


<p>Professor Cathy Humphreys Social Work at Melbourne University of Melbourne Parkville. Victoria 3010 cathy.humphreys@unimelb.edu.au</p>	<p>Melbourne Research Alliance to End Violence Against Women and Children</p>	
---	---	---

17<sup>th</sup> November, 2022

**Re: National Consultation on Coercive Control**

I thought that it might be helpful to follow up the consultation about coercive control held on 7<sup>th</sup> November with a short briefing about substance use coercion, an issue I raised at the consultation and an area where my colleagues, Van Nguyen and Dr Margaret Kertesz (and others) are undertaking an ARC funded research program. I assume that this briefing is very late given that you were almost at the end of the consultation period in early November, but hope that these points might be helpful.

My concern arises due to the lack of identification of substance use coercion amongst the elements identified in the Consultation Paper that contribute to coercive controlling tactics.

**1. Perpetration of violence**

There is now 30 years of research that shows that the **severity of violence towards women increases significantly when it occurs in the context of substance use** (Humphreys et al, 2005; Leonard & Quigley, 2017). In Australia, 240 women were murdered by a current or former male partner between 2010 to 2018 – more than 60% of the male partners involved were substance affected during the fatal episode (ANROWS, 2022). Substance use among perpetrators of domestic and family violence (DFV) is a prevalent issue. In Victoria, police attendance to DFV incidents between 2014-2015 found that 41% of offenders were possibly substance affected (Yates, 2019). While in the past, severity of DFV in the context of substance use has related to the extent of physical and sexual violence that women experience, more recently research and practice has shifted to identify the ways in which substance use is used as an integrated, fear inducing aspect of the **tactics of abuse and coercive control** (Heward-Belle et al, 2022).

**2. AOD as a coping mechanism**

Victim-survivors (including men, women or children) may use substances to cope with DFV, which often reduces their ability to engage with recovery supports. Perpetrators may introduce victim-survivors to substances and encourage these behaviors as a way to increase their control and personal power (Phillips *et al.*, 2020).

**3. Experience and severity of victimization**

Victim-survivors’ use of substances may increase severity of victimization (Braaf, 2012). Victim-survivors using substances experience additional barriers to seeking help

as their credibility is brought into question by service providers. Police are less likely to take reports of DFV seriously if a victim-survivor is intoxicated (Sutherland *et al.*, 2016).

#### **4. Children's experiences of parenting**

Exposure to parental use of AOD in the context of DFV increases children's levels of fear and trauma. Family stability is impaired when issues of AOD and DFV are present - increasing the likelihood of child protection involvement (Victor *et al.*, 2018) and children being placed into out of home care (Canfield *et al.*, 2017; Healey *et al.*, 2020). We note that **children are substantially impacted when DFV occurs in the context of substance use**. The numbers of children coming into out of home care are increasing year on year, with 46,000 children in out of home care in 2020 (AIHW, 2021). Rarely are children taken into care due to domestic violence alone, but most frequently when domestic violence occurs in the context of substance use and/or mental health problems (Conley Wright *et al.*, 2021). Children are victims in their own right, and the ways in which fear is induced through DFV occurring in the context of the use of Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) shows in the impact on their development, and at the extreme, the removal from their families. At a basic level, children are terrified when they hear their father come home drunk and abusive. They go to their bedrooms and hide. A man who has used alcohol in the context of his violence and abuse, only has to threaten with reaching for a bottle of beer to engender fear in his partner and children. **Alcohol and other drugs are an integral part of coercive control and the tactics of abuse.**

#### **Substance use Coercion**

The term substance use coercion has recently emerged in research literature (Phillips *et al.*, 2020, Warshaw *et al.*, 2014) but has not been widely adopted in real-world contexts. The complex nature of substance use coercion is demonstrated in Figure 1. As mentioned above, victim survivors' AOD use can be a coping mechanism in response to DFV thereby causing or exacerbating their use. AOD use can also interfere with victim-survivors' capacity to access treatment, and exacerbates their reliance on a perpetrator. In contrast, perpetrators' AOD use can be used as an excuse for acts of violence, provides a way to control their family through threats to use substances, and displaces responsibility for recovery onto their family members.

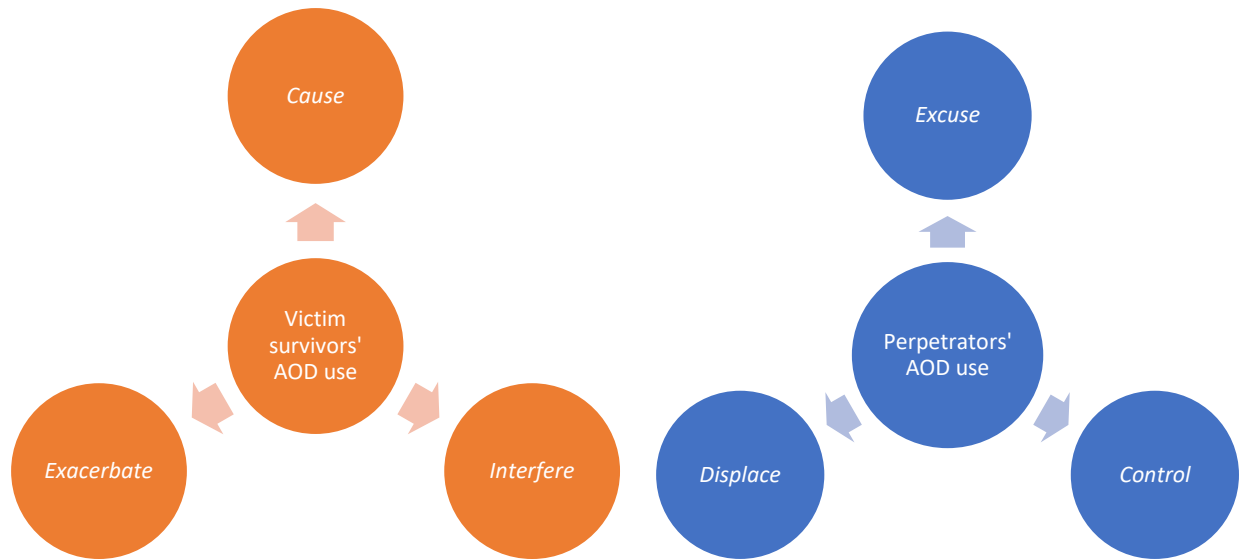


Figure 1. Themes in substance use coercion

In summary, there has been a recognisable shift in the understanding of the role of substance use in the context of DFV. It is not simply an issue of co-occurrence, but for a substantial number of perpetrators it is an integral aspect of their tactics of control.

Cathy Humphreys  
 Van Nguyen, Margaret Kertesz  
 University of Melbourne

## References

- AIHW (2021). Child protection in Australia, 2019-2020. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/child-protection/child-protection-australia-2019-20/summary>
- BRAAF, R. 2012. Elephant in the room: responding to alcohol misuse and domestic violence. In: CLEARINGHOUSE, A. D. A. F. V. (ed.). Sydney: The University of New South Wales.
- CANFIELD, M., RADCLIFFE, P., MARLOW, S., BOREHAM, M. & GILCHRIST, G. 2017. Maternal substance use and child protection: a rapid evidence assessment of factors associated with loss of child care. *Child Abuse Negl*, 70, 11-27.
- CONLEY WRIGHT, A., METCALFE, L., HEWARD-BELLE, S., COLLINGS, S., & BARRETT, E. (2021). Critical interpretive synthesis: Child protection involvement for families with domestic and family violence, alcohol and other drug issues, and mental health issues (Research report, 06/2021). ANROWS.
- GILCHRIST, G., DENNIS, F., RADCLIFFE, P., HENDERSON, J., HOWARD, L. M. & GADD, D. 2019. The interplay between substance use and intimate partner violence perpetration: A meta-ethnography. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 65, 8-23.

- HUMPHREYS, C., REGAN, L., RIVERS, D. AND THIARA, R.K (2005) Domestic violence and substance misuse: tackling complexity', *British Journal of Social Work* 35 (7) 1303-1320
- HEALEY, L., HEWARD-BELLE, S., HUMPHREYS, C., ISOBE, J., TSANTEFSKI, M. & YOUNG, A. (2020). *Working at the intersections of domestic and family violence, parental substance misuse and/or mental health issues. Research report of the STACY Project: Safe & Together Addressing Complexity*. Melbourne, University of Melbourne.  
<https://violenceagainstwomenandchildren.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/STACY-working-with-complexity-Final-Report.pdf>
- HEWARD-BELLE, S., KERTESZ, M., HUMPHREYS, C., TSANTEFSKI, M. & ISOBE, J. (2022). Participatory practice guideline development at the intersections of domestic and family violence, mental distress and/or parental substance use. *Advances in Dual Diagnosis*, 15, 51-65  
<https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/ADD-12-2021-0017/full/html>
- LEONARD, K. E. & QUIGLEY, B. M. 2017. 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 Alcohol Rev*, 36, 7-9.
- MILLER, P., COX, E., COSTA, E., MAYSHAK, R., WALKER, A., HYDER, S., TONNER, L. & DAY, A. 2016. Alcohol/Drug-Involved Family Violence in Australia (ADIVA). In: CRIMINOLOGY, A. I. O. (ed.). Canberra: National Drug Strategy.
- PHILLIPS, H., WARSHAW, C. & KAEWKEN, O. 2020. Literature Review: Intimate Partner violence, Substance Use Coercion and the Need for Integrated Service Models. National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma, and Mental Health.
- SERPELL B, SULLIVAN T & DOHERTY L 2022. Homicide in Australia 2019-20. Statistical Report no. 39. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. <https://doi.org/10.52922/sr78511>
- SUTHERLAND, P., MCDONALD, C. & MILLSTEED, M. 2016. *Family violence, alcohol consumption and the likelihood of criminal offences* [Online]. Melbourne: Crime Statistics Agency. Available: [https://www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/embridge\\_cache/emshare/original/public/2016/11/1f/362385d38/20161201\\_InBrief7\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/embridge_cache/emshare/original/public/2016/11/1f/362385d38/20161201_InBrief7_FINAL.pdf) [Accessed].
- VICTOR, B. G., GROGAN-KAYLOR, A., RYAN, J. P., PERRON, B. E. & GILBERT, T. T. 2018. Domestic violence, parental substance misuse and the decision to substantiate child maltreatment. *Child Abuse Negl*, 79, 31-41.
- WARSHAW, C., LYON, E., BLAND, J., PHILLIPS, H. & HOOPER, M. 2014. Mental Health and Substance Use Coercion Surveys. United States: National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma & Mental Health and the National Domestic Violence Hotline.