

"AS SOON AS THERE WAS NO ALCOHOL IT WAS JUST LIKE IT NEVER HAPPENED" EXPLORING WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF ALCOHOL-RELATED PARTNER VIOLENCE

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Introduction: Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a global public and human rights issue with significant health and social impacts for women and children who are disproportionately affected. Alcohol misuse is a well-established risk factor for the perpetration of IPV, although its exact role is complex and contested. Higher rates of IPV are found in clinical populations with drinking problems. Heavy and binge drinking patterns are associated with increased risk and severity of male-to-female IPV. Alcohol problems are also common in women experiencing IPV. However, the role of alcohol consumption in the initiation and escalation of IPV is not well-understood. This study aimed to explore the dynamics of violent relationships involving alcohol misuse.

Method: Qualitative interviews were conducted with 18 women living in Victoria, Australia aged 20-50 years. Participants were recruited through the community who reported feeling afraid when their current or former male partner drank alcohol. Data were analysed using constructivist grounded theory methods to identify key processes underpinning the experience.

Key Findings: The findings depict a cycle of escalating abuse intimately connected to stages of a partner's drinking. Women identified particular stages as safe and unsafe and were active agents in managing safety. Anticipating abuse when a partner drinks represented the core process for women experiencing alcohol-related IPV.

Discussion and Conclusion: For some women, alcohol plays a central role in the cycle of violence, abuse and fear. Alcohol-related IPV should be the focus of further research, prevention and treatment. Planning effective interventions to address alcohol-related partner violence should include evidence from women's lived experience and consideration of their safety.

Implications for Practice: This study provides important insight into the dynamics of alcohol's involvement in IPV for practitioners working with substance-abusing perpetrators and services providing support to women survivors of alcohol-related IPV.