Georgia State University's Dominic Parrott and Christopher Eckhardt at Purdue University in Indiana have received a five-year, $2.6 million grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to examine the underlying factors behind alcohol intoxication and violence between significant others and spouses.

Parrott and Eckhardt will undertake the study, supported by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) in what is the largest study of its kind.

"This is the first true study in the field to directly test our assumptions about how alcohol contributes to intimate-partner violence," said Parrott, an associate professor of psychology.

"It's long been assumed that alcohol intoxication is more likely to cause this sort of violence, but there has been no real scientific study to this. Anger, internal states and attitudes are assumed to be proximal causes, but they've never been directly tested."

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 29 percent of women and 10 percent of men in the United States have experienced some form of intimate partner violence. Alcohol intoxication is recognized as one of the risk factors in this type of violence.

The researchers will recruit 1,000 heterosexual couples over the five-year period from the Atlanta and Indianapolis metropolitan areas, with at least one member of the couple being a heavy drinker.

The researchers hope to develop the basis for an intervention to reduce alcohol-related violence within intimate relationships.

Psychologists studying alcohol-related violence think there is a certain effect created by intoxication to where the drunk person's attention narrows upon the provoking cues in the conflict situation, leading to the direction of hostility and anger being focused on the victim.

"The focus of attention just adds fuel to the fire," Parrott said of this "spotlight effect."

Alcohol is the most commonly used addictive substance in the United States- 17.6 million people, or one in every 12 adults, suffer from alcohol abuse or dependence along with several million more who engage in risky, binge drinking patterns that could lead to alcohol problems. More than half of all adults have a family history of alcoholism or problem drinking, and more than 7 million children live in a household where at least one parent is dependent on or has abused alcohol. Yet, for many people, the Facts About Alcohol and Alcoholism are not clear.

To obtain the Facts About Alcohol, click here.