



WHAT IS SUBSTANCE USE COERCION?

Created by Coercive Control in MH/AOD Special Interest Group members - Specialist Family Violence Advisor (SFVA) Program 2023



Substance use coercion refers to coercive tactics that target a partner's use of substances as part of a broader pattern of abuse and control (Warshaw, C. & Tinnon, E., 2018).

People who use substances are at increased risk of abuse by intimate partners, including while using or intoxicated (Mohler-Kuo, M. et al., 2004; Jessell, L. et al., 2017; Rivera, E.A. et al., 2015). Experiencing multiple forms of intimate partner violence, abuse, or trauma throughout one's life further increases the risk of developing substance use-related problems.

Types of substance use coercion tactics



Abuse directly related to survivor's substance use

- Using survivor's substance use as a justification for abuse and violence
- Damaging survivor's self-esteem by verbally abusing or insulting them because of their substance use
- Using survivor's intoxication to coerce sex or to sexually assault survivors
- Denying the abuse happened by suggesting survivors imagined it or injured themselves while they were intoxicated.



Coercion related to supplying and controlling substances

- Encouraging survivor to use substances or initiating them into use
- Facilitating survivor's progression from substance use to addiction
- Forcing survivor to use substances against their will and without their consent
- Supplying survivors with substances as a way to "apologise" for abuse and violence
- Controlling survivor's access to substances as a way to keep them in the relationship
- Forcing survivor into withdrawal as a way to harm and control them



Coercion related to children and custody

- Exploiting survivor's fear of child removal by threatening to call the authorities about their substance use
- Using survivor's substance use against them by reporting them to child welfare/child protective services or threatening them with loss of custody of their children
- Using survivor's substance use as a way to try to turn their children against them
- Encouraging or forcing survivor to use substances so they appear irresponsible to the court in custody cases



Coercion into sex work

- Coercing survivor into sex work as a way to obtain substances or acquire money for substances, often exposing them to additional abuse and violence at the hands of their clients.
- Entrapping survivor in a double-bind related to sex work, including coercing survivor into sex work to obtain substances for their abusive partner, and then abusing survivor because they engaged in sex work.



Threats to call law enforcement about survivor's substance use

- Planting drug paraphernalia and calling the police as a way to intimidate and threaten survivor
- Threatening to report survivor's substance use to law enforcement as a mechanism of control



Undermining survivor's recovery efforts and access to treatment and services

- Sabotaging survivor's attempts to discontinue substance use or achieve recovery
- Discouraging survivor from accessing substance use treatment services
- Interfering with substance use treatment (e.g., forcing a survivor to lower their methadone dose, requiring a survivor to ask their permission to attend an appointment)
- Stalking survivor at substance use treatment services and showing up at survivor's programs without their consent
- Escalating violence in response to survivor's recovery or cessation of substance use.

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.