

# Research may offer another avenue to tackling sexually aggressive behavior

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A new study from the University of Iowa sought to begin development of a possible approach to reduce the risk that college-aged men engage in sexually aggressive acts or risky sexual behavior.

The study authors, led by Teresa Treat, professor in the Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences at Iowa, developed a 12-point list of sexual assault prevention strategies. The list was created by the researchers based on previous research into risk factors that are associated with sexually aggressive acts—such as heavy alcohol consumption, difficulties reading women's cues, and not seeking consent for sexual activity.

The authors found that 71% of the college-aged men surveyed used the sexual assault prevention strategies on a regular basis over the past year. Yet 15% of the survey takers reported they seldom or never used the preventative strategies, and men who said they have engaged in sexually aggressive actions had been much less likely to use the strategies than their peers.

The authors say the strategies may offer a potential avenue to tackling sexually aggressive behavior.

"We think we have a promising set of potential preventative strategies. We found most college men use these prevention strategies regularly," says Treat, the study's corresponding author. "The downside is some college men don't use them much at all. Those college men who don't use them much at all are much more likely to be sexually aggressive. So, future research should aim to evaluate whether they may be useful prevention targets."

The survey group included more than 560 males at Arizona State University and Iowa, who earned course credit in a psychology class. The men answered questions that ranged from general biographical information (age, ethnicity, et cetera) to alcohol consumption, attitudes about women, sexual experience, and attitudes about sex.

The authors are revising the strategies based on feedback from the

college students, and hope to administer the survey to a more racially and ethnically diverse pool.

"We also are in the beginning stages of figuring out how these protective strategies might be incorporated into prevention programs for further evaluation," Treat says.

In terms of risky sexual behavior, the study found:

Seven in 10 college-aged men surveyed reported they engaged in risky sexual behavior in the last year. 55% of college-aged men surveyed reported they used the preventative strategies on a regular basis when it came to risky sexual [behavior](#). Nearly 3 in 10 (29%) of college-aged men surveyed reported they seldom or never used the preventative strategies when it came to [risky sexual behavior](#).

**More information:** Teresa A. Treat et al, Protective behavioral strategies for sexual aggression and risky sexual behavior, *Aggressive Behavior* (2021). [DOI: 10.1002/ab.21949](https://doi.org/10.1002/ab.21949)

Provided by University of Iowa

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