal only predicted by use.
Regression summary

- When burden of the addiction is worse, spouses will try more of every type of coping
  - However, the coping will be perceived as less helpful (except withdrawal)

- Coping feels more helpful when there is more coercive control, more negative “support,” or when the partner has both alcohol & gambling problems (except withdrawal)
What do we know about withdrawal?

- Used pretty often
- Considered fairly helpful

- Used more often by those who feel it’s more helpful
  - Association *not* influenced by IPV

- This is promising
What do we know about withdrawal?

- However, unclear what influences / facilitates withdrawal coping

- Need to understand more so we can advise clients
What do we know about engaged?

- Used a little less often
- Considered a little less helpful

- Those who use it most don’t feel it helps much (negative association)
  - No association under high coercive control

- Then why do they use it?
What do we know about engaged?

- Used more when addiction is harder on spouse, but then it feels less helpful
  - Maybe in tough times people will try anything

- Some engaged coping strategies are good communication skills
  - So why not so helpful with a partner with an addiction?
What do we know about engaged?

- Maybe people keep trying engaged strategies because they don’t want to give up on the relationship.

- But what is it about coercive control that predicts that engaged strategies will feel more helpful?
What do we know about tolerant?

- Used least overall
- Considered least helpful overall

- Those who use it most don’t feel it helps much (negative association)
  - *No* association under high coercive control

- Then why use it?
What do we know about tolerant?

- Maybe overwhelmed people are willing to try anything (more burden of addiction predicts more tolerant coping)
  - However, with more burden of addiction it feels less helpful

- With higher coercive control, tolerant used more & considered more helpful
  - Passive strategies might be protective under high coercion
What do we know about tolerant?

- Some tolerant strategies aren’t choices – they’re what happens when you run out of other options.

- Coping skills training might help people avoid feeling helpless, frightened, etc.

- First we should better understand how/when coping works.
What about overall coping?

- A mixture of strategies that appear to function in different ways (thus the bunny plot)

- Not one-size-fits-all ⇒ use & helpfulness of coping appears to be situation-dependent
Evaluating coping

- 12-step programs & the SSCS theory prefer withdrawal coping

- People found it (withdrawal coping) pretty helpful so maybe we should advise clients to use it

- However, other stress & coping theory points to the usefulness of problem-focused coping (engaged) or emotion-focused coping (tolerant) in certain situations
Evaluating coping

- Engaged & tolerant-inactive coping are complex

- Use, helpfulness & their relationship are influenced by burden of addiction, coercive control, & other factors

- Unclear yet whether/under which conditions we could advise clients to use these types of coping

- Much more to learn
What do we need to learn?

- Why do people choose a specific coping strategy?
  - Because the strategy is available to them?
  - Because they think the strategy will work?
  - Because they don’t know how to use a different strategy?
  - Because the other strategies they prefer aren’t available?
  - Because it will accomplish a particular goal? (What?)

- What can people do to maximize a strategy’s helpfulness?
Next steps

• Talk with more people, gather more data
  • Qualitative study to investigate these questions

• Long-term goal:
  • Learn how can we best assist families of people with addictions to make strong, helpful choices
Contact info & funding

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