

A CLOSER LOOK: EXPLORING THE INTERSECTION OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE

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Learning Objectives

- Participants will explore the intersection of substance abuse and domestic violence in the context of child maltreatment.
- Participants will learn ways batterers use substance abuse to gain and maintain power and control.
- Participants will learn best practices for working with families experiencing both domestic violence and substance abuse.

DYNAMICS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



Defining Domestic Violence...

- Domestic Violence is a pattern of assaultive and coercive behaviors in which one partner wants to gain and maintain power and control over the other partner.



Did You Know...

- A woman is battered every 15 seconds in the US.
- Intimate partner violence is most common among women between the ages of 18-24.
- The most current national studies on DV suggest that 22-25% of all women will experience domestic violence at some point in their lives.
- Femicide, the homicide of women, is the leading cause of death in the US among young African-American women aged 15 to 45 years.

Dynamic: Power and Control



It is imperative that we step away from identifying domestic violence by solely looking at the physical abuse and assess the family for **WHO** has the power.

Domestic Violence & The Family System



- All members of the family are affected by the abusive person and tries to 'adapt' to the behavior to cause the least amount of personal stress.
- As the abuse progresses, each family member compulsively suppresses his/her feelings and learns to react with survival behaviors, serving as a wall of defenses for protection from pain.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & SUBSTANCE ABUSE



Scope of the Issue

- Across studies of women seeking alcohol treatment, 47-87% of women report having experienced violence by a male partner (Stuart, O'Farrell, & Temple, 2009)
- 74% of women in substance abuse treatment have experienced sexual abuse (Covington & Kohen, 1984; Kubbs, 2000)
- 75% of wives of alcoholics have been threatened and 45% have been assaulted by their partners (AMA, 1994)

Co-Occurring Problems

- A NIDA study noted 90% of women in drug treatment had experienced severe domestic and/or sexual violence from a partner during their lifetime (Miller 1994)
- Women who have been abused are 15 times more likely to abuse alcohol and 9 times more likely to abuse drugs than women who have not been abused (Shipway, 2004)

Common Myths: DV & Substance Abuse

- Substance Abuse causes domestic violence.
- Survivors who use substances are liars.
- Survivors who use substances are not good parents.
- Children of survivors who use substances will become addicts themselves.
- Substance abuse is a choice.

Substance Use as a Coping Mechanism

Experiencing Trauma = Utilizing Coping Skills

- Substance use can be a coping skill
 - To self-medicate from the effects of physical abuse
 - To escape the verbal, mental and psychological abuse
 - To prevent abuser from physically harming children and or survivor

Potential Sources of Trauma

- Childhood sexual, physical, emotional abuse, neglect, abandonment
- Rape, sexual assault, trafficking
- Domestic violence; experiencing/witnessing other violent crime
- Catastrophic injury or illness, death, loss, grief

Trauma Reduces Access to Services

- Women impacted by multiple issues are often ill-served in our programs, and perceived as disruptive when their substance use or psychiatric symptoms become evident (Bland, 2008).
- They often need our services the most yet are among those least likely to seek or receive services. When they do not receive services their children also remain invisible and at risk (Bland, 2008).

Mechanism of Control: Abusers Pose Risk to Partners

- Introducing partner to drugs
- Forcing or coercing partner to use (e.g. dirty needles, cottons, noxious substances)
- Isolating partner from recovery and other helping resources
- Coercing partner to engage in illegal acts (e.g. dealing, stealing, sex work)
- Sabotaging recovery efforts
- Using drug history as threat (deportation, arrest, CPS, custody, job, etc.)
- Blaming abuse on partner use and benefiting from:
 - Lack of services for women with substance use issues
 - Societal beliefs re: women & addiction

Power and Control

- "The drugs are an element of control. If they can keep you on the drugs, using or addicted to the drugs, they're in control. And it's like strings on a puppet. They just keep you under control because you want that other hit. You want that other drink."



Adult Survival Skills

- Being devious to survive, lying to the abuser and others
- Encouraging an abuser to drink until the pass out point so no one gets hurt
- Reasoning with abusers, expressing disapproval
- Lying about abuser's criminal behavior
- Trying to improve the relationship
- Creating internal space through fantasy that abuser can't touch
- Having sex to placate abuser and protect children from violence
- Drinking and using drugs to numb pain (adapted from Ganley and Schector, 1996)

Harm Facing Survivors Using Alcohol and Other Drugs

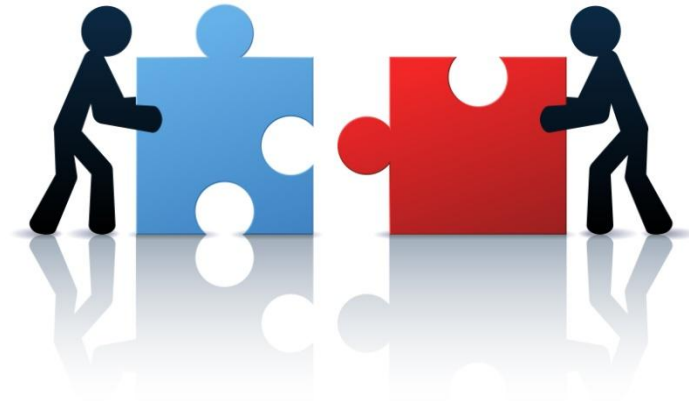
- Impaired cognition may make safety planning more difficult
- Effects of substance may prevent accurate assessment of:
 - The level of danger posed by a perpetrator
 - Capacity to defend against physical assaults
- Also, individuals impacted by substances may be reluctant to seek assistance or contact police for fear of arrest, deportation, or referral to a child protection agency

Harm Facing Survivors Using Alcohol and Other Drugs (cont.)

- Compulsive use/withdrawal symptoms may make it difficult to access shelter, advocacy, or other forms of help.
- A recovering survivor may find the stress of securing safety leads to relapse.
- If the survivor is using or has used in the past, they may not be believed.

Safe and Sober

- Do you address safety first, sobriety first or both together?



The Wrong Questions

- Why don't you just leave?
- Why don't you just quit using?
- Why don't' you just pull yourself together?
- What's wrong with you?



Re-Victimization

- People do **not** choose to develop psychiatric disabilities or substance use disorders any more than they pick out batterers.
- Think before speaking. How would you like to be spoken to?
- Remember to offer respect, not rescue; options, not orders; safe treatment rather than re-victimization.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & CHILDREN



Domestic Violence and Children

- Research shows that approximately 3.3 to 10 million children witness the abuse of a parent or adult caregiver each year.
- Research also indicates children exposed to domestic violence are at an increased risk of being abused or neglected.
- A majority of studies reveal that there are adult and child victims in 30 to 60 percent of families experiencing domestic violence.

What Else Do We Know?

- Domestic Violence and/or substance abuse is one of the most reported maltreatments in Florida; these two maltreatments are challenging and complex to work with.
- Intimate violence has a lasting and traumatic impact on the family.

Common Myths: DV & Children

- Survivors of domestic violence are bad parents.
- Survivors of domestic violence “fail to protect” their children from the violence.
- Survivors of domestic violence choose to be abused.
- Children are only impacted if they are the targets of the abuse.
- Children in violent homes need to be removed to be safe.

Domestic Violence & Child Welfare

- The co-occurrence of domestic violence and child abuse has compelled child welfare and DV programs to re-evaluate their services and interventions with families experiencing both forms of abuse.
- Child welfare and DV programs have responded separately to victims due to differences in philosophy, policies, practices, etc...

Common Ground

- The co-occurrence of domestic violence and child abuse has compelled child welfare and DV programs to re-evaluate their services and interventions with families experiencing both forms of abuse.
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Ways Domestic Violence Impacts Children

- Behavioral, Social, and Emotional Challenges
- Cognitive and Attitudinal Challenges
- Long-Term Challenges



Behavioral, Social, and Emotional Challenges

- Higher levels of aggression
- Anger/Hostility
- Oppositional behavior and disobedience
- Fear
- Anxiety
- Withdrawal
- Depression
- Poor peer, sibling, and social relationships
- Low self-esteem

Cognitive and Attitudinal Challenges

- Lower cognitive functioning
- Poor school performance
- Lack of conflict resolution skills
- Limited problem solving skills
- Pro-violence attitudes
- Belief in rigid gender stereotypes and male privilege.

Long-Term Challenges

- Higher levels of adult depression
- Higher levels of trauma symptoms
- Increased tolerance for and use of violence in adult relationships.

Keep In Mind...



Children respond differently to domestic violence. Their level of resilience is dependent upon other factors such as support system, other traumas, relationship with non-offending parent, length of abuse, etc...

Best Practices When Working With Families Experiencing DV

- Partner with the non-offending parent.
- Focus on child safety and safety for the adult victim.
- Make appropriate referrals (DV shelter, BIP, Substance Abuse Treatment).
- Don't blame the victim for the violence.
- Hold the perpetrator accountable for ending the violence.

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