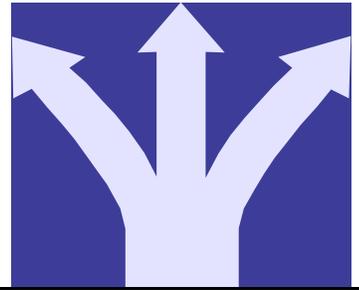


OUTLOOK ASSOCIATES of New England

94 Pleasant Street, Arlington, MA 02476
781-643-5251
www.outlookassociates.com



Volume 2, Number 3

May 2002

The Association Between Alcohol and Other Drug Use and Aggressive Behavior

There appears to be a significant association between the use of substances and aggressive behavior. For example, according to a survey done by the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics of victims of violent crime, 30% of victims surveyed believed that their attacker was under the influence of alcohol or another drug. If one were to add less extreme forms of aggressive behavior such as verbal abuse or the destruction of property, it is likely that we would also see a high correlation between substance use and aggression.

While the link between substance use and aggressive behavior is clear, the exact relationship between the two is less well understood. There are a number of explanations to describe the dynamic between the two.

Effects of Alcohol and Other Drug Use on the Brain

One view sees the connection between aggression and substance use being influenced by the psychopharmacology of the substance; that is, the nature of a drug's effect on the brain and resulting influence on behavior. The effects of alcohol intoxication include mood changes, irritability and impaired judgement. Alcohol, in fact, is associated with increased aggression in both alcoholics and non-alcoholics. Prescription drugs such as valium, klonopin and xanax are similar in their intoxication effects as alcohol. Cocaine intoxication can cause anxiety/nervousness, tension and paranoid thoughts. In addition, a person's cessation of a substance (withdrawal), can have an impact on his or her ability to function and can impair behavior and judgement. For instance, the person who has a "hangover" from the night before may be more argumentative with co-workers the next day.

Level of Dependence on the Drug

Another factor is the severity of the substance use. As dependence on a substance increases, a person's tolerance to the effects of the substance increases so that one uses larger amounts over a longer period of time. Using larger amounts for longer periods can increase the risk for negative behavioral consequences. Further, abuse and or dependence on more than one substance is common. For example, cocaine and alcohol addiction commonly occur as well as alcohol and heroin addiction. It is not clear whether combined use of different drugs leads to greater disinhibition or the withdrawal from the substances leads to increased aggressiveness.

Underlying Psychiatric Issues

An individual with underlying psychiatric problems who also uses substances increases his/her risk for aggressive behavior. For example acute intoxication in persons prone to impulsivity is likely to lead to aggressive behavior. Among persons with psychotic disorders, active substance abuse or addiction and treatment noncompliance (for example, stopping the use of medication) is associated with aggressive behavior.

"Style" of Anger

A person's style of anger may also have an influence on one's use of substances. Individuals who "stuff" their anger-meaning that they swallow their feelings and hold on to resentments-may drink alcohol or use other drugs as a way of medicating their anger or become aggressive under the influence as a way of expressing their anger.

Individuals who may have an anger style that is "escalating" meaning- that they are hostile and demanding and dumps their emotions randomly- may use substances to excuse their aggressive behavior or to incite conflict.

(Over)

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When considering how alcohol or other drug use is associated with aggressive behavior one must also look at other relevant information including history of childhood or adult victimization, stressful life experiences, social and emotional supports, and socio-cultural and socio-economic factors.

Being Victimized Under the Influence

One other related factor to be aware of is how being under the influence of alcohol or other drugs also may increase one's risk to be a victim of aggressive behavior. According to another Bureau of Justice statistic of violence-related injuries treated in hospital emergency departments, 17% of injuries for men treated in a hospital ER were alcohol/drug related and 10% of injuries for women that was alcohol/drug related.

Outlook Associates Approach to Substance Abuse Issues with its Anger Management Model

Given the significant association between substance use and anger and aggression, we have a unit as part of our model that addresses the issue of substance use.

We first explain the differences among use, abuse and dependence. **Use** is generally characterized by low tolerance to the substance and no negative consequences in any life sphere due to use. **Abuse** can involve such factors as repeated relief use of the substance and an increase in tolerance to the substance. **Dependence** to a substance may include loss of interest in activities not related to substance use and repeated loss of control over the substance.

After outlining these differences we then give a list of brief scenarios such as; *“Everyday for the last six months I use a ‘little pot’ before I go to bed either when I watch TV or listen to music to relax,”* and *“I drink a glass of wine once or twice a week or on weekends.”* We then ask individuals if they believe the scenario is an example of use, abuse or dependence. This exercise helps individuals to understand in more specific terms the differences between use, abuse and dependence and also helps them to consider how they may be using substances based on the wide range of scenarios discussed.

We also explain to participants that any anger management strategies that are learned are less likely to be used under the influence of alcohol or other drugs.

Girls Exposed to Violence More Likely to Take Drugs

Researchers at the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston interviewed 517 girls younger than age 18 who came to a clinic for birth-control counseling. The teenagers completed a survey that asked questions about their exposure to violence, including robbery, assault and rape, And on health factors such as smoking, drug use and sexual habits.

From the survey, teenage girls who had witnessed violence were **2 to 3 times** more likely to use tobacco or marijuana, drink alcohol, or use illicit drugs before sex. In addition, girls who experienced violence were **2 to 4 times** more likely than those with no exposure to violence to have sex at an early age, have intercourse with strangers, have multiple sex partners or test positive for a sexually transmitted disease.

The report is published in the November 2001 issue of the [Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine](#).

OUTLOOK ASSOCIATES UPDATES AND NEWS

- ◆ Joe Pereira and John Didio are now providers for Teamsters Insurance.
- ◆ Joe Pereira, along with John Didio, is now a provider for United Behavioral Health (UBH).
- ◆ Joe Pereira is now a Magellan and MBHP (MA Health) provider.
- ◆ John Didio is now accepting referrals for his anger management group in Framingham as well as Arlington. Both groups are expected to start in early July.
- ◆ On May 10th, Outlook Associates presented its anger management model at the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Symposium in Marlboro, MA. The presentation can be downloaded at www.outlookassociates.com/news/presentations/default.htm.
- ◆ An Anger Consequences Questionnaire has been added to our website. It can be downloaded.