

Concussion in Alaska: Support for DV/IPV Survivors

Domestic violence (DV) and intimate partner violence (IPV) can be a direct source of a brain injury. National estimates suggest 50 million survivors of IPV may experience signs or symptoms of a brain injury.^{1,2} The 2020 Alaska Victimization Survey showed that nearly half (48%) of Alaska women over the age of 18 experienced IPV in their lifetime.³ However, the true impact is difficult to measure, as many survivors do not seek medical care for their injuries.

Survivors face obstacles accessing care due to physical or psychological abuse, coercion, intimidation, sexual assault, progressive social isolation, deprivation, or economic coercion. These challenges can impact overall recovery whether or not the injury is a direct result of abuse.

Intersection Between DV/IPV and Brain Injuries

In one study, 85% of survivors of domestic violence reported being hit in the head, and half said it happened too many times to count.²

Researchers estimate that women sustain Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBIs) from domestic violence at a rate 11 to 12 times higher than TBIs sustained by military personnel and athletes combined.⁴

68% of women in abusive relationships report being strangled by a partner.⁵ Strangulation can cause brain injury by restricting oxygen to the brain.

Recognizing a Concussion

A concussion is a type of TBI caused by a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or body that causes the brain to move rapidly back and forth. This movement can stretch and damage brain cells in a way that disrupts normal brain function.

It's important for survivors, advocates, and care providers to know that concussion signs and symptoms can closely resemble other health conditions, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This overlap can make brain injuries harder to identify and may delay proper care and recovery.

Symptoms

Physical: headache, dizziness, nausea, sensitivity to light or noise, blurred or double vision, neck pain, sleep disruption, poor balance or coordination.

Cognitive: problems with memory, thinking, attention, decision-making, risk assessment, judgment, or other aspects of executive functioning.

Emotional: increased frustration, mood swings, impulsivity, aggressive or inappropriate behavior, and new or worsening mental health challenges, such as anxiety, depression, or PTSD.

Long-Term Impacts

Sustaining multiple hits to the head in a short period of time disrupts the healing process and can prolong overall recovery.

This can lead to long-term problems with thinking, memory, or mood, and increases the risk of neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's Disease, Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), Parkinson's Disease, or Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE).

Navigating Care & Safety Planning

- **Find a Safe Environment:** If you have experienced a head injury during abuse, finding a safe place away from the source of abuse is important. A second head injury before your brain has had time to fully heal can lead to serious complications.
- **Seek Medical Evaluation:** Any blow to the head, strangulation, or loss of consciousness should be evaluated by a healthcare provider, even if symptoms seem mild at first.
- **Develop a Safety Plan:** Work with a trusted advocate to build a plan that includes safe places to go, emergency phone numbers, trusted contacts, and steps if you need to leave quickly. Consider local shelters, trusted friends, or resources like the [National Domestic Violence Hotline](https://www.ndvh.org/) at (800) 799-7233.

DV/IPV Resources

[Alaska Abused Women's Aid in Crisis \(AWAIC\)](#)

24-hour Crisis & Support Line: (907) 272-0100

[Alaska Network on Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault \(ANDVSA\)](#)

Shelters, counseling, and legal support: (907) 586-3650

[Alaska Native Women's Resource Center \(AKNWRC\)](#)

Educational resources & advocacy: (907) 328-3990

[Alaska Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault \(CDVSA\)](#)

Directory for local crisis services and support programs

Brain Injury Resources

[Concussion Legacy Foundation \(CLF\) HelpLine Alaska](#)

Resource facilitation and peer support: [CLFHelpLineAK.org](#)

[Alaska TBI Resource Locator](#)

TBI clinic and provider directory: [TBIHelpAK.com](#)

[Alaska Traumatic and Acquired Brain Injury \(TABI\) Program](#)

Resource facilitation, peer support, and mini grants: (907) 269-3666

References

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3. www.ajc.state.ak.us/publications/docs/ACJC%20Reports/Domestic-Violence-In-Alaska-2022.pdf
4. [pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8773525/](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8773525/)
5. pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/11604293/