



CO-DEPENDENCY: AN INTRODUCTION

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Abstract

Co-dependency is a term originally coined to describe behaviors observed in relationships with individuals struggling with substance abuse. It is described as an overindulgent emotional or psychological dependence on a spouse, typically one who is ill or addicted and needs assistance. Co-dependency frequently arises as a result of trauma, dysfunctional family relationships, or neglect in early life. People who engage in codependent behaviors frequently struggle to retain their feeling of autonomy, set boundaries, and communicate their needs and desires. Psychotherapeutic techniques like group therapy, cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), and mindfulness practices can assist people in recognizing and challenging unhealthy coping mechanisms, identifying and challenging maladaptive beliefs and behaviors, and developing self-awareness and self-compassion. Furthermore, creating a therapy atmosphere that is both validating and supportive is crucial for helping people navigate the difficulties of co-dependency. By recognizing the signs and underlying factors of co-dependency and accessing appropriate support and interventions, individuals can embark on a path of self-discovery, healing, and the cultivation of healthier, more fulfilling relationships. This article examined the concept of co-dependency from a psychological standpoint, exploring its definition, manifestations, underlying factors, and impact on individuals and relationships.

Keywords: Co-dependency, Spouse, Dependence.

INTRODUCTION

Co-dependency is a psychological concept that describes an unhealthy relationship that individuals may have with those who are closest to them. Originally believed to entail families of substance abusers, it has expanded to encompass different sorts of dysfunctional relationships in recent years [7]. A codependent relationship is one in which one partner takes on the role of "the giver," putting aside their wants and happiness in favor of the other, who is "the taker." The tie in question need not be romantic; it can also develop naturally between friends, family members, parents, and children [7]. "The term was originally coined in the 1950s, in the context of Alcoholics Anonymous" explains Dr. Renee Exelbert, a licensed psychologist and author based in New York, "to support partners of individuals who abused substances, and who were entwined in the toxic lives of those they cared for." [5]

What is Co-dependency?

Excessive emotional or psychological reliance on a spouse, usually one who needs help due to an addiction or sickness. In a codependent relationship, one person is dependent on the other. [4]

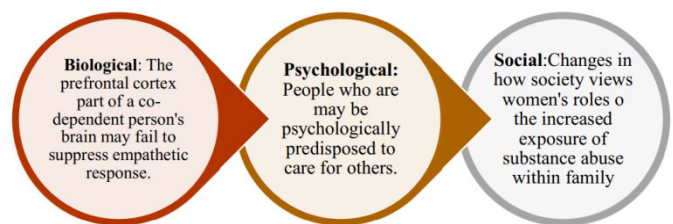


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Causes of Co-Dependency

[5] Research suggests that there may be biological, psychological, and social elements that contribute to co-dependency

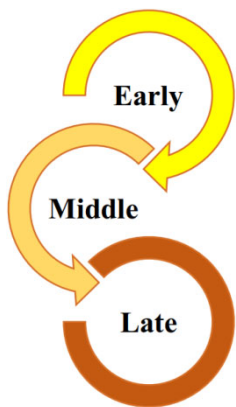
- Biological
- Psychological
- Social



Signs of Co-dependency:[5]

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low Self-Esteem • Low Levels of Narcissism • Familial Dysfunction • Depression • Anxiety • Stress • Low Emotional Expressivity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having a bad time saying no • Having poor boundaries • Showing emotional reactivity • Feeling compelled to take care of people • Having a need for control, especially over others. • Fixation on mistakes • Feeling a need to be liked by everyone • Denying one own needs, thoughts, and feelings |
|--|--|

The three stages of Co-dependency: [10]



Early stage:

Codependents become increasingly and unhealthily obsessed with someone. Problematic behavior is denied or rationalized. Lost in their desire to please, the codependent may give up their friends and activities.

Middle stage:

Self-blame, guilt, and anxiety rise. As the codependent invests increasingly more in the relationship but receives little in return, their self-esteem rapidly declines—disappointment, bitterness, and frustration increase. The codependent could nag, blame, or manipulate their loved one to make them change. They could exaggerate to family and friends about the actions of their loved ones. The likelihood of participating in risky addictive behaviors including substance abuse, binge drinking, unhealthy eating, gambling, or excessive shopping rises. Despite this, the codependent also exhibits an increase in cooperative, dependent, and compulsive tendencies.

Late stage:

Co-dependency signs have an impact on both mental and physical health. Stress-related conditions include heart disease, sleeplessness, sciatica, headaches, muscle pain, digestive issues, and eating disorders may manifest. Addiction makes things worse. Self-care is no longer important as self-esteem plummets.

Co-Dependent Vs Interdependent Behaviour:

Codependent	Interdependent
The codependent person has no hobbies and only does what their partner does.	Each person maintains separate hobbies while also having shared interests together.
The codependent partner always does the household chores and takes the blame if they're not completed.	Both partners look for ways to contribute to the household.
The codependent person keeps their partner's gambling addiction a secret and pays off their debts.	Each partner encourages the other to address problems, such as addiction, without enabling the behavior.
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REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Co-dependency is a complicated and contentious idea that mental health experts have used to guide their practices throughout the years. The fundamental issues with co-dependency have been attempted to be identified by researchers, but their evidence is still inconclusive. This study uses interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) to investigate the lived experience of co-dependency from the viewpoint of self-identified codependents for the first time. The participants described their shared experience of codependency as a real, palpable psychological issue that followed a pattern consisting of three interconnected subjective factors: a severe lack of a distinct sense of self, a persistent pattern of extreme emotional, relational, and occupational imbalance, and an explanation of present issues based on parental control and abandonment during childhood (Bacon *et al.*, 2018).

Case-control research in 2016 by Leili Panaghi *et al.*, aimed to determine the moderating effect of personality traits on the relationship between living with an addicted man and co-dependency. The co-dependency score was significantly higher among addicted men's wives. In addition, for these women, there was a strong positive correlation between co-dependency and neuroticism as well. Multiple regression analysis confirmed the significant interaction effects of being an addict's wife and personality traits of neuroticism, openness, and agreeableness on co-dependency.

The purpose of the study by (Kingston *et al.*, 2007) was to examine the effects of mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) in particular on rumination, as well as the effectiveness of MBCT in reducing residual depressive symptoms in psychiatric outpatients with recurrent depression. The clinical efficacy of mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT), a new group-based intervention for the prevention of relapse in recurrent depression, has not been thoroughly studied with regard to how well it treats post-depressive symptoms. After the MBCT, there was a noticeable reduction in depressive symptoms, and there was an even greater reduction at the one-month check-up. Scores for rumination also showed a tendency to decline. The remaining depressive symptoms are significantly reduced by group MBCT, which may be mediated by mindfulness-based cognitive therapy.

How To Overcome Co-dependency? [6]

The main emphasis of these various treatment modalities is on altering how codependent person views themselves and their relationships. The battle against co-dependency requires a lot of work. It can be more challenging to change co-dependency-related behaviors when it has a strong base or has been there for a long time. No matter how severe your co-dependency is, you can still get over it. Spending some time apart is one of the first steps in getting over co-dependency. If it makes it easier to manage, you can start slowly. Consider spending some time alone doing something you enjoy doing with your partner. Alternatively, to get that room, plan activities with friends or just go run errands by yourself. Setting aside time for yourself can help you combat co-dependency and you'll begin to feel more independent.

This can involve interventions with various (or numerous) goals: [7]



1. Learn to assert yourself

Some examples of assertiveness:

- “I know you want me to pay your parking fine, but I believe it's your responsibility.”
- “I know you'd prefer me to stay longer, but I'm tired and need to leave.”

2. Focus on yourself

This is one of the ways to overcome co-dependency. To take care of yourself, you need to focus on your own needs first. It is before worrying about what anyone else wants or needs from you.

3. Building self-esteem

- Build positive social relationships.
- Practice healthy diet and sleep habits
- Exercise more often.
- Note your strengths
- Manage your expectations.
- Don't focus too much on comparisons

4. Improving boundary setting

Because they want to win the approval of everyone around them, codependents frequently struggle with setting limits. However, you must learn how to say no and only say yes when you truly mean it if you want to take care of yourself. Another factor contributing to codependents' propensity to sacrifice their wants and happiness to appease a partner is weak or unclear boundaries.

5. Encouraging self care

Boundary setting is just one form of self-care. People with codependent tendencies can also benefit from learning to prioritize their self-care, needs, and happiness before taking care of others.

6. Practice self-compassion

Developing self-compassion is one of the key strategies for overcoming co-dependency. This entails accepting oneself for who you are, flaws and all. It also entails treating yourself

with compassion rather than punishing yourself for the mistakes you make. To change unhealthy behaviors, start by forgiving yourself for your imperfections and treating yourself with kindness.

7. Maintain healthy diet

It's crucial to have a healthy diet because unpleasant emotions can frequently bring on co-dependency. Be sure to eat foods like lean protein sources, whole grains, fruits, and vegetables, as well as healthy fats like nuts, seeds, and oils high in omega-3s. Naturally, you should also be sure to get plenty of water during the day.

Techniques of treating co-dependency:[9]

Group therapy: Several different group interventions may be effective for co-dependency. The group dynamic gives individuals an opportunity to form healthier relationships in an appropriate space. Group therapy often involves giving positive feedback and holding individuals accountable.

Family therapy: Family therapy targets dysfunctional family dynamics. Family members learn how to recognize their dysfunctional patterns so they can learn how to improve their relationships. Improved communication is often a key goal of family therapy.

Cognitive therapy: The ideas that contribute to dysfunctional relationship patterns can be targeted in cognitive therapy. The aim is to enable the other person to take more ownership of their behavior and induce good behavioral adjustments.

Mindfulness practices: Last but not least, mindfulness training keeps the mind sharp and concentrated. There are several ways to do this, including through yoga, meditation, or simply just spending time in nature. You'll notice that if you practice this often, your thoughts will begin to naturally shift away from codependent thinking and toward concepts that are more constructive and healthier.

Co-dependent anonymous: Creating healthy relationships is the main goal of the fellowship known as Co-Dependents Anonymous. The desire for love and healthy relationships is the only prerequisite for membership. A twelve-step program called Co-Dependents Anonymous (CoDA) is for those who want to build meaningful and healthy relationships. Ken and Mary Richardson started Co-Dependents Anonymous, and the first gathering, which drew 30 attendees, took place on October 22, 1986, in Phoenix, Arizona [3].

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