

Heavy drinking linked to more frequent and more severe aggression in relationships

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(Medical Xpress) -- Drinking by one or both partners increases levels of severity, anger and fear reported by victims of intimate partner aggression, according to a new study by University of Otago researchers.

The research has just been published in the international journal BMJ Open, and is the first time partner [aggression](#) and drinking has been studied in a sample of the general population in New Zealand.

Lead author, Professor Jennie Connor of the Department of Preventive and [Social Medicine](#) in Dunedin, says “Although it is well established that alcohol increases aggressiveness, it has not been clear before whether this was a major influence on patterns of aggression between partners in New Zealand.”

The study included all forms of physical aggression not just the most serious, as violence in partnerships commonly escalates from less severe aggression.

In this study, as in overseas research, if one or both partners had a pattern of [heavy drinking](#) episodes (so-called binge drinking) then physical aggression was more common. Drinkers who reported drinking five or more drinks on an occasion at least once a month were twice as likely to be an aggressor and three times as likely to be a victim of partner aggression, compared with people who did not binge. However, it appeared that this was not due to heavy drinkers being more aggressive in general, but being more likely to be involved in aggressive acts when

they were drinking.

The study found evidence of differences in men's and women's experiences of partner aggression. Although female to male aggression was reported slightly more frequently than male to female (15 per cent compared with 12 per cent of the population in the past two years), women experienced significantly greater severity of aggression, and more anger and fear at the time of the aggression than men. They were also much more likely to report that their partner had been drinking when physically aggressive towards them, and this situation was associated with the highest levels of severity, anger and fear.

“The gendered nature of partner aggression, and the escalation of aggression by the involvement of alcohol are important considerations in the prevention of domestic violence,” Professor Connor says.

“Making changes to the price, availability and promotion of alcohol to reduce the amount of heavy drinking across the whole population will be a good start to reducing the frequency and severity of [physical aggression](#) in New Zealand homes.”

More information: Connor JL, Kypri K, Bell ML, Cousins K. (2011). Alcohol involvement in aggression between intimate partners in New Zealand: a national cross-sectional study *BMJ Open* [doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2011-000065](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2011-000065)

Provided by University of Otago

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