

New study links social anxiety and dating aggression

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(Medical Xpress) -- Study finds social anxiety a predictor of dating aggression in young men.

Young men with [social anxiety](#), especially a fear of being judged negatively by others, are more likely to engage in physical and psychological dating [aggression](#), according to a new study by [psychologists](#) at the University of Maine.

The researchers also found that fear of negative evaluation put the [young men](#) particularly at risk for increased aggression when they viewed their [romantic relationships](#) as poor and antagonistic.

Until recently, it's been largely held that socially anxious people tended to avoid confrontation, taking on an avoidance or "flight" rather than "fight" response. But increasingly, studies like the one at UMaine have explored the possibility that social anxiety and aggression are related.

The UMaine study examined social anxiety as a predictor of two forms of dating aggression: physical aggression, such as slapping, use of a weapon and forced sexual activity; and psychological aggression, such as slamming doors, insulting and refusing to talk to the partner. The researchers surveyed 361 college students ages 18 to 23 who reported having romantic relationships in the past year and found that men's fear of negative evaluation was most predictive of their self-reported psychological and physical dating aggression.

“The notion of control seems central to understanding why socially anxious men may be more likely to engage in psychological aggression with their dating partners than their female counterparts,” the UMaine researchers wrote in the *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. “Men who expect their partners to evaluate them negatively may also [fear](#) that their partners will ultimately reject them.”

The researchers note that women may react to perceived negative evaluation by their partners with emotional inhibition and conflict avoidance, while men may attempt to avoid rejection by shifting the balance of power to themselves through dominance and aggressive behavior.

Provided by University of Maine

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