

## Professor's Notes

### Week Seven: Ministering to Victims of Substance, Domestic, and Sexual Abuses

#### Substance Abuse

Substance abuse is a term normally used to refer to a condition in which chemical agents, either legal or illicit, have been consumed to such a degree that the individual's life has been negatively affected, in some significant way, by the use of the chemicals.

There has long been a debate over the definition of drug abuse. Many have classified it as a disease that should be treated. This approach takes away from any moral responsibility of the individual. Addictions never start off as addictions but a willful act. *"After an initial use the individual had to make a choice to use it again and again, thus becoming addicted."*<sup>1</sup> We as Christian, pastoral care givers must define the issue in terms of the spiritual and moral standards set forth in Scripture.

An individual who is actively abusing drugs or alcohol is often not aware of the problem or denies the problem. These individuals are highly given to denying any problems resulting from their use. The pleasure and/or relief felt when a person is intoxicated becomes a powerful motivator to use chemicals repeatedly or habitually. It is important to recognize that most serious abusers are filled with guilt and shame following the return to a sober condition and are afraid and very defensive that others will pressure them to give up their "best friend". Significant abusers have developed a personal relationship with their chemicals; they have become best friends.

Drug addiction is both a medical issue (involving the physiological, psychological and emotional) and a spiritual crisis. If unaddressed, it may also lead to a legal crisis. The treatment, then, requires both medical and spiritual intervention. You cannot treat one without the other. Sir William Osler (the father of modern medicine) put it this way, *"I treat, but God heals."*

#### The Biochemistry of Addiction

All drugs affect the brain. They impact the brain on many levels. That is why they are also called psycho-active drugs because they alter the feelings (mood-altering) and work primarily in an area of the brain. The chemical compounds in **stimulants**, **nicotine**, **opioids**, **alcohol**, and **sedatives** enter the brain and bloodstream upon use. Once a chemical enters the brain, it can cause the user to lose control of their impulses. Many continue use of the substance, unlocking a host of euphoric feelings and strange behavioral traits. Long-term addiction can have severe outcomes, such as brain damage, and can even result in death.

When someone develops an addiction, the brain craves the reward of the substance. This is due to the intense stimulation of the brain's reward system which arises from the **Limbic System**. The *limbic system* is a ring of structures around the brain stem that work together to influence emotion and to form memories. This is a part of the brain where the person's feelings originate. The limbic system emits dopamine which are carried by **neuro-transmitters**, the

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<sup>1</sup> Cleave Stephen. *Counseling Substance Abuse and Addiction*. Waco, TX: Word Press. 1988. pg 32.

substance that makes us feel good. This is both normal and natural and explains why we feel good after such things as accomplishing a difficult task or receiving affection from someone. It is the Limbic System sending rewards for a positive experience or thought.

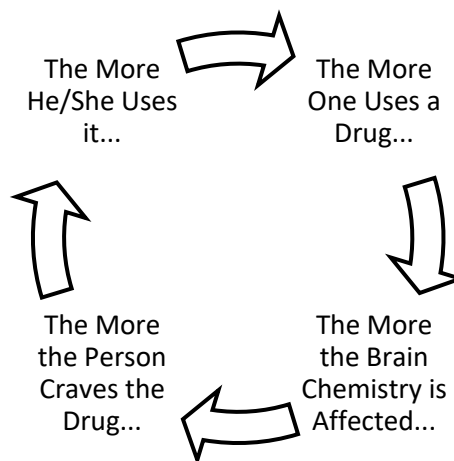
When drugs enter the body, they imitate the brain's neuro-transmitters, by speeding up their release, or by prolonging their presence. This is what the process of "getting high" is all about.

Once the effect of the drug is out of the brain the effect is gone. However, when a person begins to use a drug on a regular basis, the brain chemistry is altered by the drug, and the drug becomes a part of the normal functioning of the brain.

With prolonged substance use, the brain adjusts to the surges in dopamine by reducing the numbers of receptors that can process it. It also stops making as much dopamine as it used to. As a result, Limbic System receives very little input and the person has a hard time experiencing pleasure of any kind. That's why many drug and alcohol abusers can be lifeless and depressed. They are no longer interested in the things that used to bring them joy.

The brain responds to addiction based on a number of factors, such as the type and number of drugs used, the frequency, and the stage of addiction. For example, if someone uses cocaine, they will notice a feeling of euphoria. Therefore, there is a short, but powerful burst of dopamine—the chemical that causes many to feel euphoric. This feeling can be so intense that a strong desire to continue using may form.

The more someone abuses a drug, the more they may continue using it, unless they get help overcoming a life-threatening addiction. Once the chemical has affected the brain, individuals can feel physical symptoms, as well as the impact of the chemical throughout their nervous system. These can include a rapid heartbeat, paranoia, nausea, hallucinations, and other disturbing sensations the individual has little control over. He or she may become consumed with abusing the substance to maintain their habit, no matter the cost. As a result of this powerful grip of substance abuse, individuals can begin acting in unrecognizable ways, concerning friends and family.



A person's brain chemistry may not turn to normal after a person quits using drugs. This is called "**Post Drug Impairment Syndrome**. *"It is characterized by the inability to concentrate, maintain attention, hold a job, maintain personal relationships, achieve financial stability, handle stress, or remain in one location very long."*<sup>2</sup>

With long-term substance abuse, **the brain physically changes**. The brain actually **shrinks** and its ability to process information is damaged. When this happens, the parts of the brain that regulate impulse control, stress management, and information processing can all be harmed.

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<sup>2</sup> Journal of the American Medical Association: May, 2, 1986, 2311-14

### **The Frontal Lobe: *Impulse Control***

The limbic system is not the only part of the brain affected by prolonged drug or alcohol abuse. The frontal lobe of the brain also suffers. It shrinks and loses its ability to function properly. This part of the brain regulates decisions, choices, and the ability to know the difference between right and wrong. When the frontal lobe is not working as it should, you cannot control the impulse to drink or take drugs. Ironically the essential part of the brain you would use to change your harmful habits is impaired by those harmful habits and unable to make the proper decisions.



### **In Constant Fear: *The Amygdala***

The frontal lobe controls other parts of the brain, like the **amygdala**. The amygdala is the **emotional center** of the brain. Without proper control from the frontal lobe, the amygdala becomes oversensitive to stress. In this state, someone can have extreme mood swings and become trapped in a state of panic and worry. Many addicts and alcoholics are constantly fearful and rarely feel safe. This is because the amygdala is overexcited.

### **Cellular Structure: *Lost Connections***

The **cellular structure** of the brain is affected by heavy drinking and drug use as well. We've all heard that drug abuse kills brain cells. The brain has gray cells and white cells, or fibers. The gray cells control thinking and feeling while the white cells provide the connection and communication between the gray cells.

Persistent drug and alcohol use has been proven to kill the white cells in the brain. This **severs the communication pathways** so that information is not passed along properly. The brain can reroute these communication pathways using the remaining white cells, but it requires abstinence and time for this to happen.

These negative effects that drugs and alcohol have on the brain are frightening. But if someone can stop drinking or taking drugs completely, the brain begins to heal. With long-term abstinence, cognitive function and brain shrinkage can be reversed, new pathways in the brain can be forged, and a person can return to normal brain function. **If someone can learn to live without the drugs or alcohol, there is hope for full physical recovery.**

# Domestic Abuse

## Introduction

Domestic Abuse also referred to as Domestic Violence and also Intimate Partner Violence. The latter is the official term utilized by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in order to create a large umbrella of assistance for abuses which occur within intimate relationships. For this course we will maintain the traditional definition of Domestic abuse, recognizing that this may also entail unwed relationships and generational abuses. This crisis is a serious issue that affects millions of Americans.

Victims of repeated abuse commonly suffer significant physical injuries and many debilitating effects; low self-esteem; fear; isolation from family, friends, and other supportive relationships; inability to make their own decisions; self-blame. Some domestic violence situations may even end in the death of the victim.

CDC providing a clear and concise definition of this crisis. Additional information and current statistics can be accessed from their official website:

<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/index.html>

**More than 10 million people are abused each year in the U.S.**

## Consider the following case studies:

A young lady 23-year-old came into the emergency room with her friend explaining that she had fallen on a dance floor. The initial examination showed that she had obvious bruises on her neck and arms as well. After the clinical chaplain interacted with her she did admit that her boyfriend got a little out of hand... When she found out that once the hospital personnel received that information from her were obligated to contact the authorities, she sneaked out of the emergency room, because she did not want to get her boyfriend in trouble.

Another call came in on a Saturday morning regarding a woman who was brought in with a condition the paramedics described as a loss of blood and brain matter. That morning her husband had beaten her with their iron. She didn't survive.

## Domestic Abuse within the Church

Sadly, and far too frequently, the tragedy of domestic abuse in Christian homes has been augmented by the church's inadequacy in caring for the victim. Church teachings on men's and women's roles commonly focus more on the wife's submission to the husband than on the husband's responsibility to love, cherish and protect and provide for his wife. This imbalance along with extreme interpretation of male headship in the family has often reinforced violence in Christian homes.

### ***How would you define Domestic Abuse?***

It is nearly impossible to define domestic abuse without considering the types of abuse that occur within the family:

## 1. Child Abuse

U.S. Child Abuse Prevention & Treatment Act, defines this abuse as, *"Physical or mental injury, sexual abuse or exploitation, negligent treatment or maltreatment of a child under the age of 18, by a person who is responsible for the child's welfare."* Sadly, child abuse and neglect are common. At least 1 in 7 children have experienced child abuse and/or neglect in the past year, and this is likely an underestimate.<sup>3</sup>



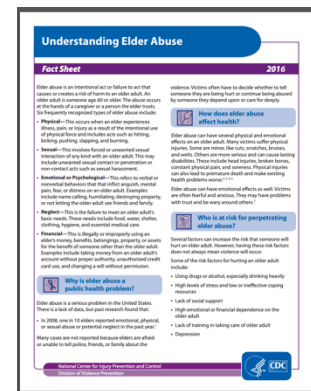
## 2. Spouse Abuse

Most states have modified this to Partner Abuse. *"Deliberate physical assault, threats of violence, emotional abuse and forced involvement in sexual behavior."* The term "domestic violence" describes physical violence, sexual violence, stalking, or psychological harm by a current or former partner or spouse. It may be helpful to watch the following video from the CDC:

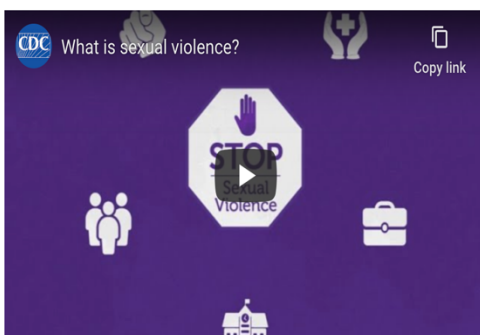


## 3. Elder Abuse

Elder abuse is an intentional act, or failure to act, by a caregiver or another person in a relationship involving an expectation of trust that causes or creates a risk of harm to an older adult. (An older adult is defined as someone age 60 or older.) It is the maltreatment of older people including rough handling, beating, negligence, withholding of food or medication, financial exploitation, sexual maltreatment. For your reference, the image to the right contains a link to the CDC's current fact sheet related to Elder Abuse.



## 4. Sexual Abuse



Sexual abuse or violence is any sexual behavior which the victim resists or which the victim is too naive or powerless to resist. It is a significant problem in the United States.

Anyone can experience sexual abuse, but most victims are female. The person responsible for the violence is typically male and usually someone known to the victim. The person can be, but is not

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/fastfact.html>

limited to, a friend, intimate partner, coworker, neighbor, or family member.

As you can see this violence takes many forms, and can happen once in a while or all the time. The American Medical Association stated that domestic violence is the # one public health issue facing women and children in the U.S.

Consider the following misunderstandings of domestic abuse:

**1. Domestic violence does not affect many people.**

- *About 1 in 4 women and nearly 1 in 10 men have experienced contact sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner during their lifetime.<sup>4</sup>*
- *Over 43 million women and 38 million men experienced psychological aggression by an intimate partner in their lifetime.<sup>5</sup>*
- *Surgeon General noted that Domestic Violence is the leading cause of injury to women between ages of 15 to 44 (more than car accidents, mugging and rapes combined).*

**2. Battering is only a momentary loss of temper**

- *Surgeon General's report: "One in five women victimized by their spouses or ex-spouses report they had been victimized over and over again by the same person."*

**3. Domestic Violence occurs only in poor, urban areas.**

- *It crosses all socio-economic life as well as ethnic and generational groups*

**4. Domestic violence is just a push or slap; it does not produce serious injury.**

- *25% of all homicides occur within the family*

**5. It is easy for the battered individual to leave their abuser.**

- *Women who leave their batterers are at a 75% greater risk of being killed by the batterer (Control issue).*
- *Nationally 50% of all homeless women and children are on the streets because of violence in the home.*
- *There are 3 times more animal shelters than there are abuse shelters.*

These are some myths that many people have embraced. As a result, abuse is taken lightly. After hearing about and focusing upon the severity of this behavior the natural question to be raised might be, "Why?" "Why would someone want to beat another, especially if that victim is a "loved one".

## **Causes of Domestic Abuse**

Since domestic abuse is so diverse, It can be difficult to put a finger on the cause. An elderly man who batters his wife has a different dynamic than the young mother who intentionally burns her child. These are three general causes of domestic abuse that seem to share an overlapping commonality with most cases of domestic abuse.

### **1. Environmental Stress**

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/fastfact.html>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/fastfact.html>

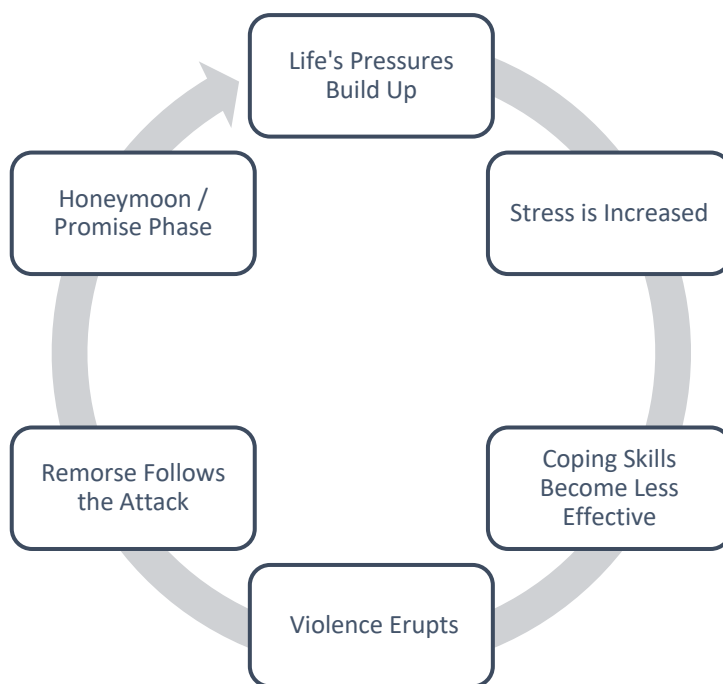
I think we can all relate to this to a certain degree. When you are stressed, for whatever reason, your fuse becomes shortened. As a result, it is much more tempting to lash out from that frustration and stress.

One issue for the Christian counselor / pastor to work with is to help the individuals identify these stresses in their life that may trigger those violent reactions.

#### ENVIRONMENTAL STRESS

*A parent stressed with financial issues, job issues, and relational stresses can be irrationally tempted to transfer the pressures on a child.*

Take a look at the **Cycle of Abuse** that occurs in this stress dynamic:



The genuine in the eyes of the abuser, the honeymoon stage is deceptive not only for the victim but also for the abuser. The victim believes in the promises and the abuser believes it also. But statistics say that as the stresses re-appear, the cycle continues and the abuse is repeated.

## 2. Learned Abuse

The second cause can stem from **learned abuse** in the past. This is a destructive cycle that occurs in the abused family. Children who are abused or have observed domestic violence in the home are very likely to become abusers themselves.

*"Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is older he will not depart from it."* - Proverbs 22:6 NASB

The greatest way you train a child is by your actions, whether they be positive or negative. When children grow up where abuse, fights and violence is common that becomes their ingrained frame of reference in terms of conflict resolution.

Susan Smith: In 1994 a woman was accused & convicted of drowning her two toddlers. A part of her defense was placed upon her childhood experiences. The fact is these kinds of behaviors can be learned and passed from one generation to another.

B.F. Skinner believed that **behavior was controlled by the environment**. There was some truth to his arguments although he denied any moral fallenness within humanity. But to a certain degree we are a partial product of our environment. Not only have our parents modeled behavior for us, but we pick up behavior from all relationships and interactions that confront us. Solomon tells us, *“Do not associate with a man given to anger; or go with a hot-tempered man, or you will learn his ways and find a snare for yourself.”* -Proverbs 22:24-25 NASB

We as humans learn behavior, whether we recognize them as unconscious or not. And so even criminal behavior can be learned and even passed down to generations by the way those behaviors are modeled. It must be noted, that behavior learned is no excuse for sin. Everyone is responsible for their actions despite where it may have been learned.

### 3. Personal Insecurity

Studies have also shown that abusers are usually insecure people. Insecure people in need of control. Just because you are insecure, does not mean you are going to be an abuser. The deviancy occurs in the manner in which security and control is obtained.

If an insecure abuser feels jealous or even intimidated by their spouse... their reaction is to be tough.

If an insecure abuser feels inadequate as a parent... their reaction is to use violence in order to gain control.



#### INSECURE ABUSERS WILL OFTEN TIMES USE:

- **INTIMIDATION:** using fear / threats
- **MANIPULATION:** turns situations against the victim (money, kids)
- **ISOLATION:** controlling what the victim does, spends, sees, and says.
- **PHYSICAL COERCION:** carrying out physical threats.

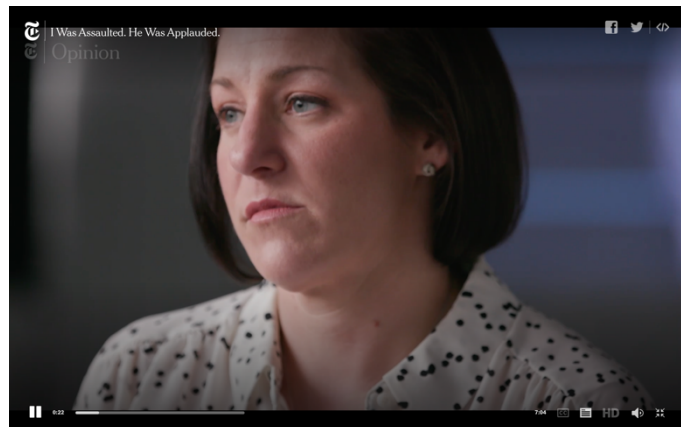


## Sexual Abuse

**Sexual Abuse, Assault or Rape** is an act of violence and is considered a crime by state and federal law. Sexual abuse occurs when a person knowingly causes another person to engage in a sexual act or attempts to do so by using force, by threatening, or by placing that person in fear without the permission of that person. Sexual abuse is not committed because the offender us sexually deprived. It is a crime of violence in which sex is the vehicle used to deliver pain, control, and humiliation. Rape is a heinous crime that can make the victim feel violated and at fault as the wrongdoer.

Sexual abuse is a much more rampant problem in our culture than many people realize. As the news media have exposed, many adults and children are abused in the church itself by adults who misuse spiritual trust and authority. The problem of sexual abuse will probably worsen as sexual mores continue to deteriorate and as graphic sexual material becomes more readily available through the Internet and other sources. Early and frequent exposure to pornographic images distorts one's thinking toward sexuality and sexual expression.

As this problem continues to gain greater public attention, doubtless more victims will emerge who are willing to talk about their pain and seek help. Consider video which portrays the painful story from the New York Times of the young lady who was raped by her youth pastor.



*Video 1 "She Was Assaulted, He was Applauded":*

While studying this issue is difficult because of the sometimes graphic and horrific nature of the material, the minister must learn to help victims find healing in Christ, and not ignore the offense or the wounds.

Studies have shown

- Roughly 25% of adult women in this country were sexually abused as children;
- Some suggest as many as 50% have experienced unwanted sexual touch.
- In the vast majority of cases of childhood sexual abuse, the offender is someone the child knows.
- Often the offender lives in the child's home.
- While most victim of abuse are girls, significant numbers or boys are abused as well.
- While most offenders are male, some are female.
- Abuse happens in every strata of society, even in the church.

### Providing Pastoral Care to Victims of Sexual Abuse

The needs of the victim are basic but oftentimes long term. The victim needs to be assured that the assault was not his/her fault. They may feel they used poor judgment by making themselves vulnerable to the abuser. However, even if that were true, that is not an excuse for such a

violation. It is critical to reinforce that the offender had no right or excuse to carry out such an assault.

Another need of sexual assault victims is the need to talk about the crime. Family, friends, and church members may sometimes react to such a crime like they do to cancer or death: *Don't bring it up, then they will forget about it.* Many times friends or family members are afraid to mention the sexual assault because they do not want to bring up a bad subject. Sadly, the unspoken message conveyed is that the crime is too uncomfortable to discuss, or that "we don't care about what happened to you." In many cases the victim often wants to discuss the traumatic event and its aftermath in great detail with someone they trust. The victim may interpret the silence on the subject by others as disinterest or self-protection, which may establish barriers not only to relationships but also to the victim's recovery.

Allow the survivor to take the lead by letting dictating what they want to discuss and when they want to discuss it. All he survivor to talk about the crime and its impact in their life. Offer to pray for them or with them as they begin their recovery process.

It should be assumed that such a traumatic experience will call for a professional counselor to direct the recovery process. While pastoral care is still being implemented throughout the journey. The question, "Why me God?" is a common response of a victim. They will pose the question to God without ever feeling that a sensible answer comes. It should be understood that crisis victims whether in sexual assault, grief, trauma, or physical abuse, these victims will often times **SPEAK MORE FROM THEIR PAIN, THAN FROM THEIR BRAIN.** When this occurs, they are not necessarily looking for the theological truths as much as desiring "Presence." That is, they need to know that they are not alone in the valley.

#### PASTORAL CARE: SEXUAL ABUSE

- *Ministers must be proactive advocates for the victimized.*
- *There should not be undue pressure too soon for the victim to forgive the perpetrator.*
- *Sexual abuse of a child MUST BE REPORTED!*

