

## Chapter 2

# Guns, Drugs and Alcohol: A Dangerous Cocktail

## Depiction Suggestions

- ◆ Unless a character's violent behavior or drug use is essential, avoid relying on these behaviors as automatic creative solutions. Look toward alternative behaviors where possible.
- ◆ Be aware that there are numerous factors correlating violence with alcohol and other drug use; therefore violent behavior frequently leads to or is caused by some form of drug use.
- ◆ Firearms seem to be considered necessary tools of the trade in illegal drug trafficking. Research has shown that dealers' desire for turf protection and retaliation results in widespread gun injury and death.
- ◆ Alcohol is the drug of choice in the United States and is the drug most associated with violence, far more than all other drugs combined.
- ◆ It is not always the drug user who becomes violent. Cocaine, for example, can cause people to provoke violence toward themselves through irritability, paranoid thinking, verbal or physical aggression, or invasion of others' personal space.
- ◆ Pharmacological effects, as well as cultural, environmental, and individual factors, can contribute to the link between drugs and violence.
- ◆ Drug abusers often rely on guns in committing crimes to support their habit.
- ◆ Crack, PCP, methamphetamine, steroids, and other drugs can serve as a catalyst by inducing violence or making an individual more prone to violent behavior.
- ◆ Drug use is associated with numerous cases of child abuse, homicide, spousal abuse, rape, assault and suicide.
- ◆ Often victims of violence turn to drugs as an emotional escape from the violent behavior of others. Moreover, victims of violent behavior often use drugs to alleviate pain from violence-related injuries.
- ◆ Perpetrators of violence, particularly those who hurt or kill someone when forced to defend themselves or others, will sometimes turn to drugs to escape their feelings of guilt.

*After drinking together all day, four longtime friends began arguing after their dogs got into a fight. One of the friends grabbed a gun from his home and shot the others, killing one and seriously injuring the other two. The dogs walked away from their fight unharmed.*

—Seattle Times, 6-15-00

- ◆ Sometimes drugs can reduce inhibitions that would otherwise keep aggressive behaviors in check.

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### Fact Sheet

- ◆ More than half (52.4%) of the state and federally incarcerated murderers - the majority of whom had used guns - reported they were under the influence of drugs or alcohol when they committed their offense.<sup>1</sup>
- ◆ An Ohio study of domestic violence-related homicides committed with firearms found that 62% of the perpetrators admitted to using alcohol the day of the killing.<sup>2</sup>
- ◆ According to a high school student survey, frequent users of inhalants and/or cocaine were about four times more likely to carry weapons than were nonusers. Abusers were nearly 20 times more likely to take guns to school than were abstainers.<sup>3</sup>
- ◆ 63% of armed male U.S. college students who binge drank reported getting into fights and arguments in the past year compared with 22% of unarmed male students.<sup>4</sup>
- ◆ There is a strong association between carrying a gun and illicit drug selling. Twenty-five percent of people admitting to selling illicit drugs reported carrying a gun all or most of the time.<sup>5</sup>
- ◆ In a study examining alcohol and interpersonal violence, results showed approximately one-half of all violent episodes are drug related. Alcohol is the drug most often associated with violence.<sup>6</sup>
- ◆ In a study among women in New Mexico, presence of alcohol or other drugs was found in over half of the homicide cases - 54% among domestic homicides, 69% among nondomestic homicides. Firearms were frequently used in domestic violence homicides.<sup>7</sup>

#### Sources

1. U.S. Department of Justice survey, 1997.
2. American Journal of Forensic Medicine and Pathology analysis of 1982-85 data.
3. Oregon State Department of Human Services, 1997.
4. Journal of American College Health, 1997.
5. National Institutes of Justice, 1995.
6. Cychoz, C., Journal of Health Education, 27(2), 1996.
7. Arbuckle et al., Annals of Emergency Medicine, 27, 1996.

See Volume 1 of *Spotlight on Depiction of Health and Social Issues* for more in-depth discussion of drug, alcohol and tobacco use and addiction, and the relationship of drug and alcohol use to violence.

#### Spotlight on Depiction of Health and Social Issues

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