

Alcohol Increases Women's Risk of Intimate Partner Violence

January 27 2010, By Valerie DeBenedette

Alcohol increases the risk of violence in couples — especially violence both to and by the female partner. A new study of couples that experienced intimate partner violence found 30.2 percent reported alcohol use before or during the event.

Severe partner [violence](#) was more than twice as likely when the woman drank alcohol, said study co-author Raul Caetano, M.D. The likelihood of severe male-on-female violence tripled and the likelihood of severe female-on-male violence more than doubled when the woman drank.

The study, which appears online and in the April issue of the journal *Alcohol: Clinical and Experimental Research*, evaluated data from 436 U.S. couples that took part in a 1995 survey. Researchers rated violence as either moderate — such as pushing, shoving or slapping; or severe — such as hitting, beating up, threatening with a weapon or using a weapon.

“The one thing that is important is that this is a random sample of couples in the U.S. When you go into general population, you pick up much more violence that is less severe and you see female involvement more clearly,” said Caetano, regional dean and epidemiology professor at the University of Texas School of Public Health in Dallas.

Most studies of alcohol use and partner violence have looked only at male-on-female violence and many of the surveys rely on people who ended up in hospitals or the legal system, he said.

The study did not address couples' marital status. No same-sex couples were involved, Caetano said.

Women who are in a physically abusive relationship might be drinking as a form of self-medication, said Rita Smith, executive director of the National Coalition Against [Domestic Violence](#) in Denver. "It could be as much that factor as that they have an [alcohol abuse](#) problem. We don't know that."

Smith said that the Conflict Tactics Scale used in the study is an imperfect tool for evaluating violence because context could be lost. For example, if one partner is strangling the other and that one hits back to get free, both acts count, she said. "We need good data and we need good tools to measure the data. People's lives are at stake here."

More information: McKinney CM, Caetano et al.: Does alcohol involvement increase the severity of intimate partner violence? *Alcohol: Clinical and Experimental Research* 34(4), 2010.

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