

Spouses of alcoholics can benefit from online help, study finds

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Women married to men with alcohol abuse problems can face a slew of problems themselves, with finding support for their situation near the top of the list.

Researchers at the University at Buffalo Research Institute on Addictions (RIA) found that women with alcoholic partners who face barriers to seeking help may benefit from an Internet-based, interactive support program.

Approximately 7.7 million U.S. adults are currently married to or living with a partner with an alcohol use disorder. The burden of living with an alcoholic partner can cause considerable psychological distress, says Robert G. Rychtarik, PhD, senior research scientist at RIA, but many spouses do not or cannot seek help.

"Specialized professional help for spouses of alcoholics is not widely available and insurance coverage can be limited," Rychtarik says. "Fear of retribution, family turmoil, stigmatization, and financial, time and geographical constraints also can be barriers."

RIA researchers developed a self-paced, Internet-administered coping skills training program to determine if it could be an effective way to help reduce distress in this frequently underserved population.

Nearly 100 women living with an alcoholic partner tested the program, which included narrated instruction, animated presentations and video

dramatizations of the most effective ways to deal with problems arising from a partner's drinking. Certified counselors ("coaches") were available to chat via computer or telephone.

"The program's goals are to help women focus on their own needs, reduce stress and talk to their partners in a more effective way," Rychtarik says. "The majority of the participants showed significantly higher levels of coping skills and experienced decreased depression and anger compared to those who didn't take part in the program."

The program is not yet available to the public. RIA researchers are seeking additional funding to evaluate it on a larger scale, and are determining the best delivery method—through social service agencies, treatment programs or [health care providers](#), or as a standalone for [women](#) to access themselves.

Provided by University at Buffalo

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