

# **Drug Abuse Impact on Early Phases of Marriage (1 to 5 Years): Exploring the Drug Addicted Wives Experiences**

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## **Abstract**

The article discusses the experience faced by the wife when their husband is involved in drug abuse. This case study focuses on the impact of drug abusers in their early phase of marriage (from 1 to 5 years of marriage), which is still less emphasized. The study's objective was to explore the experiences of women who lived through at-risk households after being married to a drug addict. The case study uses a qualitative method. A total of ten women were selected as informants using snowball sampling. Data collection was conducted through face-to-face interviews. All informants were divorced before reaching their five years of marriage. The experience in their early phase has shown all informants i) often beaten by the husband, ii) worried about their personal safety due to husband behaviour who is involved in other crimes, iii) dual-burden as the husband does not provide any basic need in the household, and iv) feeling uncomfortable during sexual intercourse due to husband forced and rough behaviour. Although marriage can be a protective factor in avoiding social problems, the drug abuse issues at an early phase, especially within 1 to 5 years of marriage, can cause risk and conflicts in the household. The study implies the importance of specific interventions for women whose husbands are drug-addicted to remain alert and aware of the risk of domestic abuse. It is also crucial for these young mothers to get exposed to existing social support agencies and experts who can be consulted when dealing with drug abuse.

**Keywords:** Wife Experiences, Early Phase in Marriage, Drug Addicted Husband, Marriage Life Risk, Drug Abuse

## **Introduction**

Marital satisfaction is characterized by several predictive factors such as communication style and life adjustment significantly affect the quality of marriage for young couples (1-10 years of marriage) in Malaysia (Marziah et al., 2020; Marziah et al., 2018). Most marital satisfaction studies focus on the duration or age of marriage. A 1-10 year marriage is categorized as the

first phase, which involves the process of introduction, adjustment, and life change. A review of the previous literature also documented the frequency of marital conflict and divorce at the same phase interval at lower marital age within 1 to 5 years. Newly married couples tend to experience conflict and disagreements in relationships. In this phase, various life transitions occur, such as changes in status from single to married, privacy and decision-making, financial, social, and parenting (Marziah, et al., 2019). Some findings from previous studies proved the marriage duration, especially the first five years, young couples, and communication style are catalysts for divorce problems (Abd. Majid & Hudin, 2017; Abe Sophian, et al., 2014). Financial circumstances are also often associated with marital instability (Dew & Steward, 2012). This factor is undeniably a trigger for couples to divorce. However, other factors also affect the household quality, especially at the early phase of marriage 1 to 5 years, such as drug addiction and crimes involvement. However, studies of drug influence focusing on this early phase marriage are still under-emphasized.

Every marriage and family institution has its own set of rules, roles, powers, structures, forms of communication, ways of discussion, and problem-solving. (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2012). Task and medium social control exist in the family to ensure all members meet the established rules' expectations. The accepted set of rules by the fellow family members will strengthen relationship stability. However, when there is the involvement of family members in crimes like drug addiction, and they are unable to handle it rationally, then the relationship between husband, wife, and other family members in the institution is threatened. Mostly they will decide to divorce as the only solution to overcome their problems by separating and making their respective paths.

Nowadays, the increasing numbers in divorce rates at the early phase of marriage 1 to 5 years is the most significant factor in family institutions changes (Velotti, et al., (2015). Harkonen, (2013); Dew & Steward (2012) assess this situation as a social problem. Early phase households tend to face financial pressures, and relationship conflicts potentially challenge the noble values of the family institution and the foundations of society. In a marriage involving drug abuse, the spouse or wife is more likely to divorce. Husband's behaviour and emotional state after being exposed to the dangers of drugs such as temperamental, aggressive behaviour, and inability to control their emotions effectively cause physical and mental stress on the wife (Juwariyah, 2011). Couples involved with drug abuse problems, especially husbands, have often been reported to have abused their wives and children.

Drug abuse has a long-term and ongoing impact, especially on women's children, without protective or social control interventions. Often, more significant effects are identified on the wife of a drug addict. According to Daley (2013), married women to drug addicts tend to experience emotional burdens, financial constraints, relationship conflicts, and increased roles/dual roles. Being trapped in a marriage with a drug addict triggers an emotional burden, especially feelings of anger, frustration, worry, fear, depression, shame, and guilt. The volatile emotions create stress to the addict's wife in the long run. They can change into less sensitive individuals and fail to emotionally close with the children. The neglect in children's emotions is noticeable when the mothers are faced with emotional stress. In addition, another significant factor that leads to divorce is the wives fear the long-term effects of drug abuse in children. Next, there are also financial constraints in the family due to much money spent on the husband to get drug supplies, especially after the husband becomes unemployed or be

imprisoned (Ibrahim, et al., 2021; Ezarina, 2020). The financial burden also worsens due to family dependency on the third party to borrow money. Most families are forced into debt due to the initial burden of much money being spent on drug abuse.

The literature also documents the existence of relationship conflict and the impact between spouses of drug abuse. The ongoing phase of conflict led to the occurrence of domestic abuse. Families become unstable due to relationship conflict, including more prone to other social problems. The wife and mother have difficulties showing love and a sense of security to her children while being trapped in long-phase conflict (Suchman, et al., 2013). Communication and ways of showing love between family members, especially children, will be affected and proven by previous studies as an encouraging reason for adolescents to engage in uncontrollable behaviour. Ezarina & Norulhuda (2019) study showed ineffective communication, and parents and other family members lack appreciation and love, exposing the child to social problems. Children from problematic families consider themselves as a victim of the disharmony family. The study informants admitted that after often being scolded by the mother or other family members, the children tend to run away from home, engaging in uncontrollable behaviour due to the fight, discomfort at home, loneliness, boredom, or feeling unloved. The chaotic house atmosphere causes teenagers to seek outside happiness uncontrollably, especially for attention and to gain love among their peers (Ezarina & Norulhuda, 2019). No less, the involvement of children from conflicted families with academic dropouts and school bullies (Sabramani, et al., 2021). In some instances, if moral danger is detected in the family, the authorities need to curb it by rescuing these children and placing them in protective institutions. As a result, family separation and more severe psychosocial impact can occur, especially the wife.

Children in these drug-addicted families are also at risk of developmental phase dysfunction. Often these children are diagnosed with nutritional problems, health, uncontrollable behaviour, weak emotional regulation skills, behavioural problems due to crime, academic dropout, and some of them face mental problems such as depression and anxiety disorders. For the worse scenario, children from at-risk households are potentially imitated adults in drug addiction. In fact, Fauziah, et al (2014) also stated moderate family relation and peer risk factors directing teenagers involvement in drugs. The risk occurs without gender bias, and it does involve not only boys but also girls. A study conducted on female drug users by Fauziah et al (2014) revealed that 39.5 percent of females started to get involved in drug abuse activity since they were under 18 years old (age gap 15-20 years). A majority (54.6 percent) experience consuming drugs consistently (with daily intake) since their onset of addiction, and more than half of the drug abusers (60.5 percent) showed moderate levels in family relations. In addition, these children are also prone to drug-addictive behaviour, according to their brother or sister (Edwards, et al., 2017). Research by Edwards et al (2017) stated that conflict marriage predicts a child's involvement in drug abuse, especially when one or both of their parents have been involved in drugs. The cycle is not easy to handle unless specific remedial intervention is taken (Klostermann & O'Farrell, 2013). Families at risk will turn their family members into drug addicts when their social environment encourages drug abuse. For example, children who grow up with residential family members who abuse drugs are considered directly exposed to a risky environment. Families are counted at high risk when: i) coldness relationship between child and parents, ii) common parental concern for engaging in children's activities, iii) poorness in family manging practice, iv) other family members

already involved in drugs, and v) parents do not care about children getting addicted to drugs. Zainah, et al (2013); Miller et al (2013) associated the family as a risk factor agent when there are members abusing drugs. Therefore, to avoid total impact on the family, wives decided to divorce and manage their children without a husband.

Previous research literature review raised the question of the impact of drug addiction in the early phases of marriage from the wives perspective? The question should be answered in more depth based on the research scope, which considers the experiences of wives in the early phases of marriage. The questions that arose prompted a study to be conducted with the objective:

1. Identify the profile of divorced women at their early phases of marriage due to their husband's drug abuse involvement.
2. Explore the impact of drug addiction on marriage based on their experience marrying a drug addict.

### **Methodology**

This is a case study research that explores the experience of informants using qualitative methods and location is in a rural area in Kedah State, Malaysia. Kedah ranks third with the highest divorce rate in the country after Selangor and Johor and is feared to record a significant increase since 2015. Based on the Malaysian Islamic Marriage Management System (SPPIM) of the Malaysian Islamic Development Department (JAKIM), divorce in Kedah in 2019 was 23.6 percent compared to 12.7 percent in 2015. Kedah also recorded a high statistic of drug addicts, which is 3528 cases in 2019 alone (AADK, 2021). This figure surpasses the cases in Penang and Selangor. The researcher's reference on the distribution of drug addiction cases and divorce cases is the primary justification for the selection of informants in the state.

The study used the face-to-face interview method and was conducted on ten selected women using snowball sampling. To ensure informants' contentment, informal and unstructured forms of interviews were used, so the informants could share personal experiences and answer all questions openly. Interview questions were constructed based on literature analysis that coincided with the scope of the study and the formation of the study objectives. Three main sections of interview questions were formed. Section A is related to the informant profile. Section B explored the factors of drug abuse and the informant's experience living with a drug-addicted spouse. At the same time, section C focused on the scope of the impact of drug abuse on the household.

Data were analysed using manual thematic analysis, and coding-type analysis was developed from the raw data obtained. Data coding begins with an overview of the issues studied, followed by open coding/open coding to find substantive data. After that, the dominant data was extracted using axial coding. Trends to emerging subthemes were analysed and grouped according to research objectives. Finally, the data were analysed using selective coding. Data selection and integration are made by linking the core categories for all existing themes at this stage. The analysis process was transparently conducted based on six steps of thematic analysis by (Clarke & Braun, 2013).

## Results

Drug abuse is not only a universal phenomenon and negative impact on social change in society but also causes marital conflict and disruption in the family institutions. Finding of the study report informant's experience as drug addict wives. Which is the main similarity is all the informants once had a husband who was involved in drug abuse and they were divorced during the study was held. The informants admitted divorce happens in less than 5 years of marriage due to their incapability to survive with the drug addict husband. A brief profile of all ten study informants is shown in Table 1.0

Table 1.0  
*Informant Profile*

Informant	Age	Age of Marriage	Education	Profession	Income	Period of Marriage
1	27	20	PMR	Tailor	RM 1200.00	5 years
2	25	21	SPM	Factory Operator	RM 1500.00	3 years
3	27	22	SPM	Boutique Assistant	RM 1000.00	4 years
4	21	17	PMR	Grocery Store Assistant	RM 900.00	3 years
5	21	18	PMR	Saleswoman	RM 1200.00	2 years
6	23	19	SPM	Cashier	RM 1000.00	3 years
7	24	20	SPM	Factory Operator	RM 1500.00	3 years
8	23	20	SPM	Factory Operator	RM 1500.00	2 years
9	23	19	SPM	Factory Operator	RM 1500.00	3 years
10	26	21	SPM	Saleswoman	RM 1200.00	4 years

Three main themes were identified from the thematic analysis conducted. All informants interviewed stated, the ex -husband's involvement in drug abuse impacted i) domestic violence and other criminal tendencies, ii) irresponsible husband in providing household alimony and iii) husband's aggressive attitude in sexual intercourse.

### Domestic Violence and Other Criminal Tendencies

Drug addicts among married men were also detected to be more potentially get involved in domestic violence against their wife and children. Based on the interviews conducted, the researcher found that all the informants stated the same thing about always being beaten by the husband. According to the informants, their husbands were often under the influence of drugs, acted out of control, and often beat their wives even with minor offenses. This can be identified by the statement

*"...whenever he is out of money, he will ask me. If i did not give him i definately get beaten. If anything goes wrong, i also get beaten up....he like to hit"*  
(Informant 4).

Informants as a whole felt they were unsafe with their husbands even at their place because of being constantly beaten.

*"...yes,i still can not forget things he have done to me untill no. He once wanted to take away my daugther. He wants to sell to other, lucky that i arrived a little early from work that day. He pick my daugther at mom house, and coincidentally i go straight to my mothers house at that time. So i can confiscated back my daughter. At the same time he became furuous and hit me with a wood until bled and got 24 stitches at my head. Lucky enough there were people in fornt of my house at the moment, if not i might died at that time"*  
(Informant 2).

A part from that, drug abuse may lead to another crime. Married couples who are involved in drug abuse are no exception to be desperate and get involved in crimes such as stealing, snatching, burglary, robbery, drinking alcohol and gambling. Statements from informant 3 as an example assert the following: *"Normally a drug addict also drink alcohol, and gambling. When you are under drug influence it does happen like that, they hit and lose control."* In addition, higher cost to buy and the need for constant drugs supply made infromants husband commit to another crimes as stated to get more money over time.

*"because they need money to by drugs, addiction id already there so he will find a way to get drugs. So, at that time there were indeed many other evil things and crimes he could commit. For example steal motorcycle, or from any stores or directly confiscated if he is in high state, his addiction became worsen"*  
(Informant 3).

Studies conducted by Vanassche et al (2017); Juwariyah (2011) clearly confirmed the statement issued by informants regarding the impact of drug abuse with other crimes involvement as well as domestic abuse. A husband who uses drugs is more aggressive and unable to control their emotions effectively. Apart from that, they are also low in adaptability, not interested in family organizing especially providing alimony to their household. So they are often unable to commit to work and earn money in easy ways. Eventually, this justification explains their involvement in domestic and street crimes (theft, robbery, snatching, burglary) is more prevalent to this group.

### **Irresponsible Husband in Providing Household Livelihood**

The results from the data showed, all informants stated that their husband were irresponsible in providing household livelihood. An informant stated;

*"...since he start take drug, he no longer cares about our family problem... the only thing he think only money."*

(Informant 9)

Further analysis found, the situation was driven by two factors, either i) the husband did not have a permanent job, or ii) the husband used all their income/ salary to by drugs.

#### *Husband have no permanent job*

Drug abuse among married couple is closely linked to the husband occupation status who do not have a permanent job. According to the informant, their husband was either unemployed, part-timer worker, or work alone by themselves. Although some of them used to work as a permanent worker their involvement in drugs make them often leave the job and behave out of control. So they were terminated from the job, and start neglecting their responsibility in providing alimony to the household and family.

*"... He is unemployed (husband). Sometimes he work but he do other activities, sohe left his job behind. And we only able to do normal work which is not permanent. Mostly we are self-employed or other suitable job that we can adjust and arrange the schedule."* (Informant 5)

#### *Salary / income to buy drugs*

Although some informants admitted the husband had worked full time, but used all the income earned to buy drugs. All informants of this study tell the same thing about their husband's behavior. According to them, the husband is willing to do anything in order to get money for drugs such as selling their wife's jewelry and house furniture. In fact, they are working just to earn money for drugs. Indirectly, they neglect the responsibilities and monthly household alimony for the family.

*"if he has it, he work just to earn income for him to buy drugs. The income that they gain we used it for taking drugs. When it turn that way, family livelihood will become burdened. Even school for children also not perfect. Nowadays they need money for school, even wife turn into problem when involves household livelihood"* (Informant 10)

#### **Aggressive Sexual Intercourse**

Researchers found that some informants stated, the husbands were often aggressive when under the influence of drugs and forced their wives to have sex.

*"...yes, he used to hit me, during my confinement period and he force me to have a sex while i still in my confinement day."* (Informant 6).

The problem in terms of the frequency of having sex is also an issue raised by drug addict wives. The husband's inability in controlling their behavior while under drugs influence makes them force their wives into sexual intercourse even though they are not ready. This can be seen from the following statements:

*"... people who are addicted to drugs actually have higher sex driven because they are more passionate. Because he took drugs, and there is stimulus in his body. So he need something especially from sex."* (Informant 10)

According to the informant, their partner behavior becomes more aggressive and increases in sexual desire as a result of the drug stimulus after-effect.

**Discussion**

The study had identified the impact of drug abuse on early-phase marital relations (1 to 5 years). An in-depth exploration was conducted on divorcee informants, they admitted going through a divorce while experiencing domestic conflict due to their husband's involvement in drug addiction. Apart from that, all informant's husbands were also engaged in other crimes and abused their wives and children. Drug users typically behave temperamental, aggressive, and have difficulty handling emotions well. In other extreme cases, drug addiction also leads to sexual abuse. Although not all of them (drug addicts) tend to have sexual gratification by forcing their partner into sex and domestic violence previous studies prove the existence of a significant link between them. These findings are supported by studies from (Sinha, 2018; Moore, et al., 2011).

Marriage has become one of the protective factors of drug addiction. Family and marital support are the contributing factors for them to control and stop abusing the drugs. The emotional and psychosocial needs are met through marital relationships especially family love becomes a positive element of protecting against drug abuse. Yet, it can lead to failure when the quality of marital relations deteriorates, remuneration commitments decrease and the adaptation of the role of head of the family is affected since the early phase (1 to 5 years) of marriage. The couples studied were still in the early stages of marriage were prone to experience relationship conflict and discord. This phase requires a high adaptive ability to the needs of the environment by each married couple. Adaptation is important and the husband's entanglement in other crimes and drug addiction will complicate this adaptation. Drug addiction is not a single risk but carries with it linked problems such as crime. This study proves the informant's ex-husband was also involved in other crimes such as stealing, snatching, drinking alcohol, and gambling.

The tendency of drug addicts to engage in crime has also been documented by many previous researchers including (Ibrahim, et al., 2020; Ibrahim, et al., 2021; Vanassche et al., 2017). These researchers explain drug abuse eventually facade to other crimes such as stealing, snatching, robbery, and burglary. The cost of owning drugs is high and the majority of them need an almost daily supply of drugs due to increased tolerance. As a result, they are willing to do anything for money to buy supplies, including engaging in crime. Eventually, a strong justification of involvement in domestic crime and street crime (theft, robbery, snatching, burglary) is more prevalent to this group. To an extent, crime has become a source of income (Ezarina, 2020). However, money from the crime is fully spent on drug purchases and leaves their family in poverty and neglect. The more critical impact certainly involves the addict's physical disability and health status. Even though they are working, it is difficult for them to survive in employment because dependency on drugs affects body physicality. Persistent and repeated addiction, recidivism indeed affect employer trust (Ezarina, et al., 2016). The risk of dismissal justifies the direct effect of neglect of alimony and irresponsibility to the family. In addition, marriage satisfaction is also driven by husband and wife perceptions towards marriage and their spouses (Zainah, et al., 2012). Wives were reported to be more likely to be less satisfied with marriage than husbands. This adds to the stress and find it easy to stop the marriage. In some situations, wives would consider the marriage to be of poor quality and they should consult with the spouses about work and work responsibilities, but the partner does not care as a result of being stuck with drugs. This marital situation could trigger discord and stress in a relationship especially for those who are in their early phase of marriage.



The study has proven, drug addiction creates a dangerous environment in the household, especially for spouses and kids. The family would be in danger stages of drug addiction when the existing indicators: i) the argument frequency about the financial burden and failure in fulfilling responsibilities between spouse are higher, ii) wife or spouse shows signs of severe emotional stress, iii) several episodes of physical, psychological and sexual abuse on wife and children, iv) often wife will help their husband in giving excuses to his employer by saying he is unable to attend work due to illness and v) the wife began to distance herself from friends, neighbors and close family members due to her fear, that her husband's drug addiction would be known to others. This danger phase indicator explains the wife's experience while dealing with the impact of drug addiction in the household.

In addition, marital conflict under the age of five years stemming from the addiction not only higher the risk of divorce but also children neglect. Certainly being a single mother at a young age is more challenging because the early phase is an important phase in finding economic stability in life. Significant challenges due to the dual role as a breadwinner and mother of a young child have to be overcome and it is likely to lead to neglect. This research has implications about the importance of a specific intervention for women whose husbands abuse drugs to remain sensitive to the risk of domestic abuse by spouses. It is very important for these young mothers to be exposed to the existence of support agencies and experts who can be consulted when faced with marital conflict. Their willingness to be open in avoiding long-term effects, especially on the child, is very significant when dealing with drug-involved family situations. They need to be brave enough to come out for help. Any form of domestic violence and causal factors are very difficult to deal with when i) the wife or victim is highly emotionally and financially dependent on the husband, ii) still keen to live in the same house, and iii) avoid in seek social support. Such cases require immediate intervention because domestic abuse is at risk of becoming severe or resulting in loss of life. The effects will be worse when the perpetrator/husband is insane due to the influence of drugs. So the wife's willingness to come forward for help is very important.

Aspects of advocacy or legislation, safety and immediate protection from abuse, treatment for wife and children, financial security because the wife also suffers economic abuse (barred from having money) need to be emphasized. The implications of this study also highlight the development of the helping profession, especially social work practice with family in identifying the priorities of wives who face various issues when the husband is involved with drug addiction. Emotional abuse, financial constraints, child neglect, risk adapter when a husband breaks the law, and trauma have been shaped the negative experiences of the married life of drug-addicted wives. Among the various impacts that have been discussed previously, the priority that needs to be emphasized in helping is to take into account emotional needs and resilience. Efforts to cope with trauma for example need to be addressed first before other interventions are mobilized. Moreover, clients' capacity in dealing with problems also should be given specific attention, especially in decision making and self-determination.

## Conclusion

The finding presented in the article is about the wives experiences and effects of being married to drug-abused husbands. The experiences in their early marriage phase 1-5 years showed that all informants were often beaten by their husband, worried about their safety as a result of crimes committed by their husbands, felt a burden in providing household alimony due to their husband irresponsibility, and feeling discomfort in forceable sexual intercourse by the husband. Although marriage can be a protective factor from the occurrence of social problems, due to husband involvement in drug abuse the risk of marital conflict and instability becomes higher for marriage within 1 to 5 years.

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