

Effective Supports for Wives of Sex Addicts: Insights from Research



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Why Focus on the Wives?

- Increasingly encountered
- Wives directly impacted
- Often neglected by regular support systems
- Improved prognosis for addicts when spouse is treated/well-supported



Common Presentations

- Intense emotions
- Self-blaming
- Policing spouse
- Isolated
- Enmeshed with husband
- High levels of stress
- Mistrusts others & self
- Cosmetic surgeries
- Poor self-image / confidence
- Financial stress
- Eating disorders
- Depression, anxiety & suicidality
- Disillusioned
- STD's

“Who are you?” said the Caterpillar.

“I – I hardly know, Sir, just at present,” Alice replied rather shyly,

“at least I know who I was when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then...”

~Lewis Carroll

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

Women are Telling Me...

- Silenced
- Torn between meeting own needs and protecting spouse
- Overlooked by caregivers & clergy
- Want consequences
- Need/want resources
- Professionals minimized or overlooked problem



Research Questions

1. Which supports do women find most beneficial when dealing with a spouse's sexual addiction or compulsivities?
2. How can women's experiences with support inform therapeutic and caregiving approaches with these women?

Research Methodology

- Qualitative, grounded theory
- 22 wives (25+ years old)
- Minnesota (6), Alberta (5), & Utah (11)
- Demographics & interview



Overview of Demographics

- 25 - 56 years old
- 1 - 28 years married
- 6 religions
- Aware of addiction an average of 7 years
- 70% had diploma, or degree
- 68% in first marriage
- 14 had it disclosed & 8 discovered it



Results

- Two broad categories of support used
 - 1. Coping Supports
 - 2. Change-Oriented Supports
- Most and Least Helpful Properties
- CAVED Principle

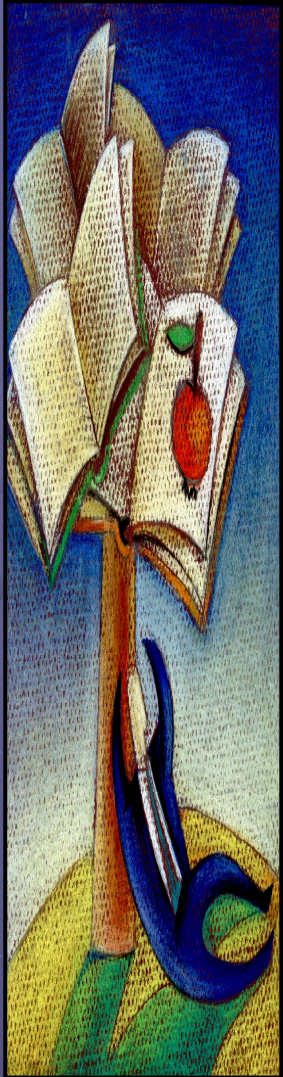
Coping Supports

| | |
|-------------------------|-------------------|
| Isolating Self | 68.18% (of women) |
| Blaming Self | 45.45% |
| Distracting Self | 36.36% |
| Hypervigilance/Policing | 36.36% |
| Avoidance of Sex | 27.27% |
| Focus on Children | 22.73% |
| Weight Loss | 18.18% |
| Suicidality | 13.64% |
| Drinking | 9.09% |

Change-Oriented Supports

| | |
|--------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Recreational | Reading (77.27%) Exercise (18.18%) Journaling (13.64%) Home Improvements (9.09%) |
| Relational | Immediate Family (68.18%) Friends (59.09%) Spouse (54.55%) Women in Similar Marriages (22.73%) |
| Professional | Group Therapy for Wives (45.45%) Individual Therapy (36.36%) Couple Therapy (31.82%) Family Physician (9.09%) Hospital (9.09%) |
| Spiritual | Clergy (72.73%) Specific Doctrinal Belief (59.09%) Prayer (50.00%) |
| Conceptual | 81.82% cited an idea, metaphor or perspective as helpful. |

Helpful Reading



1. After the Affair, J. Abrahms Spring
2. How Can I Forgive You?, J. Abrahms Spring
3. In the Shadows of the Net, P. Carnes, D. Delmonico & E. Griffin
4. Living with Your Husband's Secret Wars, M. Means
5. Surviving an Affair, W. Harley & J. Chalmers
6. Faithful & True, M. Laaser
7. Boundaries, H. Cloud & J. Townsend
8. Infidelity on the Internet, M. Maheu & R. Subotnik
9. Purity & Passion, W. L. Watson
10. Discussing Pornography Problems with a Spouse, R. Reid & D. Gray
11. Scripture & Religious Books
12. Love Must be Tough: New Hope for Families in Crisis, J. Dobson
13. From Bondage to Bonding, N. Groom
14. The Dance of Intimacy, H. Lerner

Most & Least Helpful Properties of Immediate Family

| Most Helpful | Least Helpful |
|------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Just listening | Getting emotional or upset |
| Not giving advice | Discomfort with the problem |
| Rational, level-headed responses | Ignorance about the problem |
| Sharing similar experiences | Not validating her experience |
| Giving space for her to make her own decisions | Downplaying or minimizing problem |
| Supporting both partners | Lack of confidentiality |

Most & Least Helpful Properties of Ecclesiastical Support

| Most Helpful | Least Helpful |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Initiating contact with her | Giving inappropriate or harmful advice (i.e., "wear lingerie", "have sex more often with him") |
| Following-up | Not being directive enough |
| Asking for wife's viewpoint of husband's recovery | Avoiding the issue (or her) despite knowledge of problem |
| Normalizing/validating her feelings | Procrastinating disciplinary action |
| Taking problem seriously | Over-spiritualizing problem despite serious effects (i.e., marital rape, prostitutes, child porn) |
| Being included in some of the husband's meetings with clergy | Silencing her ("I was sworn to secrecy by my Stake President") |
| Helping her connect with professional help/resources | Ill informed about the issue |

CAVED Principle

Connection: "I think the only thing that's really helped is coming to group and learning I'm not alone."

Advocate: "One pastor took it very seriously and said to him, 'You have a very serious problem and you need to get help', and I was like, 'Thank you!'"

Validation: "What a Bishop could have done for me was to listen and affirm that my experiences were understandable and legitimate."

Education: "I had been very naïve about this problem and I just sucked in the information I was being given."

Direction: "[Bishops] may not be the ones to have in depth knowledge about this, but at least they could give someone some places or resources that could help."

Questions & Contact Information



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