

Intoxication increases risk for heavy drinkers to commit violence against intimate partner

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Intoxicated, heavy drinkers have a tendency to act rashly in response to negative emotions, which can intensify the risk for intimate partner aggression, according to a study by Georgia State University and Purdue

University.

The researchers examined the link between risk-promoting factors, such as impulsivity and problematic drinking, and intimate [partner](#) aggression among intoxicated and non-intoxicated [heavy drinkers](#). To be considered a heavy drinker, participants had to report typically consuming at least five standard drinks for men or four standard drinks for women per drinking day at least twice per month during the past year.

The study suggests acute [alcohol intoxication](#) is a key facilitator of the association between problematic drinking patterns and intimate partner aggression. It's only under acute intoxication that problematic drinkers are more likely than non-problematic drinkers to perpetrate intimate partner aggression.

Olivia Subramani, first author of the study and a Ph.D. student in clinical psychology at Georgia State, offered an explanation for why [alcohol](#) intoxication exerts these effects.

"People who respond impulsively to their emotions likely do so because they tend to pay more attention to emotional cues in the situation (for example, a mean look from one's partner)," Subramani said. "This 'tunnel vision' for [emotional cues](#) is exacerbated when people are drunk, so they are focused almost exclusively on the aggression-promoting cues in the situation. This makes aggression an especially likely response."

The findings, published in the journal *Alcoholism Clinical & Experimental Research*, make important contributions about the conditions most likely to result in committing intimate partner aggression.

"Our findings shed light on one way that alcohol may cause intimate partner aggression, particularly among people who are already at high

risk for perpetration," said Dr. Dominic Parrott, professor of psychology at Georgia State and co-author of the study. "These results suggest that interventions which aim to reduce alcohol use or help people to focus on cues that inhibit, rather than promote, aggression are most likely to be effective."

Participants in this study, recruited from Atlanta and Indianapolis, were 249 heavy drinkers (148 men and 101 women) in heterosexual relationships with a recent history of psychological or physical intimate partner aggression toward their partner.

The study's results support alcohol use as an important target for the treatment of intimate partner aggression. When a person is acutely intoxicated, it could also be effective to distract them from aggression-promoting cues and redirect their attention onto [aggression](#)-inhibiting cues, such as peaceful images or themselves, the researchers said.

More information: Olivia S. Subramani et al. Problematic Drinking Mediates the Association Between Urgency and Intimate Partner Aggression During Acute Intoxication, *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research* (2017). [DOI: 10.1111/acer.13437](https://doi.org/10.1111/acer.13437)

Provided by Georgia State University

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