

College-age males at bars, parties more likely to be sexually aggressive

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College men who frequently attend parties or go to bars are more likely to be sexually aggressive compared to those who don't, Washington State University researchers have found.

"We found that it wasn't alcohol use, per se, that leads to [sexual aggression](#)," said Michael Cleveland, an associate professor in WSU's Department of Human Development. "But the combination of alcohol and the setting that the drinking takes place in had a major impact on the number of reported [aggressive tactics](#) used."

The study, which surveyed a group of over 1,000 college males repeatedly for five semesters at a large Northeastern university, asked participants if they had used sexually aggressive tactics, Cleveland said.

"We asked them how often they drank and if and how often they went to bars or parties," Cleveland said. "Then we asked if they used any specific tactics to convince, or even pressure, women to have them sex with them."

Those tactics ranged from threatening to break up with her to getting her drunk and harming her physically.

The results were published April 25 in the *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*.

Personality traits

The study questions looked at the personality traits of each participant. The researchers found that the men who went to bars and parties more often tended to have higher levels of Impersonal Sexual Orientation, characterized by a preference for sex without commitment and a greater number of sexual partners.

"Men with that orientation have a proclivity towards more casual sex," Cleveland said. "And it's been associated with a higher level of sexual aggression. So this study shows that men with those personality traits are going to parties—perhaps in order to find sex partners—and acting more sexually aggressive."

Study timeline

The researchers started the survey by contacting every male in the freshman class at a large university in the northeastern U.S. in 2012. Over 1,000 took part through their first five semesters.

The survey was conducted by email or online, with participants compensated with money deposited in their student accounts. Participants were guaranteed confidentiality in the hopes of getting more truthful results.

The study states that the more the students reported drinking as freshmen, the more likely they were to commit a sexually aggressive act by the end of the survey period, Cleveland said.

"The results are very cumulative," Cleveland said. "If a student reported drinking as a freshman, then he would be more likely to report going to parties or bars the next year as a sophomore. And then the men who

were most likely to drink at these types of settings were the ones that most likely were sexually aggressive during their junior year."

Preventing aggression

The study showed how much room there is to educate men on their role in reducing and eventually eliminating aggressive sexual behaviors.

"Prevention of sexual assault should target men's behaviors and attitudes," Cleveland said. "There are hot spots, like bars and parties, where aggressive behavior happens more often. Having bystander intervention, where someone intervenes on behalf of the victim, is really important in these situations."

More information: *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs* (2019).
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