



## Fact Sheet

August 2008



# Substance Abuse and Domestic Violence

### Background

Domestic violence (also known as spousal abuse) is the use of intentional verbal, psychological, or physical force by one family member (including an intimate partner) to control another.

Violent acts may include destruction of the victim's possessions, animal cruelty, and, in some instances, killing of the victim and/or his/her children. According to police records, nearly one-third of female homicide victims are killed by an intimate partner.

Since women are most often the victims of domestic violence, the information in this fact sheet is directed primarily at the battered woman or wife. Please note that incidents of domestic violence against men are increasing, and domestic violence also exists in same-sex partnerships.

Spousal abuse and battery are used for one purpose: to gain total control over the victim. In addition to physical violence, abusers use the following tactics to exert power over their wives or partners:

- Dominance, humiliation, isolation, threats, intimidation, and denial and blame.

Recognizing the warning signs and symptoms of spousal abuse is the first step, but taking action is the most important step in breaking free.

### The Correlation Between Substance Abuse and Violence

While there is no direct cause-and-effect link, the use of alcohol and other drugs by either partner is a risk factor for domestic violence. Although substance use may be a trigger for violence, there is a belief that the violence will stop once the drinking or drug

use stops. Substance use may increase the likelihood that a batterer will commit an act of domestic violence. It reduces inhibitions and distorts perceptions. Alcohol is often used as an excuse for violent behavior. Substance use and domestic violence tend to follow parallel escalating patterns.<sup>1</sup> Alcohol, narcotics, hallucinogens, and stimulants affect users in very different ways - influencing different degrees of violent or aggressive behavior.

Today, mounting evidence about the varied associations between domestic violence and substance abuse attests to the need to add violent behavior and victimization to the list of problems that should be explored during treatment.<sup>2</sup> According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), TIP 25, it was found that one-fourth to one-half of men who commit acts of domestic violence also have substance abuse problems. Women who abuse alcohol and other drugs are more likely to become victims of domestic violence. Victims of domestic violence are more likely to receive prescriptions for, and become dependent, upon tranquilizers, sedatives, stimulants, painkillers, and are more likely to abuse alcohol. As a result, victims of domestic violence are more likely to self-medicate against fear and to relieve stress.

Further evidence in the connection between substance abuse and family violence includes the following data:

- About 40 percent of children from violent homes believe that their fathers have a drinking problem and that they are more abusive when drinking.
- Childhood physical abuse is associated with later substance abuse by youth.
- Fifty percent of batterers are believed to have had addiction problems.

- Women in recovery are likely to have a history of violent trauma and are at high-risk of being diagnosed with post traumatic stress disorder.
- A large percentage of convicted batterers were raised by parents who abused drugs or alcohol.

A study conducted by the California Department of Justice found that more than half of defendants accused of murdering their spouses—as well as almost half of the victims—had been drinking alcohol at the time of the incident.<sup>3</sup>

### **Battering, Victimization, and Treatment Effectiveness**

Battering and victimization undermine substance abuse treatment in both direct and indirect ways. A substance-abusing woman often finds that her abusive partner becomes angry or threatened when she seeks help. Their violence or threats of violence may result in her dropping out of treatment.

Men's drinking patterns, especially binge drinking, are associated with marital violence across all ethnic and social classes. Chronic use of alcohol is a better predictor of battering than acute intoxication.

Drinking can increase the likelihood of victimization by placing women in settings where the chances are greater of encountering an offender.

Batterers often blame their victims for the violence, either implicitly or explicitly. Society often accepts this argument. Research suggests that intoxicated victims are more likely to be blamed than sober victims, and that aggression towards an inebriated victim is considered more acceptable than aggression towards a sober one.

### **Pregnant Women and Domestic Violence**

Women experiencing violence during pregnancy often obtain minimal or late

prenatal care. They are at increased risk of having poor weight gain, anemia, infections, preterm labor, delivering a low birth weight infant, or experiencing postnatal depression. Pregnant, battered, women are more likely to engage in smoking, drug use, and alcohol consumption, which can cause birth defects. Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) occurs in approximately 10 per 1,000 live births, or 40,000 babies per year. FASD lasts a lifetime and is entirely preventable by not drinking alcohol during pregnancy. It is the most serious and recognized condition in the spectrum. In 2005, the United States Surgeon General stated, in part, "A pregnant woman should not drink alcohol. A pregnant woman who has already used alcohol during her pregnancy should stop right away. A woman who is thinking about getting pregnant should stop using alcohol."

Women abused during pregnancy are at an even greater risk of violence in the postpartum period. The number of unwanted or unplanned pregnancies and terminations is higher among women experiencing domestic violence.

### **Substance Use and Child Abuse**

Although there is no direct "cause" of abuse, and no specific profile of abusers, many factors contribute and make abuse more likely to occur. Pressures on the family, alcohol and drug abuse, and social isolation can all lead to parental stress and increase the chances that a parent will strike out at their child.

Nearly four in 10 child victimizers reported that they had been drinking at the time of the crime; of those who had been drinking, about half reported that they had been drinking for six hours or more preceding the offense.

SAMHSA's evaluation of the Comprehensive Community Mental Health Services Program for Children found that children's mental health problems are closely related to parental substance abuse,

maltreatment, and other forms of family violence.<sup>4</sup>

### Implementing Differential Response for Families Impacted by Domestic Violence

Families who experience domestic violence differ considerably from one another. Differential response intends to provide development of a coordinated, community-based, family assistance and service delivery system for families who request, and are willing to receive, services to address a current or developing need that threatens family stability. Families may be more agreeable to access the care and services they need if the service delivery system is integrated in their communities, is culturally competent, and is not part of the traditional child protection system.

Differential response will assure children's stability and well-being in their own homes, promote healthy family functioning, prevent child abuse, and prevent the need for invasive child protective services involvement. Successful differential response intervention provides the family with an established network of support and resource systems to which the family will have continual access, when the need for intervention ends.<sup>5</sup>

### Domestic Violence Reported – California Office of the Attorney General – Statewide

<b>Domestic Violence-Related Data 2006 Statewide</b>
<b>134 – Murders were the result of intimate partner violence*</b>
<b>110 – Women in California were killed by their husbands, ex-husbands or boyfriends, ex-wives or girlfriends.*</b>
<b>176,299 – Abuse calls received by California law enforcement.*</b>
<b>80,946 – Abuse calls received by California law enforcement involving weapons.*</b>

\*California Department of Justice, Criminal Justice Statistics Center

<sup>1</sup> SAMHSA/CSAT, TIP 25; (Gondolf, 1995; Leonard and Jacob, 1987; Kantor and Straus, 1987; Coleman and Straus, 1983; Hamilton and Collins, 1981; Pernanen, 1976.)

<sup>2</sup> SAMHSA/CSAT, TIP 25, p. 5

<sup>3</sup> National Library of Medicine (NLM)

<sup>4</sup> SAMHSA

<sup>5</sup> Differential Response, Child Welfare Booklet

#### Links:

California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs, Resource Center  
[http://www.adp.ca.gov/RC/rc\\_sub.shtml](http://www.adp.ca.gov/RC/rc_sub.shtml)  
(916) 327-3728

California Department of Social Services  
<http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/cdssweb/PG20.htm>  
(916) 552-9800

Federal Department of Health and Human Services, Center for Disease Control  
<http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/dvp/IPV/default.htm>

California Department of Public Health  
<http://www.safenetwork.net/>  
Hotline - 1-800-799-SAFE