

# Data Points

RESULTS FROM THE CALIFORNIA WOMEN'S HEALTH SURVEY

The California Health and Safety Code defines domestic violence as “infliction or threat of physical harm against past or present adult or adolescent female intimate partners, and shall include physical, sexual, and psychological abuse against the woman, and is a part of a pattern of assaultive, coercive, and controlling behaviors directed at achieving compliance from, or control over, that woman.”

In the United States, approximately 1.5 million women are physically assaulted or raped by an intimate partner each year.<sup>1</sup>

The relationship between alcohol or substance abuse and domestic violence is complex. Misusing drugs or alcohol may not directly cause violence but may increase the risk of violence. Alcohol and drug abuse may also be a consequence of victimization. Several research studies have associated heavy drinking and drug use with violence between intimate partners.<sup>2-5</sup> Studies show that in 45% of domestic violence cases, men had been drinking, and in about 20% of cases, women had been drinking.<sup>6</sup> Alcohol abuse is also correlated with severity of battering.<sup>7</sup>

Treating alcohol and drug dependence along with trauma (including domestic violence) appear more effective than addressing domestic violence alone for individuals with these multiple issues.<sup>8</sup>

Since 1996, the California Department of Health Services has administered the Battered Women's Shelter Program, currently funding 94 agencies to provide domestic violence-related services to battered women and their children. In addition to emergency shelter, the programs provide counseling, legal services, transitional

housing, and other support services.

Women experiencing domestic violence often present to service providers with multiple issues, including alcohol, drug abuse, and/or mental health problems. Service providers have anecdotally reported difficulties helping women who are both victims of domestic violence and have alcohol or drug abuse problems.

This report describes findings from the California Women's Health Survey on domestic violence as well as alcohol and drug abuse among California women age 18 and older. In 2004 and 2005, respondents were asked about their experience with domestic violence as well as their alcohol use. In 2005, women who reported physical or sexual abuse or stalking were also asked whether alcohol or drugs were involved in those incidents. Survey questions on domestic violence focused on:

- Physical violence—whether in the past 12 months an intimate partner threw something at the respondent, or pushed, kicked, beat or threatened her with (or used) a knife or gun, or forced sex.
- Psychological abuse—whether in the past 12 months the respondent was frightened, controlled or followed by an intimate partner.

Women who responded “yes” to any of the questions regarding domestic violence were categorized into two groups: those who responded positively to any of the physical or sexual abuse questions, and those who responded positively to only psychological abuse questions.

## *Alcohol and Drug Abuse Issues for California Women Experiencing Domestic Violence, 2004-2005*

Department of Public Health  
Maternal, Child and  
Adolescent Health/Office of  
Family Planning Branch

**Public Health Message:**  
*Women experiencing domestic violence may benefit from domestic violence service providers who are trained to recognize and be sensitive to women affected by alcohol or substance abuse, and from programs that provide formal linkages between domestic violence services and alcohol and drug abuse treatment.*

Survey questions also assessed the respondent's alcohol use during the past 30 days. Women who reported consuming five or more drinks on any occasion in the last 30 days were classified as binge drinkers.

Data from both survey years were combined, forming a sample of 9,180 women. Results from the 7,703 respondents who completed questions on both domestic violence and alcohol use are as follows:

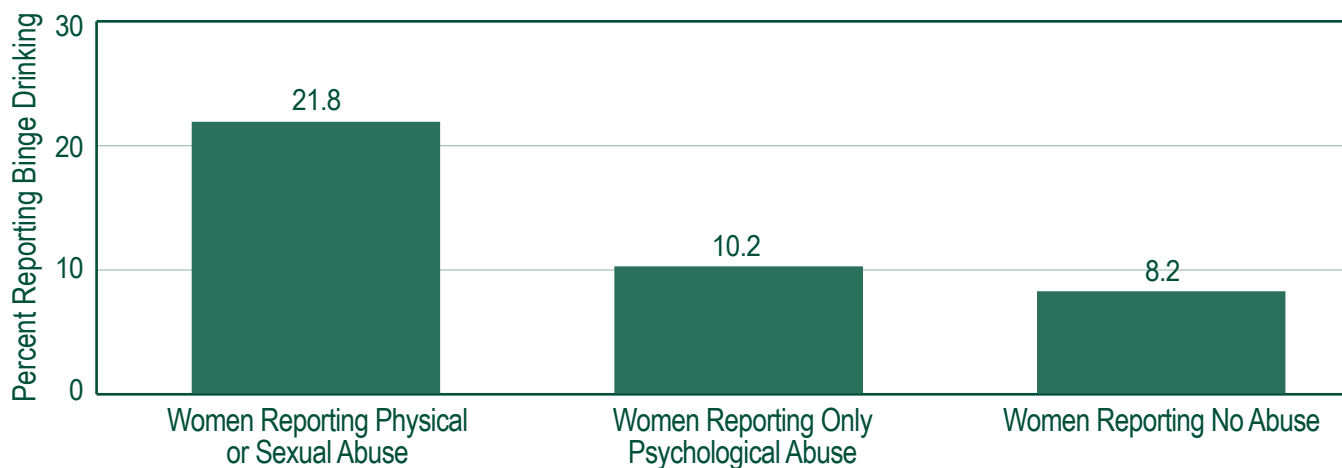
- At least one incident of domestic violence over the previous 12 months was reported by 9.2 percent of women respondents.
  - Half of this group (4.6 percent) reported physical or sexual violence or both (many in this group also reported psychological abuse).
  - The other half (4.6 percent) reported psychological abuse but no physical or sexual abuse.
- Binge drinking in the past 30 days was identified in 8.9% of women respondents.

- Binge drinking was identified at nearly twice the rate among women reporting any type of domestic violence compared with those reporting no domestic violence (15.8 percent vs. 8.2 percent respectively) in the past 12 months.
- Binge drinking was identified in more than twice as many women who reported physical or sexual domestic violence compared with those reporting psychological abuse only (21.8 percent vs. 10.2 percent respectively).

The 2005 survey question about alcohol or drug involvement associated with domestic violence was asked only of respondents who positively answered a question regarding physical or sexual abuse or stalking (n = 158). The question did not differentiate whether it was they or their partners who had been involved in the alcohol or substance abuse.

- Of women who reported experiencing domestic violence (physical or sexual abuse or stalking) over the previous 12 months, 39.5 percent also reported that alcohol or drugs were involved in at least one incident.

**Percent of California Women Reporting Binge Drinking Among Those Reporting Domestic Violence, 2004-2005**



Source: California Women's Health Survey, 2004-2005

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