

Some thoughts on the intersection of substance abuse, mental health and domestic violence

- Codependency is not a useful or accurate concept for describing domestic violence victims.
- For victims: “Denial” has different and similar functions when it relates to domestic violence versus substance abuse
 - Different: avoiding new violence and abuse; protecting children; protecting from revictimization by others;
 - Similar: avoid feeling shame;
- A victim’s recovery or mental health is her responsibility. She is not responsible for her partner’s violence or cessation of violence.
- A domestic violence perpetrator’s substance abuse or mental health issues can be an aggravating factor to his abuse and control but is a separate issue. That said, his violence and abuse is unlikely to get better without his being in recovery and/or treatment.
- Inpatient/outpatient substance abuse and mental health programs often do not screen at all or well for domestic violence so their formulation of the case may be limited/lacking inclusion of issues of safety, e.g. She is an addict and domestic violence victim.
- If victim’s partner is in recovery or treatment he may remain abusive and controlling. Cessation of use does not guarantee a cessation of abuse. In fact, he may use his recovery as a justification for control e.g. “I need to go to my meetings, put my recovery in front of everything else.” “We need to save money etc so I fix my mistakes.”
- A victim who is addict or has mental health issues may be more vulnerable to a domestic violence perpetrator because of her addiction/diagnosis. She may
 - Not be able to call police to protect herself from the violence
 - She may lack supports from family and friends due to substance abuse or mental health related behavior, eg . lying, stealing, unreliability
 - May not be believed about abuse and violence because of her history of substance abuse or mental health issues
 - Is perceived as a “less worthy” victim
 - Self blame and the blame from others makes it less likely she will reach out around the violence.
 - May not be able to access traditional domestic violence services because she is actively using or has left/kicked out of shelter due to her substance use or mental health
 - He may attend the same 12 step meetings or be able to keep track of her through his friends in the meetings.