

**FACTS ON ALCOHOL, DRUGS AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE***Robert Mackey, M.A., C.A.S.*

Statistics on the correlation between domestic violence and addiction range between forty-four percent according to the New Jersey Uniform Crime Report of 1989, to more than eighty percent in some research studies. According to the National Woman Abuse Prevention Project in Washington, D.C., alcoholism and battering share the following characteristics: Both are inter-generational, both involve denial and minimization of the problem, and both involve isolation of the family. Considering this, any intervention with either of these problems should consider the implications and presence of the other.

The topic of domestic violence and its association with addiction has received increased attention over the past decade. In a report by Schuerger and Reigle, personality and background data were obtained on two-hundred and fifty men enrolled in a group treatment program for spouse abuse. The major conclusions of this investigation verified the prevalence of alcoholism, drug abuse, and violence in the family of origin of abusive men. Fitch and Papantonio found violence between the batterer's parents, abuse of the batterer as a child, alcohol and drug abuse, and economic stress to be highly correlated to spouse abuse. Lehmann and Krupp cited several striking statistics on drinking and wife abuse. Data from the New York based program, *Abused Women's Aid In Crisis*, indicate that alcohol abuse on the part of the husband was a factor in over eighty percent of their cases. Another interesting point cited by these authors was the survey conducted by Scott, who interviewed 100 wives of alcoholics who had identified themselves as victims of abuse. Seventy-two percent of these women indicated they had been threatened physically, forty-five percent had been physically attacked, and twenty-seven percent had experienced "potentially lethal" attacks. None of these women had sought help as victims of battering, suggesting that alcohol abuse is not

only a factor in many cases of domestic violence, but that wife battering may be very common in families of alcoholics.



Lehmann and Krupp carried out their own survey of 1500 cases of women calling a hotline for abused women in Philadelphia. Fifty-five percent of these women said that their husbands became abusive when drinking. They asserted that although the association between alcoholism and domestic violence is clear, "most existing research supports the conclusion that alcohol abuse does not cause domestic violence." A final portion of this research involved interviews with ten alcoholism counselors and ten workers specializing in the field of domestic violence. Contrary to the research literature, workers in both fields believed that alcoholism was in fact the primary cause of the violence. These findings support the need for collaboration between the fields of addiction treatment and domestic violence as well as professional training on the subject.

In summary, the literature on alcohol abuse and domestic violence makes it clear that men with drinking problems are at high risk to be abusive toward their spouses. However, it is also clear that many men who have drinking problems do not abuse their wives and that some men who don't have drinking problems do abuse their

wives. Therefore, the conclusion that there is no direct causal relationship between drinking and spouse abuse, a position supported by most of the researchers in this area, appears irrefutable.

There are a few salient points to consider when intervening with the problems of alcohol abuse and domestic violence. First, there is no causal relationship between the two, therefore recovering from one of the problems does not assure resolution of the other. Treatment of the addiction should precede treatment for the battering; however in many cases, counseling for battering can be initiated concurrently or can be instituted initially to assist in confronting the denial of the addiction. In either case, the violence must be addressed immediately, if not through counseling then through legal sanctions and restraints to assure the safety of the victim(s). Victims of domestic violence, where alcoholism is involved or not, should receive the benefit of counseling and education concerning the cycle and dynamics of battering. Victims should also be afforded the opportunity to investigate family-of-origin issues, beliefs, behavioral patterns, and role expectancies that increase vulnerability to abusive types of relationships through disempowerment. The goal of intervention is to assure safety and to empower both victim and abuser to act in their best interest independently. While family therapy is an important aspect of addiction recovery, it is contraindicated in the presence of domestic violence. Early recovery where both problems exist should focus on individual self-management and should incorporate marital or family treatment as an adjunct therapy later in the therapeutic process. Domestic violence creates an extreme imbalance of power in the relationship prohibiting effective negotiation. This disempowerment requires a reasonable degree of resolution before the effective assertion of the victim's needs can be realized.

The following components are recommended to be incorporated in treatment programs for battering, in order of priority:

1. Instruct/support the alcoholic-batterer to abstain from alcohol use and violence through direct appeal and appropriate treatment modalities (if necessary, through legal or formal sanctions such as restraining orders, job jeopardy, etc.).
2. Confront denial/minimization and projection of responsibility.
3. Incorporate recovery programs for addiction concomitant with anger management/self-control techniques.
4. Address potential relapse issues common to both problems such as resentment, self-pity, and cyclical self-defeating patterns of behavior.
5. Teach assertive communication skills.
6. Educate all parties on the techniques of effective problem-solving, thereby empowering each individual in the system to behave in his or her personal best interest.
7. Address the needs of the entire family system. These are inter-generational problems, and prevention is a primary objective.

#### Suggestions for Abusers

1. Seek help from people with specific knowledge of addiction and/or aggression control. This may require involvement in appropriate 12-step meetings and in anger management counseling. Remember, addressing one problem will not necessarily resolve the other.
2. Understand that both battering (physical and psychological) and addiction are progressive. The longer you deny the problems, the more dangerous they become.
3. Resentment, denial, self-pity, and loss of control are characteristic of alcoholism and battering. Be willing to get honest.
4. Alcoholism and family violence tend to be inter-generational; be prepared for long-term care. Be supportive and encourage help for your children and family.
5. You can't avoid influencing others, but you can't afford to control anyone but yourself.
6. Stop losing control of yourself to try to gain control of others.

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#### Suggestions for Battered Persons

1. Attempt to define yourself as a *survivor* of violence rather than a *victim*; it's more empowering.
2. Reach out to support groups; isolation is one of your greatest enemies.
3. Trust that ultimately you know what's in your best interest; act accordingly.
4. You are not the cause of another's behavior, so you cannot change someone else; focus on yourself.
5. Develop a safety plan for you and your children in the event that you need to act quickly. A local domestic violence service can assist you in developing your options and advise you of your rights. In New Jersey, the state-wide hotline number is: 1-800-572-SAFE.

Domestic violence and addiction can be a

lethal mix. The loss of control and effects of alcohol and drug abuse contribute significantly to the severity of beatings in abusive relationships. FBI statistics indicate that thirty percent of female homicide victims are killed by their husbands or boyfriends.

Battering, unlike the disease of addiction, is a socially learned behavior which can be reversed if the motivation for change is realized. Techniques and social skills can be re-learned to eliminate the violent behavior, just as life manageability can be attained through a commitment to recovery. Where abstinence of the drug alone is insufficient for true recovery, elimination of the violence is just the first of many steps toward breaking the cycle of domestic violence. The process of recovery ultimately benefits other significant people.

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The New Jersey Alcohol / Drug Resource Center and Clearinghouse serves institutions of higher education, state agencies, communities and school districts throughout the state of New Jersey by providing technical assistance, training, and resources in alcohol and other drug abuse education and prevention. For more information on the Clearinghouse, call or write to:

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