

Executive Summary

Research Project “Intimate Partner Violence and Alcohol”

The Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH) has commissioned the research project “Intimate Partner Violence and Alcohol”. The project was designed and carried out by Social Insight – Research, Evaluation, Consultation between July 2011 and March 2013.

The starting point is the FOPH’s goal, specified in the National Programme Alcohol (NPA) 2008–2012, to reduce the “alcohol-related share” of domestic violence. The results will aid in the development of Switzerland-wide strategies in the area of domestic violence and alcohol.

In order to safeguard action, we have to find out more about the topic from a Swiss perspective. While everyday counselling practice has shown that the perpetration or suffering of domestic violence can coincide with alcohol use, no detailed information is available. How often does this dual problem occur? Who is affected? What are the patterns? What are experts’ counselling experiences concerning people with dual problems? What does counselling practice look like?

The completed project comprises four parts. The first part presents the available literature on the topic of intimate partner violence and alcohol, with a special focus on the health relevance of the topic of violence. Secondly, a quantitative survey of victim and violence counselling services in the three linguistic areas of Switzerland will determine the prevalence of the dual problem of intimate partner violence and alcohol abuse; more than 1,500 questionnaires will be analysed. Thirdly, group interviews with affected persons will more closely record diverse problem areas. Lastly, workshops with experts in the areas of victim support, violence counselling and alcohol abuse counselling will illustrate current practice in this area while identifying the need for action in the area of domestic violence and alcohol. The report will include conclusions as well as recommendations and approaches for future developments.

Results and Conclusions

Research and literature: A clear definition of what we mean by “intimate partner violence/domestic violence” is pivotal. Research shows that domestic violence and alcohol represent an important topic in the area of public health. Along with the WTO, we’d like to point out that the topic of violence within a partnership presents many additional health-relevant aspects. The literature demonstrates the need for measures in the area of domestic violence and alcohol as well as for measures and their targeted implementation in the public health sector overall when it comes to intimate partner violence. Exemplary field research from Great Britain provides some clues as to possible developments in the dual problem area. The topic of domestic violence is to be broadly and sustainably embedded, at the policy level, in Swiss health care and public health policy.

Presence of the dual problem, patterns: The results of the prevalence survey of the dual problem show that counselling often concerns couples where the man not only perpetrates violence but also exhibits problematic alcohol use (victim counselling: 43.2%; violence counselling: 15.8%). Furthermore, there are instances – albeit significantly less common – of counselling services being faced with couples where both partners, man and woman, have a problem with alcohol on top of the violence issue (victim counselling: 4.3%; violence counselling: 9.6%). The least common counselling situation concerns couples where the woman affected by violence has a problem with alcohol but her partner does not (victim counselling: 0.6%; violence counselling: 4.8%). Overall, it is apparent that the majority of counselling situations related to intimate partner violence do not involve a dual problem (victim counselling: 51.9%; violence counselling: 69.8%). It is nevertheless a safe assumption that for a large share of counselling situations alcohol abuse is a concern in addition to the issue of violence.

Victim counselling services for female victims of intimate partner violence are predominantly faced with the dual problem indirectly, i.e. the (ex-)partner of the woman receiving counselling is a problem drinker. It is less common – though not unheard of – for victim counselling services to be faced with the dual problem directly.

Violence counselling services for male perpetrators of intimate partner violence are often faced with the dual problem directly. Oftentimes the man is the one with the alcohol problem, occasionally the man and his (ex-)partner both are. In rare cases the violence counselling services are faced with the dual problem indirectly, i.e. only the woman has an alcohol problem.

This study is unable to provide precise information regarding the prevalence of the issue in alcohol counselling services. But the results suggest that they are also faced with the dual problem, be it directly or indirectly – in other words, with alcoholic persons or their families who suffer from or perpetrate intimate partner violence.

The results on the *simultaneous* incidence of alcohol use and intimate partner violence show that constellations where domestic violence is always or predominantly connected with alcohol use occur in only one out of four examined cases (victim counselling: 25.0%; violence counselling: 22.5%). For a substantial majority of those who seek counselling, intimate partner violence either happens without the involvement of alcohol or it happens *with* as well as *without* the involvement of alcohol (victim counselling: 75.0%; violence counselling: 77.5%). In other words, most instances of intimate partner violence are not restricted to situations involving alcohol use. This impression is partly based on police data; on the other hand, police interventions concern, for obvious reasons, individual situations and excerpts of particular circumstances. The present data – which, given the counselling situations, are more broadly applicable to couples' everyday lives – show that intimate partner violence very often occurs even *without* the involvement of alcohol. The same also applies, and this bears emphasising, to many couples where the man or both partners have an alcohol problem.

The results of the qualitative interviews with male perpetrators of intimate partner violence confirm the patterns of the quantitative study. In addition, they demonstrate a variability of forms and situations of joint as well as separate occurrences of violence and alcohol.

Counselling practice in cases of dual problems: The results from the workshops with experts in the areas of domestic violence and addiction indicate a lack of consolidated information on the presence of the issue or on situations of dual problems. Institutions have developed no specific approaches for situations of dual problems. The two counselling sectors interact very little, and the experts lack institutional guidelines, principles and concrete information for specific cases which would support and guide them in their dealings with the issues of intimate partner violence and excessive use of alcohol. There are no services for continuing or further education on the topic of intimate partner violence and alcohol.

The exchange among field experts during the research project has roused their mutual interest. The experts from both areas have many questions for the respective other counselling sector and are interested in a further exchange.

The analysis demonstrates that, despite their current distance, the two sectors share more commonalities than was initially assumed, be it in terms of the situation of those seeking counselling or the experts' own work situation. An institutional, interdisciplinary exchange as well as cooperation, including that in specific counselling cases, should be promoted in future.

The main objective which proves to be pivotal is this: Counselling services in both sectors – counselling of victims and perpetrators of domestic violence and counselling of persons dealing with alcohol abuse as well as their families – must be able to ensure the safety of the victims of domestic violence, (even) if the latter are also directly or indirectly affected by alcohol abuse.

Recommendations and Approaches for Development

Raising awareness for the dual problem of intimate partner violence and alcohol

Recommendation #1: Britain is a pioneer in the area of domestic violence and alcohol. A study trip, including a visit to some model projects in Britain, can raise the awareness of the topic for key players in the areas of policy, administration and practice.

Recommendation #2: The results of this study are to be disseminated and presented at symposiums throughout Switzerland in order to raise the awareness of the responsible experts in the field and in the area of policy/administration.

Policy level: Institutional guidelines and quality requirements

Recommendation #3: The stakeholders at the policy level have crucial functions and duties in the allocation of resources and the monitoring of services rendered. The service mandates, the allocation of resources, etc., have to take into account the new insights regarding the dual problem. A clear policy-level commitment will promote efforts in the field.

Recommendation #4: Resources have to be made available for the field as well as for continuing and further education in the area of dual problems.

Field level: Counselling services by experts of both sectors

Recommendation #5: Future handling of dual problems should be determined by practitioners, specifically addiction, violence/perpetrator and victim counselling services. The development and implementation of appropriate continuing and further education options, which can be utilised by various practice sectors together, should follow. This will also promote the necessary cross-pollination.

Recommendation #6: A manual on the topic of intimate partner violence/domestic violence and alcohol is to be developed to support the practitioners (model: Stella Project Toolkit). A reference book like that provides quick and effective support in specific counselling cases.

Further studies on open questions

Recommendation #7: A qualitative–empirical research project should conduct an in-depth investigation into the patterns of intimate partner violence and alcohol that dually affect concrete situations. Answers providing help and support for those affected are to be developed.

Recommendation #8: Existing research and discourses on the dual problem are to be reviewed and an overview made available for policy, research and practice.

Recommendation #9: In connection with the topic of intimate partner violence, research should also focus on outpatient and inpatient addiction services. A qualitative (for now) study is to review individual cases and examine current practice. The results will support dual counselling practice.

Recommendation #10: Research into health and intimate partner violence/domestic violence is to be ramped up in Switzerland in general. Corresponding strategies should be developed at the institutional level (confederation, cantons).