

Alcohol, Domestic Abuse & Sexual Assault



IAS

Institute of Alcohol Studies

Key Points

Between 25% and 50% of those who perpetrate domestic abuse have been drinking. In some studies the figure is as high as 73%.

Cases involving severe violence are twice as likely as others to include alcohol.

Alcohol can be a compounding factor in domestic abuse, but not the root cause.

Alcohol should not be used as an excuse for those who perpetrate abuse, but neither should its influence be ignored.

Key Points

Alcohol use by the victims of domestic abuse is a complicated issue.

7.3% of women and 5% of men experienced domestic abuse in 2011/12.

Overall 31% of women and 18% of men had experienced some sort of domestic abuse since the age of 16. Over 80% of those who experience four or more incidents of domestic abuse are women.

Alcohol & those who perpetrate domestic abuse

Biological and social effect

Perpetrators may intentionally use alcohol to justify aggressive behaviour (sexual and non-sexual)

Alcohol increases the likelihood of perpetrating violence, through reduced inhibition and increased aggression

Alcohol also has a psychopharmacological effect on cognitive functioning, can cause drinkers to misread and disregard body language

Alcohol abuse & those who suffer domestic abuse

There is little robust data on levels of alcohol consumption (problematic and otherwise) among survivors. Some small scale studies have found:

- A US study of 'female alcoholic patients' (n = 103) found that two thirds of women had suffered partner abuse in the previous 12 months.
- Another US study reports that 60% of women accessing drug or alcohol services (n = 360) reported current or past domestic abuse.
- 25-75% of people who have survived abusive or violent traumatic experiences report problematic alcohol use, compared with 10-30% of people who experience accident-, illness-, or disaster-related trauma

Alcohol & access to refuges

- Most refuges are 'dry'.
- The majority of refuges in London are required to support women with a range of support needs, and cannot operate a blanket policy of excluding women who drink problematically.
- Nonetheless, many are reluctant to accept women who drink problematically.
- Limited data on the number of women drinkers who are supported in refuge - not collected systematically
- Question mark about how refuge staff assess alcohol-related risk and needs at point of referral
- Anecdotal evidence that there is an increase in heavy drinking among refuge service users - lack of knowledge/confidence in how to address

Alcohol & dual perpetrator abuse

Cases of dual perpetrator domestic violence are the most likely to involve alcohol

Alcohol found in 88% of cases

Within this men are still more likely to instigate abuse, and to drink more.

Alcohol, children & domestic abuse

Alcohol misuse is estimated to be involved in 25% – 33% of child abuse cases.

Parental drinking is the number one reason that children contact ChildLine.

Children who experience abuse have a greater propensity to develop alcohol and drug problems.

Denmark: compulsory to offer treatment for children of alcoholics.

New York: alcohol abuse by parent is assumed to be evidence of child neglect.

Preloading & high caffeine drinks

Preloading linked to increased consumption, increased sexual assaults and increased fights and injuries.

Growing research linking the mixture of high caffeine energy drinks with alcohol to an increased risk of sexual assault for both men and women.

Policies to reduce levels of alcohol-related domestic abuse

Pricing policies

Improved training for law enforcement agencies

Reforms to drug and alcohol services

The price of alcohol

Reducing the affordability and accessibility of alcohol is associated with reduced incidents across a range of violent crimes.

NICE: pricing policies 'the most effective way of reducing alcohol-related harm'.

MUP research found increases in alcohol price were associated with reductions in overall crime, violent crime and sexual assault. Evidence for the effect on domestic violence was inconclusive.

Other research found that a 1% increase in alcohol price resulted in a 5% reduction in the likelihood of domestic violence against wives.

Improved training for law enforcement agencies

Betsy Stanko review of approximately 500 rapes allegations reported to the Met police in April/May 2012:

- Those with learning difficulties were 67% less likely to have their case referred by police for prosecution than those without.
- Mental illness reduced the chances by 40%.
- Alcohol consumption prior to the attack reduced the chances of referral to prosecutors by 45%

AVA (2012) found that:

- Of 76 respondents, 57% had survived more than one drug-facilitated sexual assault and 17% reported surviving ten or more such assaults.
- 97% of respondents had consumed alcohol. Other substances consumed included cannabis (13%), benzodiazepines (8%) and cocaine powder (5%).
- When asked how drugs or alcohol consumption impacted on the police treatment of them, 47% (n=6) said that they believed it had impacted negatively or very negatively.
- Recommend further investigation of symptom clusters approach

Drug & alcohol services

- Increased awareness of domestic and sexual abuse
- Training on how to respond to disclosures
- Training on how to support survivors within substance misuse services
- Further support to deliver interventions for perpetrators who may be excluded from mainstream programmes due to alcohol use

Questions?

Find more at:
www.ias.org.uk - [IAS Reports](#)