

Alcohol's Role in Marital Conflict and Violence

Kenneth Leonard
Clinical and Research Institute on Addictions and
The Department of Psychiatry
University at Buffalo

Journey Together
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1

Disclosure Statement of Interest Kenneth Leonard, Research Institute on Addictions

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2. NIDA
3. NIJ

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1. None
- 2.
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Consulting Relationships

1. None
- 2.
- 3.

Speaker's Bureau(s)

1. None
- 2.
- 3.

2

Outline

- A very brief history of people's views on alcohol and intimate partner violence
- The “causes” of violence and partner violence
- The distal relationship between alcohol and violence
- The proximal relationship between alcohol and violence
- Alcohol does not increase aggression in everyone
- The multiple thresholds model
- Treatment implications

3

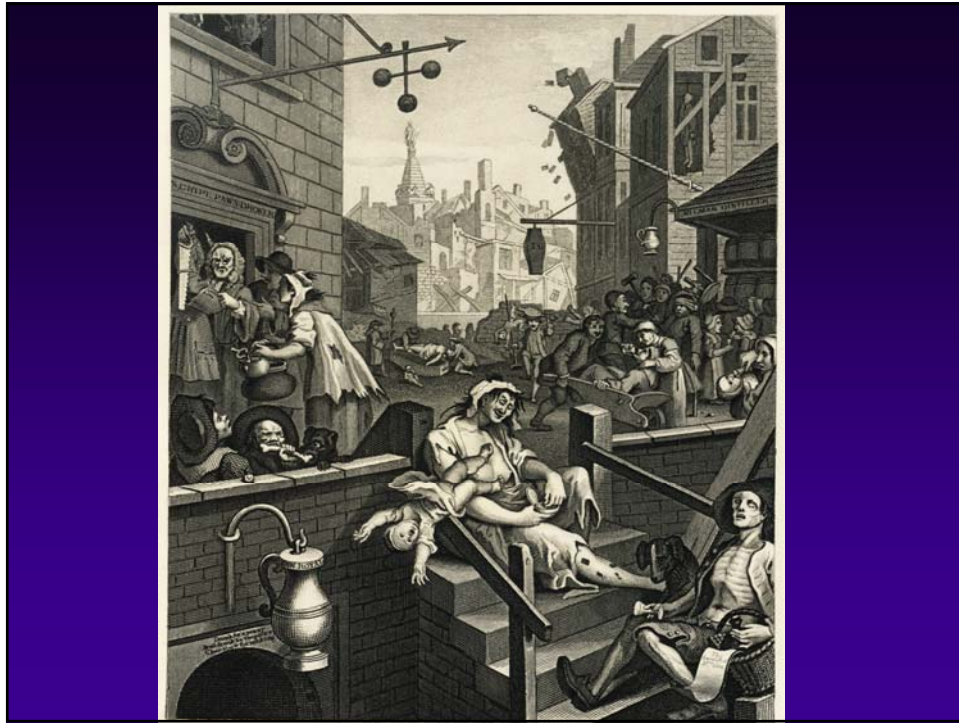
Netzahualcoyotl of Texcoco



- “It [alcohol] is like a tornado that destroys everything in its path. It is like a hellish tempest that brings with it all evils. Drunkenness ... causes violence among kinfolks. Yelling and brawls are caused by *octli* and its accompanying drunkenness

(Soustelle, 1955 cited in Paredes, 1975)

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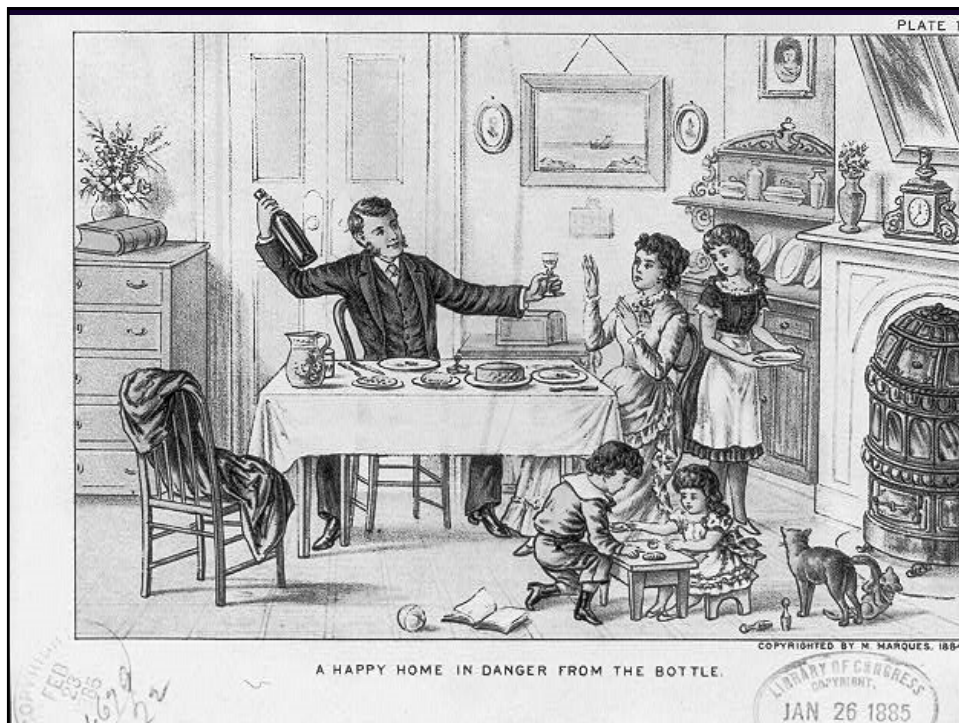


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In 1815, Peter Lung of Middletown, Connecticut, beat his wife Lucy to death. There is said to have been a long 2 day, verbal and physical bout, resulting from both spouses' chronic intoxication.

At Lung's trial the presiding judge, Zephaniah Swift stated that "Excessive drinking the prevailing vice and the deepest disgrace of our country, constituted a major source of violence and domestic misery".

7



8

"Evidence from cross-cultural research, laboratory research , blood test of men arrested for wife beating, and survey research all indicates that although alcohol use may be associated with intimate violence, alcohol is not a primary cause of the violence. "

Gelles, R.J. (1993) Alcohol and other drugs are associated with violence-they are not its cause. in R.Gelles and D. Loseke (Eds). Current Controversies on Family Violence. Newbury Park, CA ; Sage 182-196

11

The belief that alcoholism causes domestic violence is a notion widely held both in and outside of the substance abuse field, despite a lack of information to support it.

The False Connection Between Adult Domestic Violence and Alcohol
Theresa M. Zubretsky and Karla M. Digirolamo

12



What about help for my partner?

What if he stops drinking or using drugs?

Even when men who batter stop drinking or using drugs, their violence most often continues. In fact, many battered women say that the violence got worse during substance abuse recovery. Alcohol and other drug abuse do not cause domestic violence, although batterers often use it as an excuse. Batterers who drink or use drugs have two separate problems—battering and substance abuse—that need to be dealt with separately.

13

There is not enough evidence to support preventive policies based on male alcohol consumption as a risk factor of intimate partner violence.

D. Gil-González, C. Vives-Cases, C. Álvarez-Dardet and J. Latour-Pérez
Alcohol and intimate partner violence: do we have enough information to act?
Eur J Public Health 16:278-284, 2006.

14

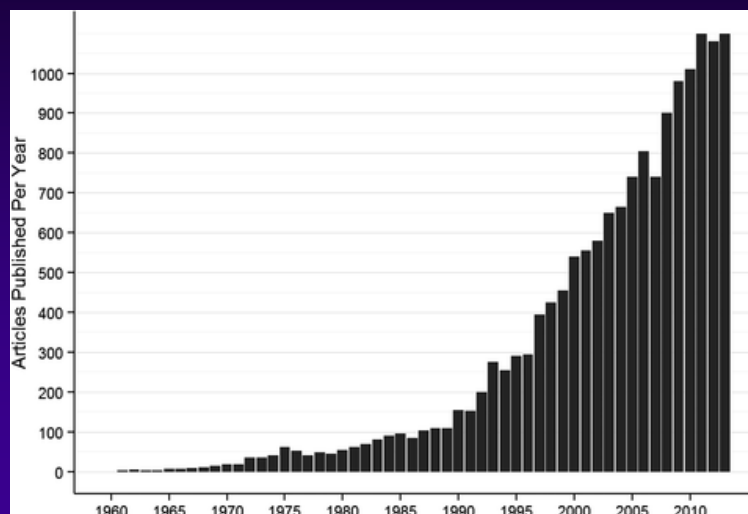
Contemporary Controversy

Although _____ appears to be associated with _____, there is no definitive evidence that _____ causes _____!

In the absence of such causal evidence, it is unwarranted to try and change _____.

15

Alcohol/Violence articles published by year



16

‘What methodology can demonstrate a causal relationship between excessive alcohol use and marital violence?’.

- Cross-sectional
 - NO- Overlap between excessive drinking and marital violence may occur because some third factor (e.g. hypermasculinity, need to control causes both)
- Sophisticated Longitudinal models
 - NO- even though many possible third factors can be ruled out, there is always the possibility that the critical third variable was omitted.
- Careful analysis of violent events to see if heavy drinking is associated with violent events
 - NO- some third factor could cause the heavy drinking and the violent event (e.g. acute stress).
- Experiments in which we randomly administer alcohol to some but not to others, and measure the outcome.
 - NO- our experiments can not ever be set up so that actual marital aggression is the outcome, there are ethical concerns and practical issues
- Treatment studies may remove or reduce a putative causal factor
 - NO- Simply because treating alcoholism may lead to reduced marital violence does not mean that alcohol caused the marital violence, the cause of a cure is not necessarily directly indicative of the cause of the disorder.

17

In short, there is no research design that will definitively demonstrate causality, particularly in the case of complex social behavior.

Causality is a judgment that is based on the convergence of evidence drawn from variety of sources, each with different limitations.

18

What are the causes of intimate partner violence?

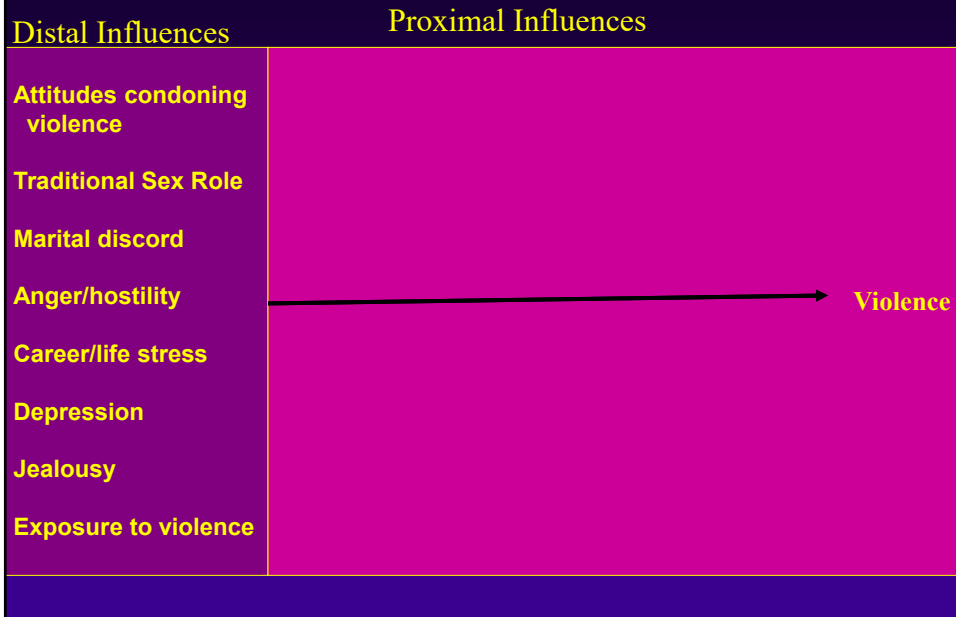
Fazel et al, 2018	OR	Spencer et al, 2020	r
Attitudes condoning violence	3.1 (2.7-3.6)	Approval of violence	.27
Traditional Sex Role	3.0 (2.5-3.6)	Traditional gender roles	.19
Marital discord	2.8 (2.6-3.0)	Relationship satisfaction	-.26
Anger/hostility	2.7 (2.3-3.1)	Anger	.32
Career/life stress	2.7 (2.0-3.6)	Stress	.16
Depression	2.4 (2.1-2.8)	Depression	.21
Jealousy	1.9 (1.5-2.4)	Jealousy	..24
Exposure to violence	1.9 (1.8-2.1)	Witnessed violence/abused	.24-.25

Fazel, S., Smith, E. N., Chang, Z., & Geddes, J. R. (2018). Risk factors for interpersonal violence: an umbrella review of meta-analyses. *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 213(4), 609-614.

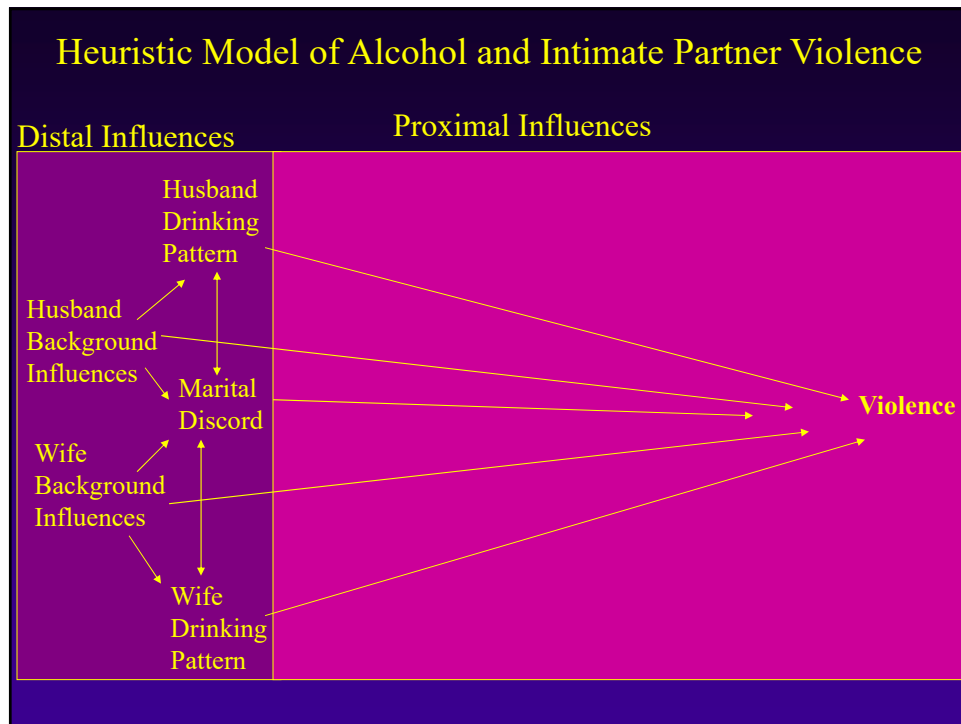
Spencer, C. M., Stith, S. M., & Cafferky, B. (2019). Risk markers for physical intimate partner violence victimization: A meta-analysis. *Aggression and violent behavior*, 44, 8-17.

19

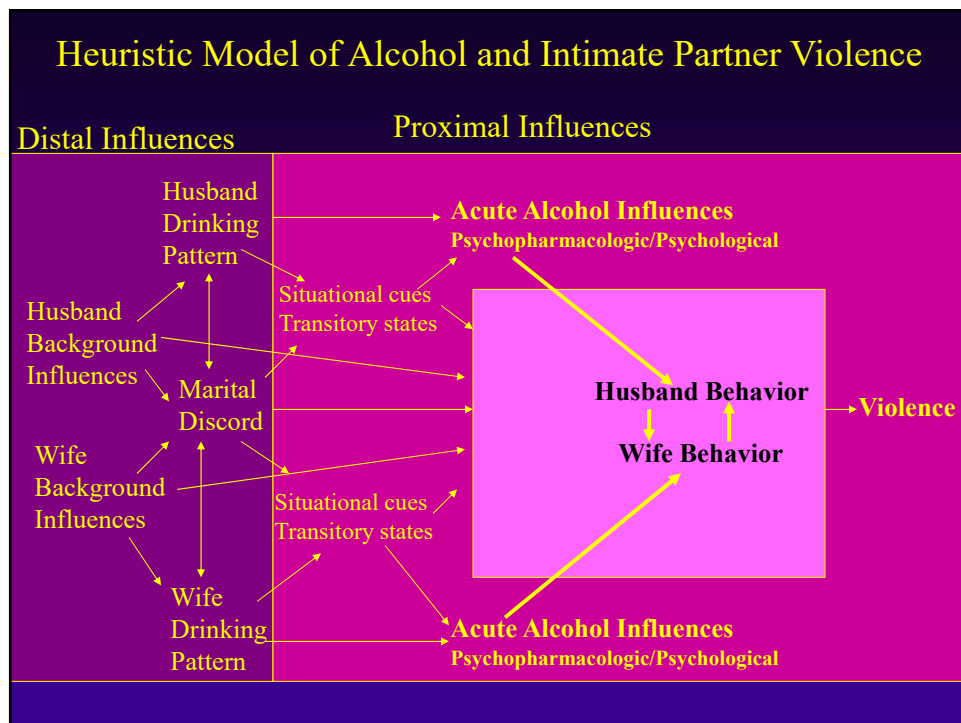
Heuristic Model of Alcohol and Intimate Partner Violence



20



21



22

Epidemiological Criteria for Causality

- consistency of association
- strength of association
- dose-response
- temporality
- experiment
- plausibility and coherence

23

Consistency

- The relationship between excessive alcohol use and domestic violence
 - has been observed in many different cultural contexts

24

Multi-country studies find alcohol a major risk factor

- Profiling Domestic Violence- Kishor and Johnson- Demographic and Health Surveys
 - Nine countries- nearly 164,000 women
 - Asia- India, Cambodia
 - Africa-Egypt, Zambia
 - South America-Columbia, Peru
 - Central America- Nicaragua, Dominican Republic, Haiti
 - “the relationship between the experience of violence by wives and the frequency of drunkenness among men who consume alcohol is ...highly significant in all countries where data on drunkenness are available.”

25

Multi-country studies find alcohol a major risk factor

- WHO multi-country study of women's health and domestic violence- Abramsky et al (2011)
 - Eleven countries- 24,000 women
 - Asia- Bangladesh, Japan, Samoa, Thailand
 - Africa-Ethiopia, Namibia, Tanzania
 - South America-Brazil, Peru
 - Europe-Serbia, Montenegro
 - “Problematic alcohol use, among both women and their partners, is consistently and strongly associated with IPV.”

26

Multi-country studies find alcohol a major risk factor

- Violence against women: An EU-Wide survey
 - 42,000 women across 28 EU member states
 - Violence among men who never get drunk 5%
 - Violence among men who get drunk monthly 23%
 - “The survey did find heavy alcohol use by perpetrators of domestic violence, but further analysis is needed to understand the relationship between alcohol and other factors that contribute to violence.”

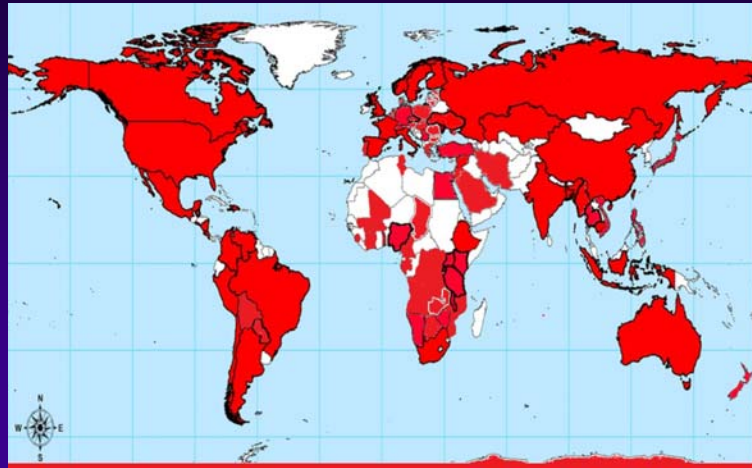
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Multi-country studies find alcohol a major risk factor

- Kiwuwa-Muyingo and Kadengye, 2022
Demographic and Health Surveys from 2014-16
 - Six East Africa countries- nearly 33,646 women
 - Burundi, Uganda, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Rwanda, Kenya
 - “Women whose partners got drunk often were found to be up to nine times more likely to experience IPV compared to those whose partners did not drink.”

28

The alcohol-IPV relationship is pervasive across different cultures



29

Consistency

- The relationship between excessive alcohol use and domestic violence
 - has been observed in many different cultural contexts
 - has been found across many different kinds of samples

30

Rates of Alcohol Problems among violent men as reported by women

Source	Sample	Extent and type of Alcohol Problems
Gondolf (1988)	525 women in 50 Texan Shelters	54% husband as alcohol abusers 35% -husband arrested for drinking
Gayford (1975)	100 battered wives seeking help in England	52% reported husband frequently drank
LaBell (1979)	Women's Shelter problems	72% reported husband had alcohol
Roy (1982)	4000 women calling hotline	35% reported husband to be problem drinkers
Roy (1977)	150 women calling hotline	85% alcohol or drug abusers

31

Violence in Alcoholic Populations

Report	Sample	Percent Violent
Scott (1974)	100 married male alcoholics	45% ever
Powers et al (1983)	77 VA inpatients in New Jersey	68% ever
Gertenzang (1986)	44 VA and private hospital patients	93% past year
Stiith et al (1991)	52 alcohol treatment patients	59% past year
Gondolf & Foster (1991)	218 VA inpatients	39% past year
Murphy & O'Farrell (1994)	107 alcoholics in couples therapy	65% past year

32

Samples / representative studies supporting alcohol/ domestic violence association.

- Alcoholic/substance abuse samples
 - O'Farrell, T.J., Fals-Stewart, W., Murphy, M., & Murphy, C.M. (2003). *Journal of Consulting & Clinical Psychology*, 71, 92-102.
- BATTERERS
 - Stuart, G.L., Meehan, J.C., Moore, T.M., Morean, M., Hellmuth, J., & Follansbee, K. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*. Jan 2006 v67 i1 p102(11).
- Emergency Room
 - Kyriacou, D.N., McCabe, F., Anglin, D., Lapesarde, K., & Winer, M.R. (1998). *Annals of Emergency Medicine*, 31, 502-506.
- Prenatal and Antenatal Clinics
 - Muhajarine, N., & D'Arcy, C. (1999). *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 160, 1007-1011.
- Primary Care Settings
 - Coker, A.L., Smith, P.H., McKeown, R.E., & King, M.J. (2000). *American Journal of Public Health*, 90, 553-559.
- Community and representative samples
 - Kaufman Kantor, G., & Straus, M.A. (1990). In M.A. Straus & R.J. Gelles (Eds.), *Physical violence in American families: Risk factors and adaptations to violence in 8,145 families* (pp. 203-224). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.
 - Arseneault, L., Moffitt, T.E., Caspi, A., Taylor, P.J., & Silva, P.A. (2000). *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 57, 979-986.

33

Strength of the association

- The relationship between excessive alcohol use and domestic violence
 - has been observed in many different cultural contexts
 - has been found across many different kinds of samples
 - represents an association of at least moderate strength

34

Strength of cross-sectional associations

- Lipsey, Wilson, Cohen, and Derzon 1997
 - 34 studies of domestic violence including child abuse
 - Effect size .22
- Stith, Smith, Penn, Ward, & Tritt, 2004
 - 22 studies of partner violence and alcohol use
 - Effect size .24
- Foran and O’Leary, 2008
 - 50 studies of partner violence and alcohol
 - Effect size .23

35

What are the causes of intimate partner violence?

Fazel et al, 2018	OR	Spencer et al, 2020	r
Attitudes condoning violence	3.1 (2.7-3.6)	Approval of violence	.27
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Jealousy	1.9 (1.5-2.4)	Jealousy	..24
Exposure to violence	1.9 (1.8-2.1)	Witnessed violence/abused	.24-.25
Alcohol use in perpetrator	4.6 (3.3-6.4)	Alcohol Use	.22

Fazel, S., Smith, E. N., Chang, Z., & Geddes, J. R. (2018). Risk factors for interpersonal violence: an umbrella review of meta-analyses. *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 213(4), 609-614.

Spencer, C. M., Stith, S. M., & Cafferky, B. (2019). Risk markers for physical intimate partner violence victimization: A meta-analysis. *Aggression and violent behavior*, 44, 8-17.

36

Key aspects of the alcohol/ domestic violence relationship.

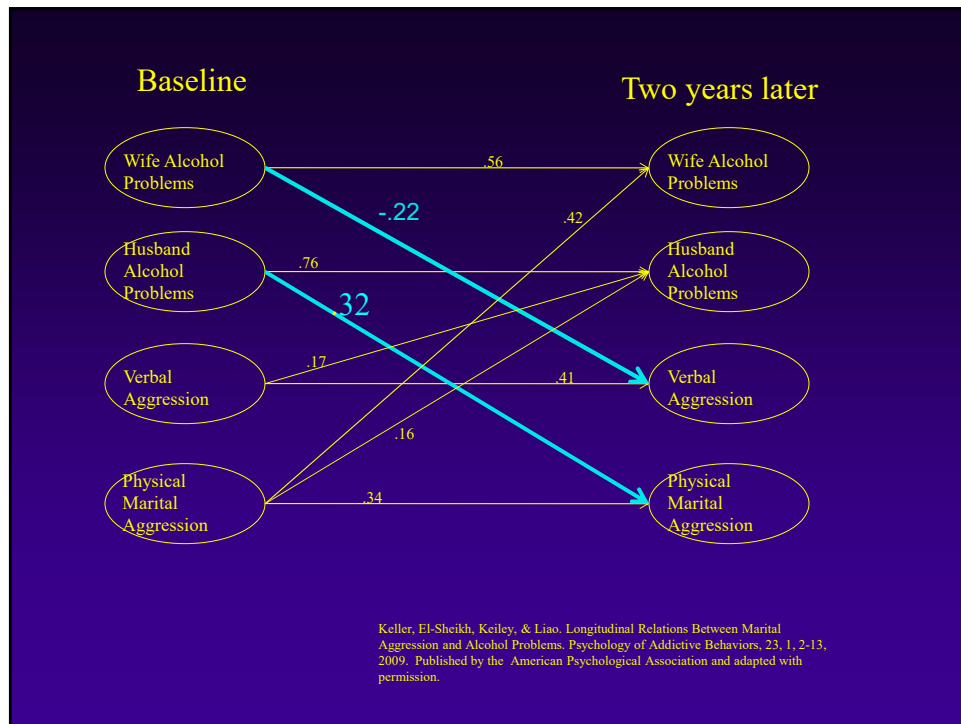
- The relationship between excessive alcohol use and domestic violence
 - has been observed in many different cultural contexts
 - has been found across many different kinds of samples
 - represents an association of at least moderate strength
 - observed in prospective studies

37

Longitudinal Studies

- Sophisticated Longitudinal models
 - Studies that attempt to predict partner violence over longer periods of time (3 to 5 years post baseline) sometimes find a longitudinal relationship and sometimes they do not.
 - Studies with shorter follow-up do find that heavy drinking predicts male partner violence.

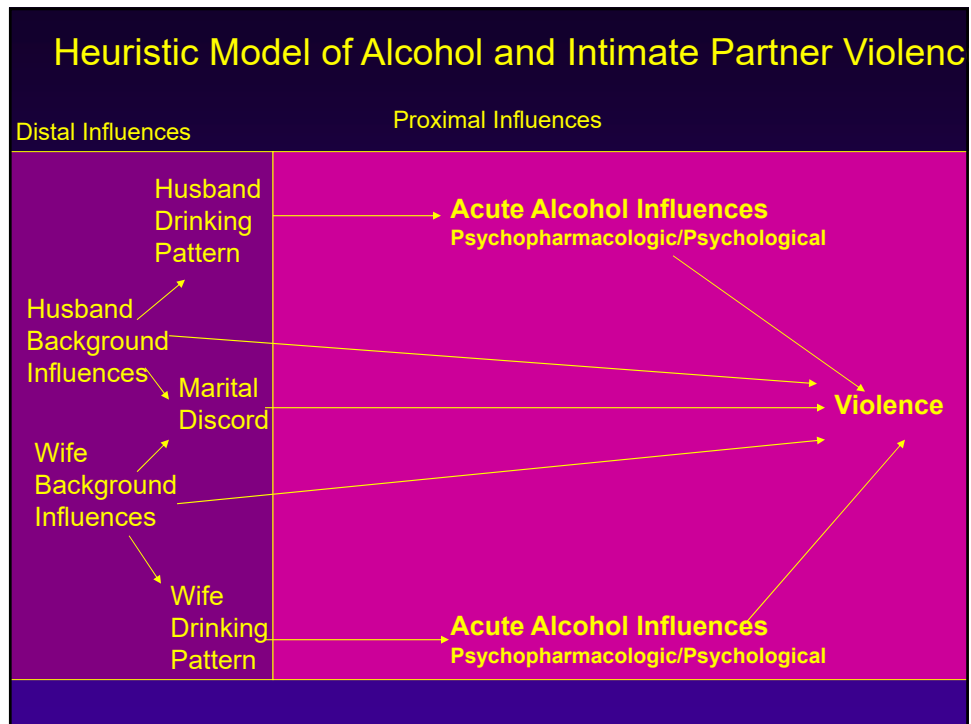
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41

**Key aspects of the alcohol/
domestic violence relationship.**
It appears that *acute* effects of alcohol contribute to
the violence, even in chronic heavy drinkers

42



43

* Temporality-acute effect of alcohol on aggression

- Event-based research

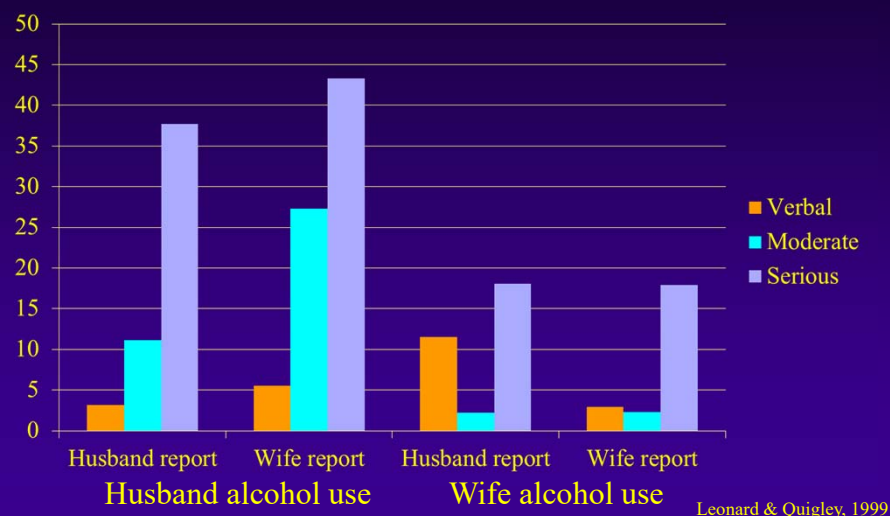
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Careful analysis of violent events with respect to heavy drinking

- Comparisons of drinking in verbal versus physical events
- Comparison of violence level in drinking and non drinking events
- Daily assessments of drinking level and violence

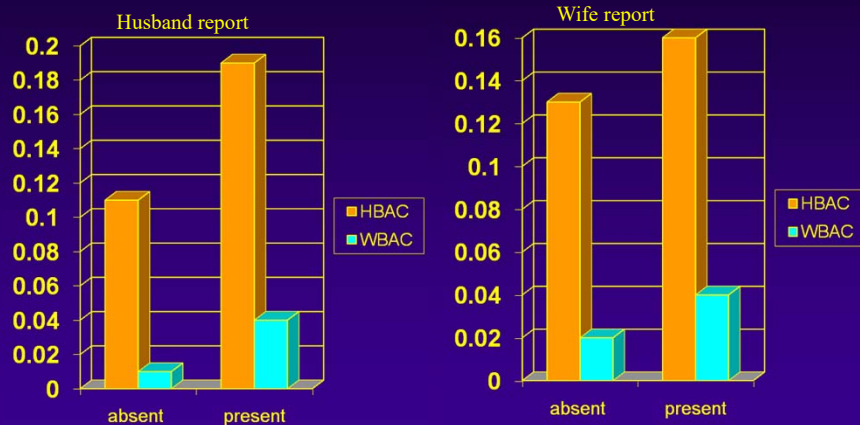
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Husband and wife alcohol use in conflict episodes



46

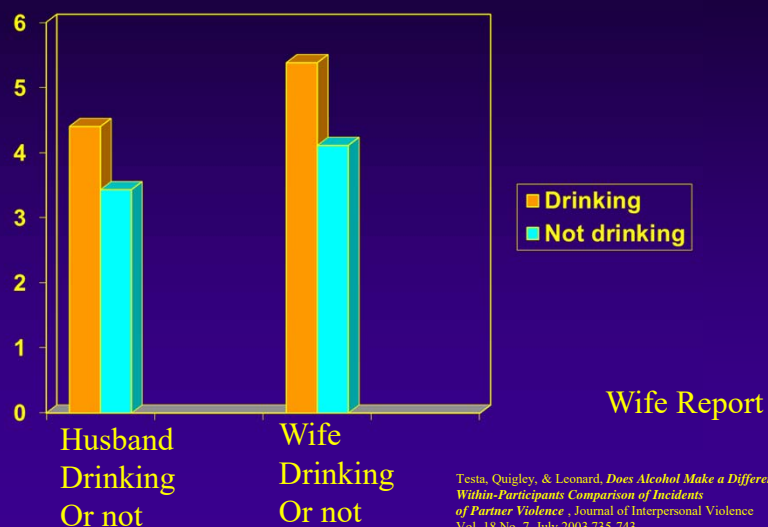
Comparing conflict episodes with and without violence



Murphy, Winters, O'Farrell, Fals-Stewart, & Murphy: Alcohol Consumption and Intimate Partner Violence by Alcoholic Men: Comparing Violent and Nonviolent Conflicts, *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors* 2005, Vol. 19, No. 1, 35-42. Published by the American Psychological Association and adapted with permission

47

Number of aggressive acts by husbands according to whether husband or wife were drinking



Testa, Quigley, & Leonard. *Does Alcohol Make a Difference? Within-Participants Comparison of Incidents of Partner Violence*, *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* Vol. 18 No. 7, July 2003 735-743

48

Alcohol involvement in Police-Citizen Encounters

Crime Type	Percent Alcohol involved	Odds Ratio	N
Violent crime/sexual assault	43.3	2.5	250
Spousal Assault	43.4	2.5	103
Robbery	39.1	2.1 ns	36
Public order, vandalism	46.1	2.8	250
Nonviolent crimes	23.4		597

McClelland & Teplin, Alcohol intoxication and violent crime: Implications for public health policy
The American journal on addictions, 10 (supplement), 70-85, 2001

49

Alcohol involvement in Police-Citizen Encounters

Crime Type	Suspects		Victims		OR
	Percent Intoxicated	n	Percent Intoxicated	n	
Violent Crime/sexual Assault	26.5	119	15.3	127	2.0
Spousal Assault	25.0	49	6.4	55	4.9
Robbery	14.8	14	18.0	28	.8 ns
Public order/vandalism	38.2	157	4.6	84	12.9
Nonviolent crimes	16.5	205	3.0	225	6.3

McClelland & Teplin, 2001

50

Daily assessment of drinking and aggression

- 119 cohabiting couples (ages 21-46)
- Drink four or more drinks at least once a month- largely similar drinkers
- For 56 consecutive days, each partner independently reported episodes of alcohol use and conflict and verbal and physical aggression
- Temporal associations between each partner's alcohol use and aggression were examined using the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model.

Testa and Derrick, 2018

51

Key: **Yellow- Wife report of non severe husband to wife violence**

Red- Wife report of severe husband to wife violence

Blue X - Substance use by husband

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					

22 Days of No Substance Use

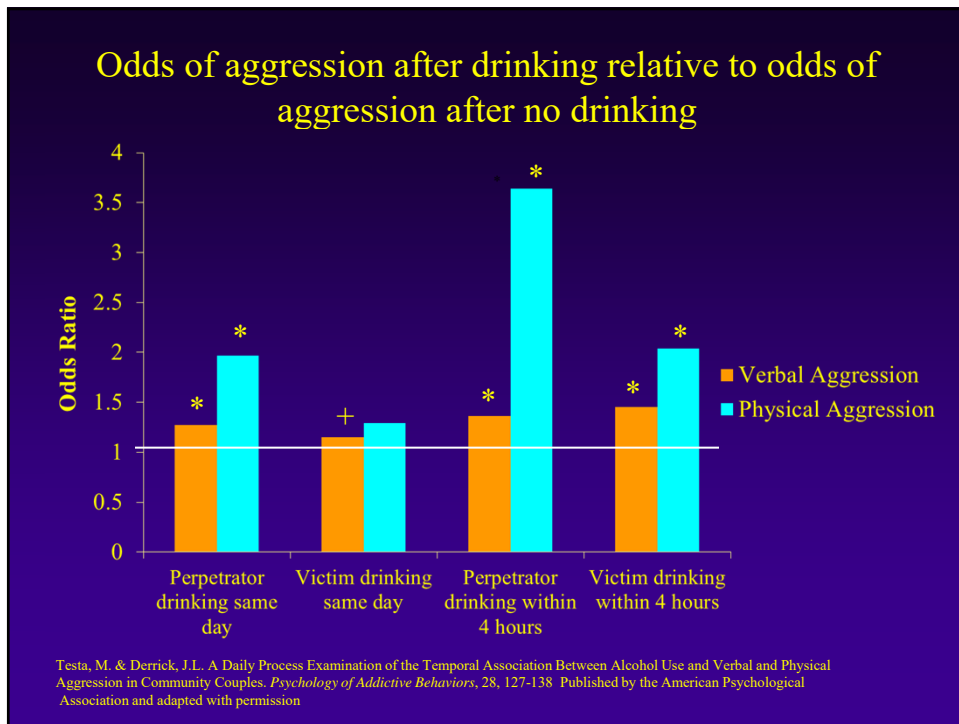
8 Days of Husband Substance Use

20 Days of No Violence

7 episodes of Non- Severe Violence

3 episodes of Severe Violence

52



53

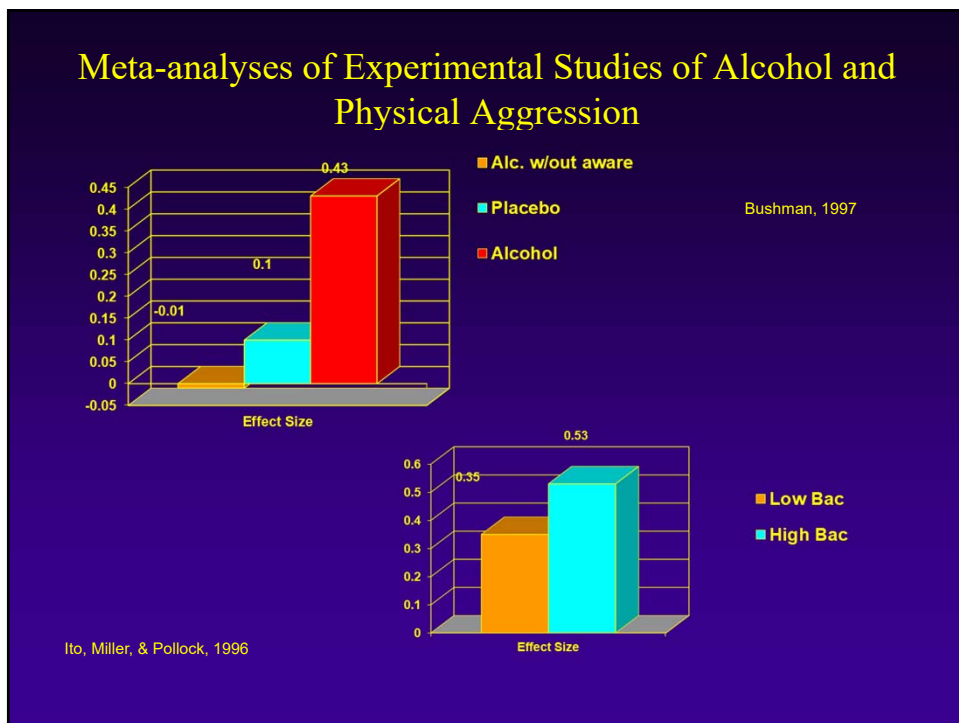
Experimental Studies of Alcohol and Physical Aggression

- General Methodological Approach
 - Random Assignment to alcohol versus control, which is sometimes no alcohol, sometimes placebo, sometimes both.
 - Experimental Context is which mild aggressive behavior (usually shock or noise) is enabled.
 - Often the context includes manipulation of other variables.
 - No studies of couples

54



55



56

57

* Experimental Studies of Alcohol and Aversive Verbal Behavior

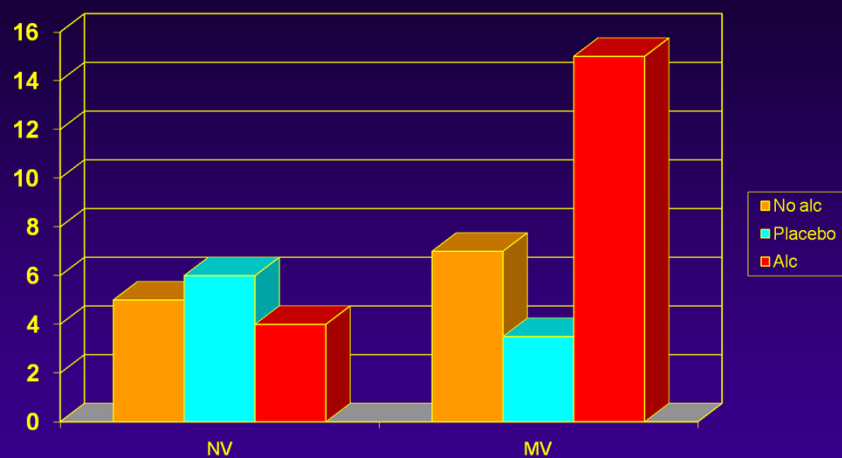
- Seen as more ecologically valid than other aggression paradigms
 - Less artificial than reaction time or teacher learner.
 - Verbal aggression more natural response than setting shock
 - Links between verbal aggression and physical aggression
 - Primarily has been used in studies of intimate partners.

58

Articulated thoughts to scenarios of spouse conflict

59

Aggressive verbalizations to angry scenarios

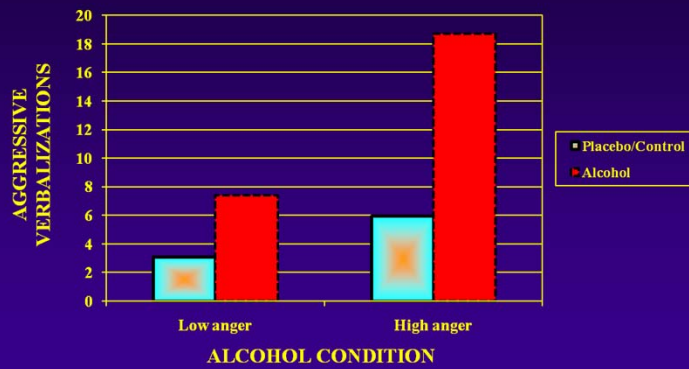


Eckhardt, Effects of Alcohol Intoxication on Anger Experience and Expression Among Partner Assaultive Men *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 2007, Vol. 75, No. 1, 61–71, Published by APA and adapted with permission

60

Marital Violent Men

Trait Anger Scale scores and Alcohol effects on Composite ATSS Aggressive Verbalizations.



Eckhardt, Effects of Alcohol Intoxication on Anger Experience and Expression Among Partner Assaultive Men Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 2007, Vol. 75, No. 1, 61-71. Published by APA and adapted with permission

61

Couples' conflict behavior when
drinking vs when sober

62

Experimental Design of the Buffalo Marital Interaction Project			
Group	Baseline	Experimental Interaction	Video-assisted Reconciliation
Aggressive group	No Alcohol	No Alcohol	—————▶
		Placebo	—————▶
		Alcohol	—————▶
NonAggressive group	No Alcohol	No Alcohol	—————▶
		Placebo	—————▶
		Alcohol	—————▶

63



64



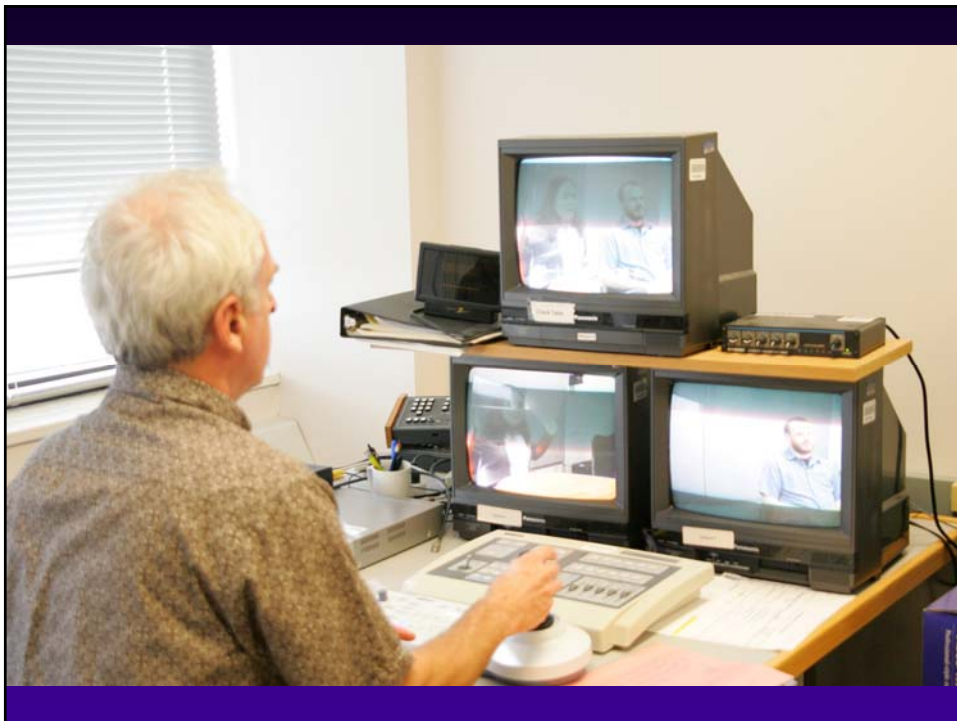
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67



68

Marital Interaction Coding System

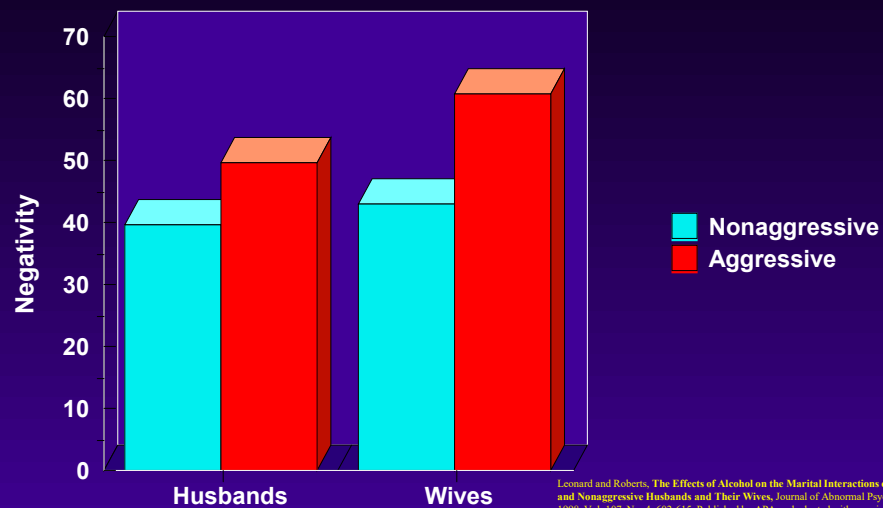
Negativity: Interrupt, Turn off, Disagree, Disapprove, Mindread Negative, Put Down, Command, Criticize, Noncomply

Problem Solving: Problem description, Question, Positive Solution, Negative Solution, Compromise

Positivity: Smile/Laugh, Humor

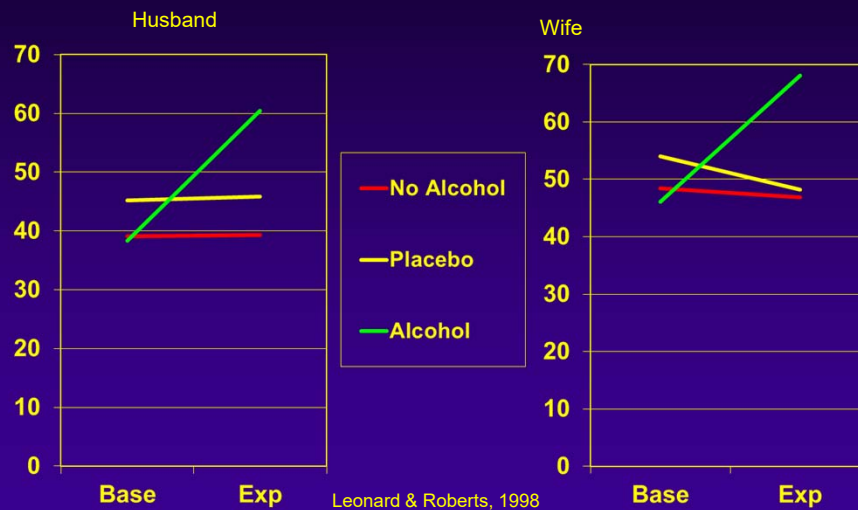
69

Negativity among aggressive and nonaggressive men and their wives



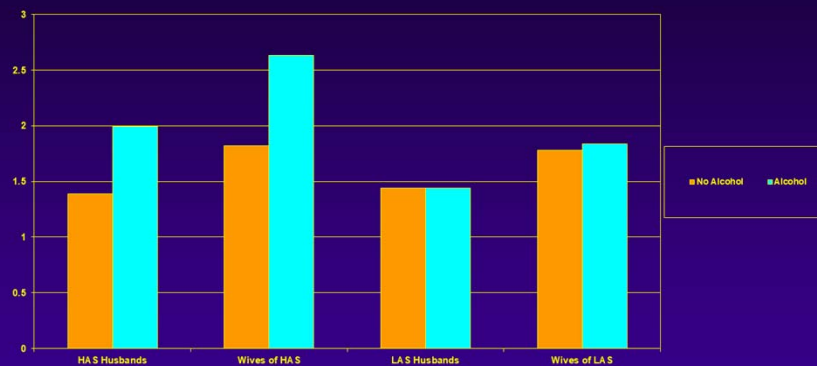
70

Negativity as a function of alcohol condition and time



71

Negativity among High Antisocial and Low Antisocial Alcoholics and their wives as a function of alcohol



Jacob, T., Leonard, K.E., & Haber, J.R. (2001). Family interactions of alcoholics as related to alcoholism. *Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research*, 25, 834-843.

72

Key aspects of the alcohol/ domestic violence relationship.

- Alcohol contributes to the occurrence and severity of partner aggression
- But, alcohol does not increase violence for everyone, and it does not increase aggression every time it is consumed.
- The challenge for causality and intervention is to explain to identify when alcohol leads to aggression and when it does not, and to explain this.

73

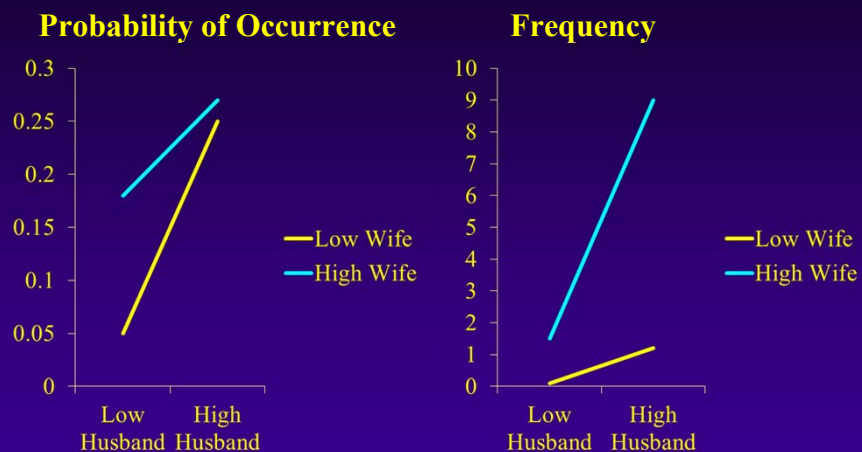


74

Factors that influence the relationship between excessive alcohol and partner violence

75

Husband and Wife Alcohol Dependence scores as predictors of occurrence vs frequency of partner violence



Testa, M., Kubiak, A., Quigley, B.M., Houston, R.J., Derrick J.L., Levitt, A., Homish, G.G., & Leonard, K.E. (2012). Husband and wife alcohol use as independent or interactive predictors of intimate partner violence. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, 73(2), 268-276.

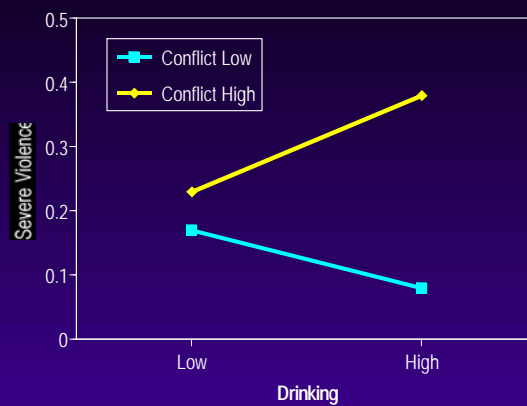
76

Factors that increase the impact of alcohol on aggression

- Hostility (Leonard & Blane, 1992)
- Verbal aggression (Quigley and Leonard, 1999)
- Life stress (Margolin, John, & Foo, 1998)
- Negative affect (Leonard & Blane, 1992)
- Jealousy (Foran & O'Leary, 2008)
- Trait Displaced Aggression (Denson, White, & Warburton, 2009)
- Childhood Physical Abuse (Maldonado, Watkins, & DiLillo, 2015)

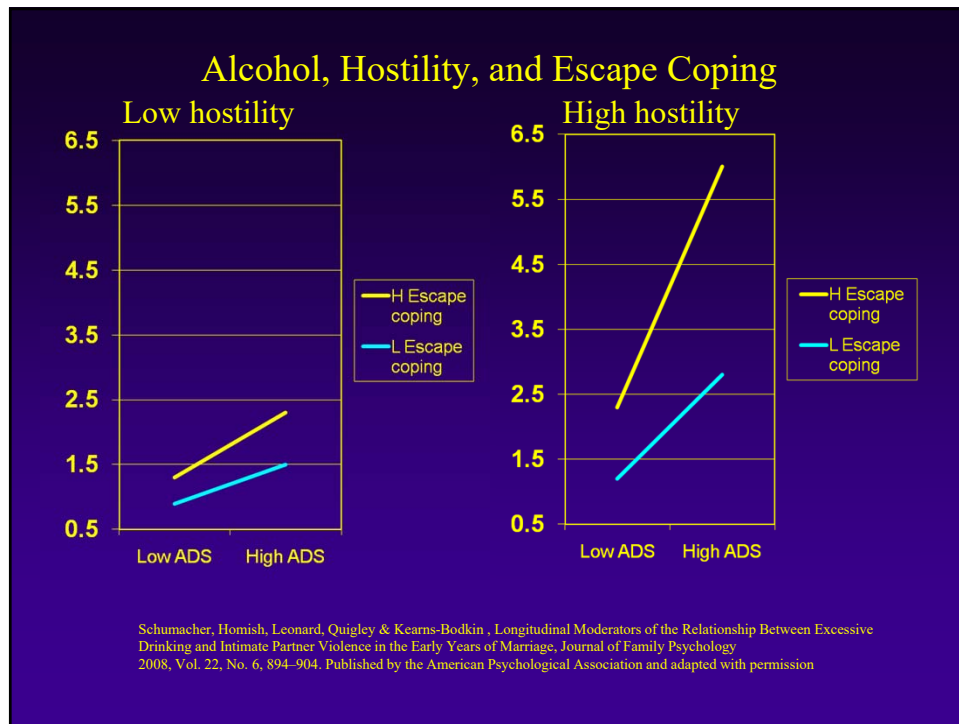
77

Interaction of Husband Drinking and Couple Conflict before Marriage on Severe Aggression during First Year of Marriage



Quigley and Leonard, Husband Alcohol Expectancies, Drinking, and Marital-Conflict Styles as Predictors of Severe Marital Violence Among Newlywed Couples, *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors* 1999, Vol. 13, No. 1, 49-59
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78



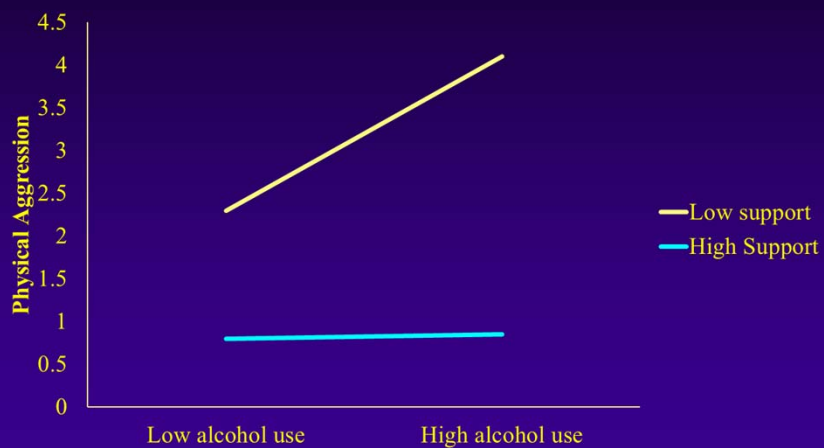
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Factors that decrease the impact of alcohol on aggression

- Marital satisfaction (Leonard & Blane, 1992)
- Social Support (Caldeira and Woodin, 2012)
- Mindfulness (Gallagher, Hudepohl, & Parrott, 2010)
- Cognitive Reappraisal Ability (Stappenback & Fromme, 2013)
- Impulse Control (Watkins, Maldonado, & DiLillo 2014)

80

Interaction of husband alcohol use and husband perceived emotional support predicting husband -> wife aggression



Caldeira and Woodin, 2012

81

What happens at the extreme

- Studies are done with general population and sometimes with couples in which one has an alcohol use disorder
- What is the impact on alcohol on those with high levels of facilitating factors and low levels of inhibiting factors.

82

At the extreme level, alcohol appears to have no effect on the frequency of violence



83

Processes underlying alcohol's effect

- Cognitive disruption models – Dominant cue (Taylor and Leonard, 1983) or Alcohol Myopia (Steele and Josephs, 1989)
 - Intoxication leads to cognitive impairment, in order to deal with this, focus on salient cues and neglect inhibitory cues.
 - Several implications
 - Intoxication should lead to behavior consistent with the dominant cue in the situation.
 - Factors that lead to hostile cues/aggressive response as being dominant should interact with alcohol.
 - Factors associated with diminished processing of inhibitory cues should interact with alcohol.

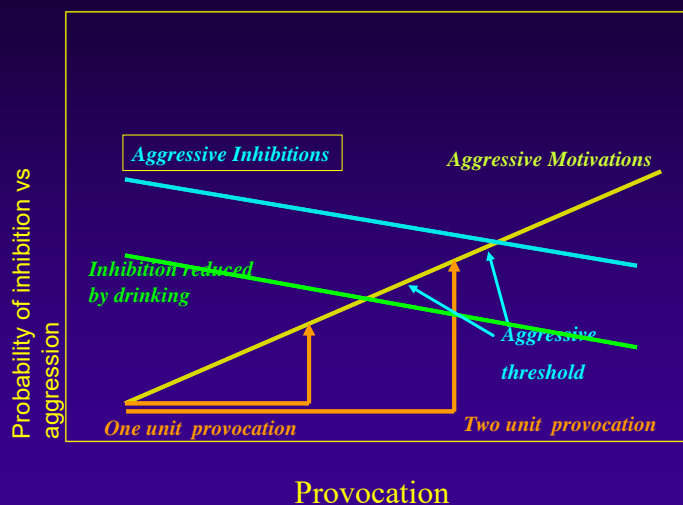
84

Multiple Thresholds Model: A consideration of the total load of instigatory and inhibitory factors

- Aggression occurs as a function of external provocations, aggressive motivations, and inhibitory processes.
- Provocation increases aggressive motivations and decreases aggressive inhibitions.
- The model assumes IPV occurs when an individual's aggression threshold is exceeded; that is, when the strength of the aggressive motivations exceeds the strength of the inhibitions.
- There may be multiple thresholds, e.g. moderate and severe aggression or a threshold and then a linear effect.
- Intoxication is hypothesized to lower these aggression thresholds by impairing inhibitions through its effect on cognitive functioning

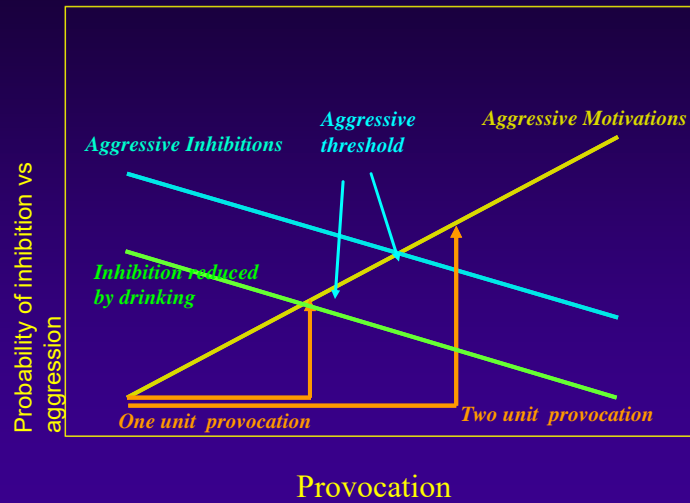
85

Aggression Curve For Individuals with Weak Aggressive Motivations and Strong Aggressive Inhibitions



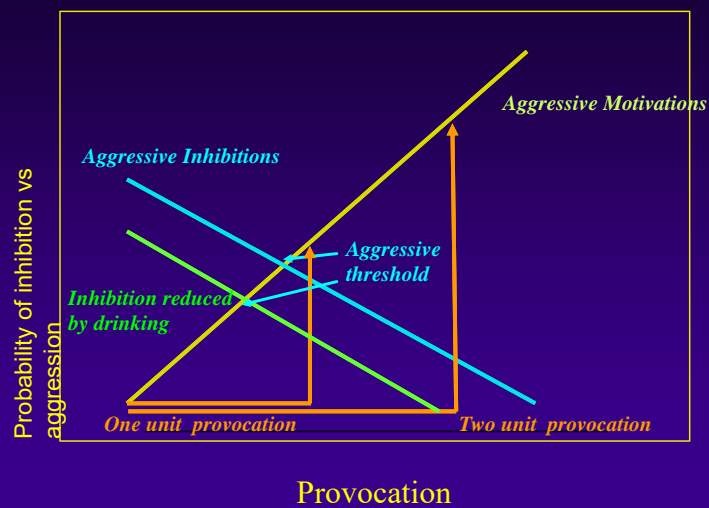
86

Aggression Curve For Individuals with Moderate Aggressive Motivations and Moderate Inhibitions



87

Aggression Curve For Individuals with Strong Aggressive Motivations and Low Inhibitions



88

Conclusions about factors that influence the causal impact of alcohol on violence

- Individuals with low aggressive motivations and high levels of inhibition are unlikely to be aggressive when drinking, unless there are high levels of provocation.
- Individuals with high aggressive motivations and low inhibition are aggressive even under low provocations, and alcohol does not impact the occurrence of aggression (although they may be more severe).
- Individuals with moderate aggressive motivations and moderate inhibitions are the most impacted by alcohol intoxication

89

What are the implications for treatment

- Evidence of the effectiveness of most treatments for batterers is mixed at best.

90

Meta-analysis of Treatment Studies of Batterers

Babcock, Green, & Robie (2004)

Based on the experimental studies, the effect size (d) due to treatment is 0.09 and 0.12, based on victim report and police records, respectively.

To a clinician, this means that a woman is 5% less likely to be re-assaulted by a man who was arrested, sanctioned, and went to a batterers' program than by a man who was simply arrested and sanctioned.

Babcock, Green, & Robie (2004)

91

Meta-analysis of treatment for batterers with substance use problems

Stephens-Lewis et al (2021)

- “Little evidence exists for effective interventions for male IPV perpetrators who use substances”

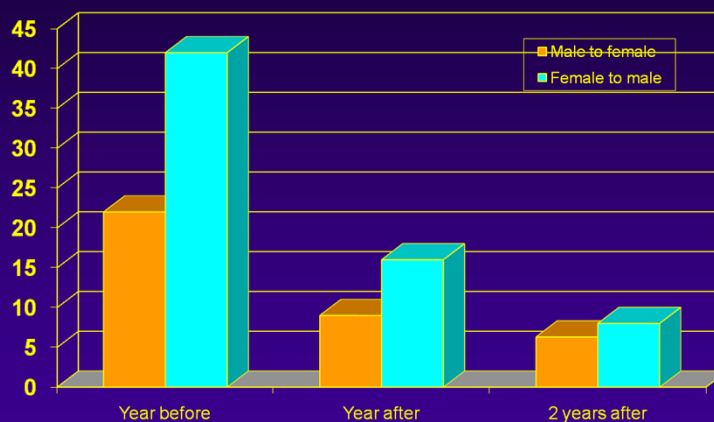
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What are the implications for treatment

- These studies are based on largely on men referred to treatment for battering.
- However, there is some evidence that married individuals who present for treatment for alcohol problems reduce their aggressive behavior –if they maintain their sobriety.

93

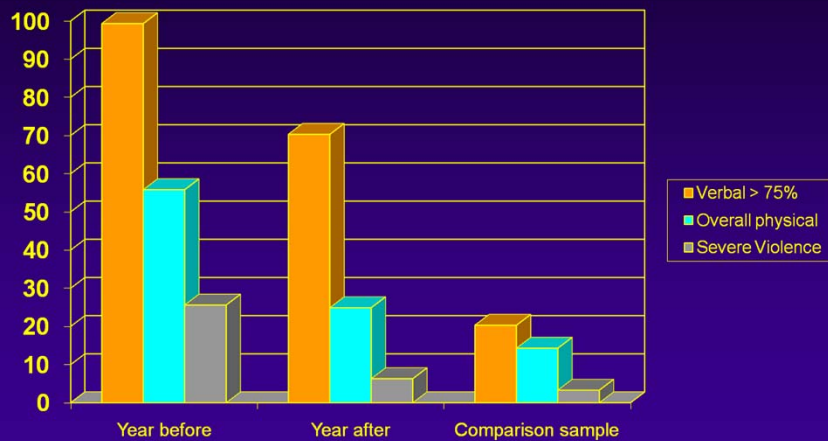
Severe aggression after couples based treatment for AUD



O'Farrell et al, 2004

94

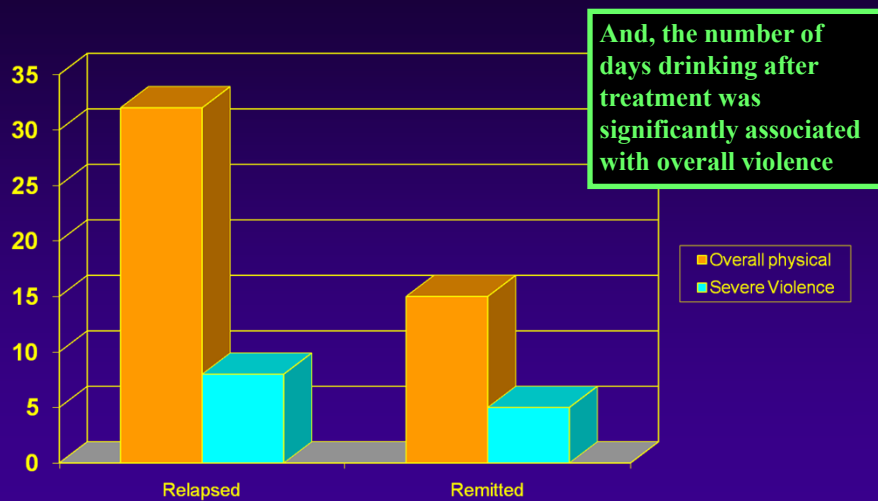
Prevalence of violence before and after individually based treatment for AUD



O'Farrell, Fals-Stewart, Murphy, and Murphy, Partner Violence Before and After Individually Based Alcoholism Treatment for Male Alcoholic Patients, *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 2003, Vol. 71, No. 1, 92-102
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95

Prevalence of violence after individually based alcoholism treatment



O'Farrell, Fals-Stewart, Murphy, and Murphy, Partner Violence Before and After Individually Based Alcoholism Treatment for Male Alcoholic Patients, *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 2003, Vol. 71, No. 1, 92-102
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96

What are the implications for treatment for individuals presenting for AUD or SUD treatment?

97

Summary

- It is clear that excessive drinking and acute alcohol use are neither necessary nor sufficient causes of marital violence.
- Excessive drinking is a clear risk factor for partner violence. A substantial portion of this risk is conferred by acute alcohol consumption.
- Excessive consumption also contributes to the occurrence of partner violence among nonalcoholic couples.
- Our approach to moderation suggests that excessive alcohol will have its largest effect on the occurrence of violence among those at moderate risk for aggression and on the severity of those at high risk for aggression.

98

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Ash Levitt

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Brian Quigley

Philip Smith

Al Reifman

Linda Roberts

Maria Testa