Mental health and emotions in couples with an alcoholic member.

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Introduction
>Alcoholic’s partners report more psychological distress than healthy individual’s partners [e.g., Halford, Bousu, Kelly & Young, 1999; Kahler, McCrady & Epstein, 2003]. This distress is manifested by depression, anxiety and somatic complaints (Finney, Moos, Cronkite & Gamble, 1983). However, to our knowledge, a descriptive framework of the symptomatology of alcoholic’s partner compared to healthy individual’s partner is still missing.
>Alcoholic’s partners report feeling more negative emotions than partners of couple with healthy members (Sferrazza et al., 2002).
>Martial satisfaction is worse in couple with an alcoholic dependant person compared to control couple with healthy members. Alcoholic’s partners seem to be less hoping to divorce than members of healthy couple (review in Marshall, 2003). However links between this marital distress and both symptomatology and negative emotions have not been investigated.

Object of the study: to compare specific mental health symptoms and experienced emotions between partners of couples with an alcoholic member to control couple with healthy members and their links to marital satisfaction.

Methods

Participants
40 heterosexual cohabiting couples: 20 french-speaking alcoholic dependant patients according to DSM-IV criteria (ADP) and their non alcoholic partner (AD) matched to 20 healthy individual from 20 Control Couple (CC) for length of couple’s cohabitation. AD were hospitalised at the time of the study.

Measures

•Martial satisfaction
A French translation of the Locke and Wallace Marital Adjustment Scale (Wright et Sabourin, 1985) that evaluate marital life adaptation and more particularly in happiness in marriage, adaptation with budget organization, with family, with sexual functioning, with social relationships, with his philosophy and with endomark.

•Mental health symptomatology
The SCL-90R (Engleman, Lippman & Corel, 1973), a questionnaire that consists of ten subscales (Somatisation, Obsessive-Compulsive, Interpersonal Sensitivity, Depression, Anxiety, Hostility, Phobic Anxiety, Paranoid Ideation, Psychotism and Dissociative Symptomatology) and a Global Severity Index (GSI). The SCL-90R measures symptomatology in the past 7 days.

•Individual emotional experiences
A part of a semi-structured and validated questionnaire developed by the Clinical and Social Research units from the Catholic University of Louvain (Pr P.Philippe). The couple and used with alcoholic couples by Sferrazza et al. (2002). The subject had to evaluate on a 9 point Likert scale (from “never” to “frequently”) the frequency of which he experiences certain emotions. More specifically, the emotions assessed were shame, joy, fear, culpability, affection, jealousy, sadness, anguish and anger.

Results

Marital satisfaction score
AD (n=94,30, S.D.=23,54) and AD partner (81,30, S.D.=30,27) showed a significantly worse marital relationship satisfaction than CC (n=119,85, S.D.= 21,95). No significant differences emerged between AD and AD partner.

Mental health symptomatology score
An analysis of variance was conducted on SCL-90R using a mixed design with subscale as within-subject factors and group as between-subjects factor. A main effect of group [F(2,77)=11,73, p<0.001, η²=0.23], of marital satisfaction (r[40]= -.44, p< .01) while this correlation is not significant in AD and ADP.

Correlational analysis
Correlational analysis were conducted between (1) marital satisfaction and mental health symptomatology (GSI) and (2) marital satisfaction and felt emotions. In ADP, a significant correlation emerged between the experience of anger and marital satisfaction (r[20]= -.59, p<0.01) while this correlation does not emerge in CC and in AD. In CC, a significant correlation emerged between global symptomatology and marital satisfaction (r[60]= -.44, p<.01) while this correlation is not significant in AD and ADP.

Discussion
>ADP as well as their partner report more mental health symptoms than CC partners. More specifically, ADP manifest more symptomatology of anxiety, depression, somatisation, hostility, paranoia, and diverse symptomatology and a predictive of poor prognosis in alcohol treatment programs (review in Halford et al., 1999).

Emotions scores
An analysis of variance was conducted on the individual emotional experience scales using a mixed design with emotion as within-subject factors and group as between-subjects factors.
A main effect of group [F(2,77)=11,73, p<0.001, η²=0.23], of emotion [F(9,693)=22,76, p<0.001, η²=0.23], and an interaction effect [F(9,693)=5,64, p<0.01, η²=0.13], were found.

Post-hoc analysis Emotions scores

Alcohol problem in one member of a couple

Martial distress

anger felt by ADP