Public health interventions for alcohol-related intimate partner violence

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Women’s suffrage: “home protection” from alcohol-related male violence

"Temperance fueled as important a contribution to the women’s movement as abolition. Slavery fueled discussion of the innate equality of humans of all races and sexes; intemperance forced consideration of inequality and abuse within the American family."


Frances Willard
President, Women’s Christian Temperance Union
Lived 1839-1898
Women’s experiences of fear and harm from an alcohol-affected male partner
“Once he started drinking on a Friday night then Mr Happy would ... Mr Bouncy would come out again. But Mr Happy started turning into Mr Sarcastic and Mr Making Personal Remarks and ... and then being threatening and then, you know, hurting.” (Kath)
“And he would start to put his face right into my face. That was the start of it so just that really intimidating put his face right up to me and talk through his teeth and, you know, be quite verbally aggressive. But with his face probably an inch away from mine which was ... and I would be backed into a corner.”  (Kym)
“I will usually wait for that stage when he would be too drunk to do anything, when he’ll be unstable on his feet that was the moment when I knew I was pretty much safe.”

(Carla)
Not all partner violence is alcohol-related

Alcohol is involved in a substantial proportion of partner violence
US studies - **25-50%** involve alcohol (Leonard, 2001)

**50%** of partner violence is alcohol-related; **73%** physical assaults (Laslett et al., 2010)

Indigenous partner homicides **13 times** more likely to involve alcohol than non-indigenous partner homicides (Dearden & Payne, 2009)

Australian victimisation survey - 1 in 3 (**35%**) recent incidents were alcohol-related (Mouzos and Makkai, 2004)

**40%** females experienced alcohol-related physical violence in intimate relationship compared with **11%** of males (AIHW, 2011 2010 National Drug Strategy Household Survey)
Alcohol and IPV: what is the link?
Strong evidence for association

- Cross-sectional studies (alcoholic males higher IPV)
- Longitudinal studies (drinking in early marriage predicts later IPV)
- Laboratory studies (alcohol and aggression)
- Stronger effect on aggression in males v females
• Theoretical explanations
  • Physiological (cognitive functioning)
  • Psychological (expectancies/beliefs)
  • ‘alcohol myopia’ (Steele & Josephs, 1990)
  • Social learning/cultural (excusing drunken behaviour)
  • ‘responsible disinhibition’ (Galvani, 2004)
  • Alcohol an instrument of domination (Room, 1980)
• Heavy and binge drinking increases risk of IPV (Foran & O’Leary, 2008)

• Violence is more severe when one or both partners drink (Abramsky et al., 2011; Graham et al., 2011)

• “Alcohol may not cause partner violence but it seems to make things worse” (Graham et al., 2011)

• Contributing role of alcohol in IPV
How and where can we intervene in alcohol-related partner violence? An ecological model

WHO Ecological model for understanding violence against women
(Krug et al., 2002; Bronfenbrenner, 1979)

Alcohol pricing and taxation
Restrictions on sale of alcohol
Alcohol outlet density
Couples-based treatment
Individual treatment

Societal (population)
Community
Relationship
Individual
Interventions
+
alcohol-related IPV
=
neglected space
Society level – what do we know?

Alcohol-pricing and taxation

Alcohol pricing strategies are generally effective in reducing consumption and related harms

Few studies have looked at taxation and impact on domestic violence

- Only one American study found price reduction may reduce partner violence
- Limited evidence base

Strategic policy:

- We need to know more to target pricing mechanisms
- How perpetrators are affected by alcohol price: type of alcohol/drinking patterns/forms of partner violence
Community level - what do we know?

Alcohol availability

Reducing physical availability decreases consumption and harm by increasing effort to obtain alcohol.

Alcohol sales restriction

- Reduce hours or days of sale
- Study in Brazil – reductions in homicide and non-significant reduction in violence against women
- Restrictions in Aboriginal communities - reductions of IPV in some communities but no rigorous or clear evidence
Community level - what do we know?

Alcohol availability

*Reducing physical availability decreases consumption and harm by increasing effort to obtain alcohol*

Alcohol outlet density

- Australian evidence of links between packaged liquor (off-premises) and increase in family violence police incident rates (↑28.6%)
- Two other US studies found associations between outlets and police reports of domestic violence (inconsistent about type of outlet)
- Evidence is still weak, but worth investigation
Relationship level – what do we know?

Couple-based treatment

Aims to reduce alcohol consumption and improve marital relations in couples where one partner has alcohol problems

- Some evidence for brief interventions reducing both problem drinking and aggression in dating university couples (but reductions not linked)
- Other uncontrolled studies showed reductions in clinical populations (treatment seeking, middle-aged couples, long-term relationships); effects not often sustained
- Increases in violence with relapsed patients

Picture: Penywise
Individual level - what do we know?

Individual treatment

Aims to reduce alcohol problems in individuals with diagnosed problems

- Standard batterer program compared with batterer and substance use treatment (motivational interview brief intervention) had some effects on IPV but lost over time

- The remaining few intervention studies (using CBT and telephone motivational interviewing) showed limited evidence, effects not sustained and unclear if violence reduction mediated by alcohol reduction

- Uncontrolled studies found some links between alcohol use and violence outcomes
Reducing alcohol-related intimate partner violence

What do we know and what do we still need to know?
Conclusion

• Evidence for what to do at any level is scarce and limited quality

• We need more strategic research – current research focusing on generalised alcohol policies may not be sensitive enough

• We need:
  • Focus on those at risk (young/binge) and heavy drinkers
  • Better research quality
  • Targeted interventions at all levels of ecological model
  • Other approaches e.g., South Dakota criminal justice?
Better research and evaluation

Improve data collection

• Recording of alcohol-related IPV versus non-alcohol-related IPV

Measure prevalence

• Surveys of populations at risk (young people; heavy drinkers)
• Personal Safety Survey – specifically include alcohol use in domestic violence
• More longitudinal research – alcohol risk and perpetration and victimisation

Research and Evaluation

• Evaluations of alcohol policy interventions should include measures of domestic violence
• Investigate alcohol availability, drinking location and domestic violence
Alcohol use ‘one of the factors most open to intervention and change’

(Lori Heise in Graham et al., 2008)
The long term impact

“Five years now on, we’ve got a child and I still -- I’m still waiting for the moment when he will become drunk and angry.”

“... we are the damaged goods (laughs), you know, me and my other kids” (Carla)

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