

# Alcohol and domestic abuse

Alcohol alone is not a cause of domestic abuse, and is never an excuse. There are, however, many ways in which alcohol and domestic abuse are related.

## How are people affected by domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse is a one-off incident or pattern of behaviour, committed by one person towards someone personally connected to them, that is:

- Physically or sexually abusive
- Violent or threatening
- Controlling or coercive
- Economically abusive
- Psychologically, emotionally or otherwise abusive

Domestic abuse affects millions of people in the UK. It affects not just the main target of the abuse but also other family members and children.

The COVID-19 pandemic, and measures to contain it, may have led to more domestic abuse taking place. Since the first lockdown started, some of us have been drinking more heavily, which could have made the problem worse.

## The links between alcohol and domestic abuse

### 1. Drinking and domestic abuse often occur at the same time

Many abuse incidents occur when one or both people involved has been drinking, and alcohol is more commonly involved in more aggressive incidents.<sup>1</sup> It is not just being intoxicated that can increase risk; lack of access to alcohol can make someone irritable or angry which can, in turn, create a trigger point.

### 2. When alcohol is involved, abuse can become more severe

Alcohol can affect our self-control and decision-making and can reduce our ability to resolve conflict. Global evidence shows that alcohol use can increase the severity of a violent incident.<sup>2,3</sup> Home Office analysis of 33 intimate partner domestic homicides in 2014-15 found that 20 of these involved substance use.<sup>4</sup>

### 3. Controlling access to alcohol can become part of the abuse

A perpetrator may exert control over another person by withholding alcohol from them, or preventing them from buying it. For someone who is dependent on alcohol, this could be extremely distressing and even dangerous, if they experience withdrawal symptoms.

### 4. People who experience domestic abuse may drink to try to cope

Living with domestic abuse can be extremely frightening, distressing or exhausting. This can cause some people to drink alcohol to try to cope with the physical and mental health impacts of domestic abuse. Research shows that women who experience extensive physical and sexual violence are more than twice as likely to have a problem with alcohol than those with little experience of violence and abuse.<sup>5</sup>

Alcohol use can also leave someone more vulnerable to further abuse, especially if drinking prevents survivors from accessing support or makes their mental health worse.

## What to do if you are experiencing domestic abuse and alcohol is involved

If you are experiencing domestic abuse, you are not alone. Sadly, hundreds of thousands of families are affected every year and each and every person deserves support.

Getting help with your drinking or reducing the amount you drink might enable you to take steps to become safer.

Some things to consider:

- Consider whether things are worse when drinking in certain places or with particular people and try to find alternatives.
- **Women's Aid** suggests having a simple safety plan in place in case abuse escalates when alcohol is involved. This might include:
  - Planning how you might respond in different situations, including crisis situations.
  - Thinking about the different options that may be available to you.
  - Keeping with you any important and emergency telephone numbers.
  - Teaching your children how to call 999 in an emergency.
  - If you have neighbours you could trust, telling them what is going on, and asking them to call the police if they hear sounds of a violent attack.
  - Rehearsing an escape plan, so in an emergency you and the children can get away safely.

- Packing an emergency bag for yourself and your children, and hiding it somewhere safe (for example, at a neighbour's or friend's house). Try to avoid mutual friends or family.
- Trying to keep a small amount of money on you at all times – including change for the phone and bus fares.
- Knowing where the nearest phone is, and if you have a mobile phone, try to keep it with you.
- If you suspect that your partner is about to attack you, try to go to a lower risk area of the house – for example where there is a way out and access to a telephone. Avoid the kitchen or garage where there are likely to be knives or other weapons; and avoid rooms where you might be trapped, such as the bathroom, or where you might be shut into a cupboard or other small space.
- Being prepared to leave the house in an emergency.

### If you or someone you know needs help

If you are in danger, be ready to call the police using 999. You can also call 101 to report a previous incident or to get advice from the local domestic abuse team.

**Refuge** provides the 24-hour National Domestic Abuse Helpline on 0808 2000 247. You can also access advice on their website, and support via live chat (Mon-Fri 3pm to 10pm) or British Sign Language (Mon-Fri 10am to 6pm) on their website: <https://www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk/>

**The Women's Aid Survivors Handbook** contains a wealth of information, including information on legal rights, supporting children and finding help. Women's Aid also runs a live chat service (Mon-Sun 10am to 6pm): <https://chat.womensaid.org.uk/> and their website contains links to local services near you and to services specialising in support for Black and minoritised women: <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/domestic-abuse-directory/>

The **Men's Advice Line** provides a range of services aimed primarily at men experiencing domestic abuse from their partner on **0808 801 0327** or email [info@mensadviceline.org.uk](mailto:info@mensadviceline.org.uk) (Mon-Fri 10am-1pm and 2-5pm).

**Galop** provide support for LGBT+ victims/survivors of sexual violence, hate crime or domestic abuse. They are trans inclusive and welcome anyone from the LGBT+ community, including those who are questioning their identity. Galop operates the National LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Helpline on 0800 999 5428 (Mon-Fri 10am to 5pm, Wed and Thur till 8pm) and offers support via email and live chat: <https://galop.org.uk/get-help/helplines/>

**Adfam** provides a series of **online support video sessions** for families affected by a loved one's substance use. <https://adfam.org.uk>

[www.alcoholchange.org.uk](http://www.alcoholchange.org.uk)

- 
- 1 Leonard, K. E. and Quigley, B. M. Thirty years of research show alcohol to be a cause of intimate partner violence: Future research needs to identify who to treat and how to treat them. *Drug and Alcohol Review*. January 2017, 36, 7-9.
  - 2 World Health Organization. *Intimate partner violence and alcohol* 2006.
  - 3 Gadd, D. et al. The Dynamics of Domestic Abuse and Drug and Alcohol Dependency. *The British Journal of Criminology*, Vol. 60. January 2020, p243.
  - 4 Home Office. *Domestic Homicide Reviews: Key findings from analysis of domestic homicide reviews*, 2016 p.9.
  - 5 Women's Aid. *The nature and impact of domestic abuse*. Accessed September 2021.