

Interpersonal conflict from intoxicated people: the experiences of people who use methamphetamine

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Introduction: People who use methamphetamine often experience interpersonal conflict. Most research focuses on physical abuse from intimate partners. This study examines the past year prevalence of verbal and physical abuse by intoxicated people among people who use methamphetamine, how this varies by relationship type, and correlates of experiencing such abuse in this population.

Methods: We used 2019 Australian National Drug Strategy Household Survey data (N=20,513) to estimate the past-year prevalence of verbal and physical abuse by a person under the influence of drugs or alcohol among respondents reporting past-year methamphetamine use (n=246) by relationship to the perpetrator (stranger, friend, partner, relative) and by gender. Correlates of verbal and physical abuse were explored. All analyses were weighted for the survey sampling framework.

Results: Among Australians reporting past-year methamphetamine use, the past-year prevalence of abuse by an intoxicated person was 61% for verbal abuse (95% CI 53-68%) and 27% for physical abuse (95% CI 20-36%). Although the overall prevalence of experiencing verbal or physical abuse by an intoxicated person did not differ by gender, physical abuse from an intoxicated partner was more prevalent among women (16%, 95% CI 9-27%) than men (4%, 95% CI 2-11%). Verbal and physical abuse from an intoxicated person was associated with more frequent methamphetamine use, self-reported diagnoses of mental disorders, and polysubstance use, particularly opioid use.

Discussions and Conclusions: Interpersonal conflict involving intoxicated people is common among people who use methamphetamine, particularly those reporting more frequent use, co-occurring mental disorders, and polysubstance use. Women who use methamphetamine are particularly vulnerable to physical abuse from intoxicated partners.

Implications on communities, practice, policy and/or First Nations communities: Acknowledging and addressing interpersonal conflict in harm reduction and treatment interventions may improve outcomes for people who use methamphetamine. In this context, specific attention to women experiencing intimate partner violence is needed.

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