

# Prevention Pathways - Online Courses

## FACT SHEET

### Overview of Alcohol Abuse and Violence Against Women

Alcohol is the most widely used and abused substance in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Alcohol abuse and drug abuse create social, health, and other costs of huge proportions. More than 14 million people nationwide have alcohol problems in any given year.<sup>2</sup>

Violence against women is also a major problem. Women of every race, nationality, and income level are the victims of 2.7 million violent crimes each year.<sup>3</sup> By understanding how the two problems are related, society can find ways to treat and prevent both alcohol abuse and domestic violence.

#### The Link Between Alcohol and Violence

Although alcohol abuse and violence often occur together, one does not *cause* the other.<sup>4</sup> Alcohol or drug use can increase the risk of violence and can affect how often violence occurs and how severe it is. For example, a man with a quick temper or low frustration level may be more likely to act out his anger physically or verbally after he has had alcohol. Alcohol tends to lower a person's inhibitions. In other words, he may act before he thinks. Similarly, after drinking alcohol, a man who tends to express his anger in sexually controlling ways might rape or sexually assault a woman before stopping to think about his behavior. When sober, the same man may be more likely to think first.

Some abusive men use the excuse that substance abuse causes them to be violent. Although many men who abuse alcohol never become violent,

nearly half of men who commit acts of violence against their partner also have alcohol abuse problems.<sup>5</sup> They may become violent:

- To release feelings of stress, anger, or frustration,
- To avoid painful issues and shift blame, or
- To feel in control.

Alcohol or drug use is not just a risk factor for potential offenders. For a woman who is drinking, it may also increase her chances of becoming a victim of violence. So, women that become victims of violence may actually use alcohol before they are ever victimized. They may also begin to use alcohol *after* the violence as a way of coping with the pain.

#### The Truth About Alcohol and Violence

Many people do not realize how powerful the effects of alcohol can be on their behaviors, actions, and even brain chemistry.

People may drink or use drugs:

- To escape stress, sadness, or depression,
- To appear confident, or
- To numb feelings of guilt, shame, anger, or loneliness.<sup>6</sup>

For more information for consumers, go to [www.samhsa.gov/preventionpathways](http://www.samhsa.gov/preventionpathways) and click on "courses" to find the online course, "It Won't Happen to Me: *Substance Abuse and Violence Against Women*."

#### References:

<sup>1</sup> George, R. L. (1990). *Counseling the chemically dependent*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

<sup>2</sup> National Institute of Health, National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. (2001). *Alcoholism: Getting the facts*. Bethesda, MD: Author. Available online at <http://www.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/booklet.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Rennison, C. (2001, September). Criminal victimization 2001: Changes 2000-01 with trends 1993-2001 (National Crime Victimization Survey, NCJ 194610). Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin. United States Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs.

<sup>4</sup> Fazzino, PA; Holton, JK, and Reed, BG. (1997). Substance abuse treatment and domestic violence. Treatment improvement protocol series 25. (DHHS Publication No. SMA 97-3163). Rockville, MD: Center for Substance Abuse Treatment.

<sup>5</sup> Bennett, L. and Lawson, M. (1994). Barriers to cooperation between domestic violence and substance abuse programs. *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Human Services*, 75, 277-286.

<sup>6</sup> American Medical Association. (1999). Substance abuse: Why do people use drugs? Chicago: Author.