

Behind Closed Doors Network 29th February 2008

Domestic Abuse & Substance
Misuse

Julia Worms

‘Theory illustrates the complexity of intimate partner violence. Alcohol adds another dimension to this..... But the involvement of alcohol neither increases or diminishes an offender’s culpability’

Home Office Findings 216 (2004)

‘Substance use was an excuse, not a cause of violence’

Humphreys et al (2005)

Evidence Perpetrator/Substance Use

- BCS 1999 – 32% incidents of partner violence were committed when perpetrator were under influence of alcohol (Mirrlees-Black 1999)
- Alcohol consumed prior to the offence in nearly three-quarters of dv cases & a feature in almost two thirds.
(National Probation Service 2006)
- Almost half of those convicted of dv offences were alcohol dependent
(National Probation Service 2006)
- Rates of alcohol abuse & dependence may be 2 to 7 times higher than in general population (Logan 2001)

Evidence Perpetrator/Substance Use

- Among men undergoing alcohol treatment – 62% committed dv compared to 12% in a matched group of non-alcoholics (O'Farrell 1999)
- 58% rape offenders reported drinking prior to offence and 12% had used a combination of drink & drugs. 37% alcohol dependent. (Grubin 1990)
- Among women attending A & E 65% those injured by partners had partners with alcohol abuse, compared to 26% those injured in other ways (Kyriacou 1999)
- Of men attending alcoholism treatment number of drinking days positively related to frequency of partner violence in first years of treatment (O'Farrell)

Evidence Victim – Substance Use

- Women experiencing dv are up to 15 times more likely to misuse alcohol & 9 times more likely to misuse drugs than women generally. (Women's Aid)
- 60% women accessing drug or alcohol services reported current or past domestic abuse (Swan et al 2001 – USA)
- 40% Asian women who seek treatment for alcohol misuse are experiencing domestic violence (Shaikh et al 2000)
- Study of women using crack cocaine found 40% reported being regularly physically assaulted by current partner, 75% by a current or previous partner (Bury 1999)

Perpetrators - Impact

- Offender only drinking is common in incidents of partner violence (Martin & Bachman 1997)
- Levels of consumption contribute to likelihood & severity of violence (Quigley & Leonard 2000) (Humphreys 2005)
- Alcohol can escalate existing conflict (White & Chen 2002)
- Frequency & severity of violence significantly greater among alcoholics than non-alcoholics (O'Farrell 1999)
- Forms & patterns of violence associated with alcohol – suggest 'intimate terrorism' - raped or pressurised to have sex, threats to kill & strangulation attempts
- Substance misuse used as another dimension of power & control

Victims - Impact

- Alcohol misuse often consequence of dv - majority
- Coping strategy for severe & repeated abuse – dull ongoing physical or emotional pain
- Symptom of post-traumatic stress & psychiatric problems resulting from abuse
- Their substance misuse used as an excuse for the violence – minority
- Victims introduced to substances as a means of control
- Access to support & treatment may be disrupted
- Increase their vulnerability to longer-term abuse
- Rates of victim drinking in incidents of dv are much lower

Children

‘This has major implications for children living in families where there is both substance misuse & domestic violence’

(Humphreys 2005)

- Children are at greater risk of harm when dealing with dual problems
- Negative effects are compounded when suffering both
- Agencies need to understand their role in relation to early intervention & prevention

Children Evidence

- Child Line –
 - 44% children who called about significant other alcohol misuse had called to talk about physical abuse
 - 29% children who called about significant other drug use reported physical abuse

(Greater London Authority 2007)

 - Social Work Caseloads 50 – 90% cases include parents with drug, alcohol or mental health problems
- (Social Care Institute of Excellence 2003)

'The Role of Alcohol is Likely to be Multi-Faceted'

Finney – Home Office Findings
216 (2004)

Alcohol Related Factors

- 'Cultural' – how alcohol & its relation to violence is understood by society
- 'Person' – individuals responses to expectations & beliefs around alcohol
- 'Pharmacological' – the properties of alcohol
- 'Context' – physical & social circumstances in which alcohol is consumed

Graham 1998 - Canada

Alcohol Related Factors

Cultural Social & Individual Beliefs

- May drink to find the 'courage' to be violent
- Drink may provide an excuse for violent behaviour
- Intoxication may be evoked as a post offence excuse
- Social drinking norms may 'permit' violence against drunken victims

Alcohol Related Factors

Pharmacological

- Escalation of conflict
- Dis-inhibitor
- Increase aggressive responses
- Exacerbates existing conflict
- Intensify negative emotions e.g. depression

Alcohol Related Factors

Context & Relationship

- Disparate drinking patterns may be a source of conflict
- Heavy drinking source of conflict increasing risk of violence
- Relationship dissatisfaction
- Directional impact – violence may lead to relationship conflict & then to problem drinking