

Intoxication important in determining when some men commit sexual aggression

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A new review article published in the journal *Drug and Alcohol Review* assesses the extent to which alcohol plays a causal role in sexual assault perpetration. Results found that men who are already prone to anger, who have hostile attitudes toward women, and who are in social environments that accept sexual aggression are most likely to engage in sexual aggression when intoxicated.

The review article is part of a September special issue focusing on [Alcohol](#) and Aggression. Antonia Abbey, PhD, a professor in the Department of Psychology at Wayne State University, critically reviewed the relevant alcohol administration and survey research literature to examine the causality between sexual assaults and alcohol, since approximately half of all sexual assaults involve [alcohol consumption](#).

One study reviewed a sample of 356 male college students. 42.4% had no history of sexual assault, 31.2% were sexual perpetrators while consuming alcohol, and 26.4% were perpetrators without any consumption of alcohol. Using discriminant function analysis and analysis of variance, the study showed that there were few differences between men who commit sexual assault when sober or drinking. Both groups of perpetrators scored higher than non-perpetrators on measures of aggression, delinquency, hostility towards women, and sexual dominance. The perpetrators who used alcohol differed from others in their strong belief that alcohol increased their sexuality and women's interest in having sex, and they drank the most alcohol in potential sexual

situations.

Alcohol primarily appears to influence the circumstances under which some men are most likely to commit sexual assault. Other analyses of this subset counted sexually [aggressive acts](#) participants committed when sober and when [drinking alcohol](#). 25% had committed sexual assaults both when sober and when drinking. As such, alcohol did not appear necessary for them to commit sexual assault.

Alcohol affected aggression, but these effects were strongest for people already predisposed to be aggressive. Overall, the survey research findings indicate that the personality characteristics, attitudes, and past experiences of sexual assault perpetrators who drink during the assault are similar to those who do not drink during the assault. Thus, intoxication may be a more important determinant of when some men commit sexual aggression, rather than who becomes sexually aggressive.

"As a field, we need to develop better prevention and treatment programs," Abbey concludes. "Having a more precise understanding of alcohol's role in [sexual assault](#) will aid in the development of more sophisticated and targeted interventions."

Provided by Wiley

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