

# WHAT IS SUBSTANCE USE COERCION?



Substance Use (SU) Coercion is when **an intimate partner uses a person's substance use against them** to harm, control, or isolate them. A person doesn't need to use substances to experience SU coercion - an unsafe partner could seek to harm them with even just accusations of substance use.

## COMMON TACTICS OF SU COERCION

SU coercion tactics are used by unsafe partners to threaten, intimidate, scare, isolate, hurt, or control someone. These tactics can be about any substance, including alcohol, cannabis, or nicotine. When society teaches people to look down on those who use substances, abusive tactics become even more harmful. The combination of abuse and public judgment leaves people, regardless of substance use or not, facing discrimination, guilt, and shame.



-  Getting someone to start using substances or use in ways that cause them more problems.
-  Making or pressuring someone to use substances or to use them in more dangerous ways.
-  Threatening someone with withdrawal or overdose, or making them go into withdrawal or overdose.
-  Forcing or pressuring someone into illegal activities to get substances (like stealing, dealing, or trading sex).
-  Drugging someone or making someone use substances to sexually assault them.
-  Blaming abuse or sexual violence on substance use.
-  Using someone's substance use as an excuse to control and spend their money, including spending their money on substances.
-  Making it hard for someone to get treatment or work on recovery.
-  Controlling, stealing, or messing with someone's medications; calling someone hurtful names like "addict" for taking medications.
-  Threatening to tell or telling police, courts, or others in positions of power about someone's substance use and health information.
-  Threatening to report or reporting someone's substance use (or for "child endangerment") to child protective services.
-  Threatening to tell or telling someone's safe supports about their substance use.
-  Making someone's substance use sound worse than it is or lying to say someone uses substances when they don't.
-  Using guilt, shame, or judgment about substance use to make things harder for someone.

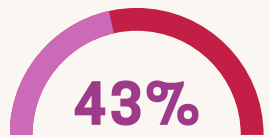
## HOW COMMON IS SU COERCION?

an NCDVTMH survey of 3,056 callers to the National Domestic Hotline found:

**1 in 4**



had been pressured or forced to use substances or made to use more than they wanted



had experienced at least one form of substance use coercion

**1 in 4**



had used substances to reduce the pain of abuse

# SUBSTANCE USE COERCION BLOCKS ACCESS TO HELP

an NCDVTMH survey of 3,056 callers to the National Domestic Hotline found:



24%

were afraid to call the police for help because their partner said they would be arrested or not believed



38%

said their partner threatened to report their substance use to authorities to keep them from getting things they wanted or needed (e.g. protection order, medication, or child custody



60%

of people who tried to get help for substance use said their partner tried to stop them, interfere with their care, or make it harder for them to get support.

## HOW DOES SU COERCION IMPACT SURVIVORS?



- Harms a person's mental and physical health
- Raises the risk of accidental overdose
- Makes people feel more alone and trapped
- Makes it harder to get or keep a job, housing, or money
- Puts a person's relationship with their children at risk
- Makes it harder to heal and get the support they want
- Increased risk of legal problems

## IN A SURVIVOR'S WORDS

“

He threatened countless times to call the sheriff and the pastors and report my drinking. He discouraged me from getting help for my drinking. After I got help for drinking, if or when I drank again he would say, 'See, you failed at this too.' He would leave bottles all around when I was in recovery

- Survey Participant

”

“

Every time I see them [abusive ex's], I drink because of the anxiety it gives me

- Survey Participant

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## GET SUPPORT

Locating Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Advocacy Resources:

<https://ncdvtmh.org/resource/locating-domestic-violence-and-sexual-assault-advocacy-resources/>

Locating Substance Use Support Resources:

<https://ncdvtmh.org/resource/locating-substance-use-support-resources/>

## REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> Warshaw & Tinnon. (2018). [Coercion Related to Mental Health and Substance Use in the Context of Intimate Partner Violence](#). National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma, and Mental Health.

<sup>2</sup> Warshaw et al. (2014). [Mental Health and Substance Use Coercion Surveys](#). National Center Domestic Violence, Trauma, and Mental Health.