

## **Is there a link between domestic violence and alcohol?**

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Well, not nearly as much as most of us probably think.

As it turns out, the most direct link appears to be between the drinker's expectation of how he will act after having consumed alcohol and then how he in fact acts. In other words, wishing will make it so.

Wide-ranging research has been done over the last 20-30 years, in most cases, fully expecting to find a direct link; no one has been able to find that link.

However, researchers have found many interesting overlaps between alcohol use and domestic battery both myth and fact. Three widely held myths are:

- Alcohol use causes men to batter.
- Successful alcohol treatment will also address any violence issues.
- Battered women tend to be co-dependent and therefore contribute to the continuation of his violence and alcohol use.

Despite the commonly held belief that alcohol use leads directly to violence, the truth is more complicated. The rate of serious injury to their victim is higher among men, who drink heavily, but most abusive men do not drink heavily and most heavy drinkers are not abusive.

Additionally, there is no evidence that there is a link between alcohol use and any other frequently used abusive behavior including economic control, intimidation or isolation.

What is common is the conviction, among drinkers and the general public, that the use of alcohol disinhibits a person: they will do and say things that they would never dream of doing any other time. In other words, he has no control over his behavior and is therefore not responsible for it.

Research within the alcoholism and domestic violence fields have found something quite different. The major determination of behavior after drinking is not the disinhibiting effect of the alcohol, but the expectation of how they will act by the person doing the drinking. A distorted self-fulfilling prophesy: I feel like being mean so I will drink because I always get mean when I drink but, it won't be my fault because I won't be able to control myself.

He gets his way and no one appears to be the wiser including some prosecutors and judges. When a criminal justice official asks a man arrested for domestic battery if alcohol was involved, the perpetrator knows he's on the home stretch. His excuse has been handed to him on a silver platter: this wouldn't have happened if he hadn't been drinking, right?

Wrong.

Men, who choose to abuse their intimate partners and have not been held responsible in general, will without doubt find themselves even less accountable if they were also drunk. Drinking and the use of violence are both choices, choices that we allow far too many men to make in tandem.

So, will ordering these men to alcohol treatment also take care of their choice to use violence when drinking?

No.

There is no direct link between these two choices. Alcoholism is a disease and although some drinkers can not control themselves without very serious medical intervention, most drinkers are not alcoholics. The choice to use violence is not a disease and is not directly linked to alcohol use: most men who abuse their intimate partner are stone cold sober.

Women with abusive drunken partners overwhelmingly report that during alcohol recovery his choice to use violence not only continues, but frequently escalates creating an even higher risk for danger to her and her children. Or, if his use of physical violence lessens, then his use of threats, intimidation, manipulation, lying and isolation increases. Either way, the victims are certainly no better off and all too often worse off than before he began his alcohol recovery.

Alcohol served as his excuse for having no control over his choice to use violence. If or when this excuse is exposed for what it really is, his total control over the violent situation he has created will also be exposed. Intimate partner violence is not a lack of control; it is total and very deliberate control over certain individuals (his intimate partner) in specific situations (when he chooses) and in carefully selected locations (usually their home).

Are the women these men abuse co-dependent? Rarely. The victims of drunken abusive men are often very familiar with his moods. They must be able to assess their level of danger at any given time.

If a very well-meaning Al-Anon counselor, who is highly unlikely to be familiar with professional domestic battery safety planning, encourages this woman to get “self-focused” by practicing emotional detachment; to define her personal boundaries by setting limits on her partner’s behavior or most dangerous of all, to refuse to continue to make excuses for his drunken conduct; this woman will be in even greater danger and she knows it.

Abusive men set the boundaries, never, ever, ever their partners.

So what can be done?

The experts agree on three major points:

- Both alcohol abuse and domestic battery must be addressed separately and concurrently. There is not a one size fits all.
- Alcohol use has no bearing on why a man chooses to commit a domestic battery.
- To perpetrate intimate partner violence is not a sickness it is a choice.

Men's Batterers' Intervention and AA offer real solutions for many of these men and are both locally available. Contact Crisis Connection at 649-2303 (abusers) or 800-245-4580 (victims) for more information on the Men's Batterers' Intervention Program and professional victim safety planning. Contact Southern Hills Counseling Center for assistance with alcohol treatment and referral at 649-9168.

And please make these calls today...an awful lot is riding on these choices.

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