

Alcohol and sexist attitudes combine to increase male violence towards women

Peer reviewed: Yes

Type of study: Secondary analysis of a longitudinal study

Subject of study: People

Funding: Intergovernmental organization

Researchers have long known that problem drinking increases a man's likelihood of being violent towards his wife or girlfriend, but a new study published today by the scientific journal *Addiction* suggests that this relationship between drinking and violence is also affected by the man's attitude toward women's equality; that is, toxic masculinity also plays a role. In a study of men in low and middle income countries, heavy drinking males were more likely to commit violence against their wives and girlfriends (intimate partner violence, or IPV) if they held sexist rather than egalitarian attitudes about women.

Male violence against women is a global problem. But the interaction of heavy drinking, sexism, and male violence is particularly important to understand in low and middle income countries (LMIC), where male harmful heavy drinking, inequitable attitudes toward women, and IPV rates are all higher than in high-income countries.

This study used data from 9,148 male married or ever-partnered (with women) respondents aged 18-49 years from seven Asian-Pacific LMIC: Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Sri Lanka and Timor Leste. Respondents who reported having 6+ drinks in one session at least monthly were defined as regular heavy episodic drinkers. Gender attitudes were scored using the Gender-Equitable Men (GEM) scale, which measures attitudes toward gender norms related to sexual and reproductive health, sexual relations, violence, domestic work and homophobia.

Overall, 13% of the men interviewed reported committing physical or sexual IPV in the previous 12 months. As expected, both binge drinking and lower gender-equitable attitudes independently increased IPV. The pooled odds ratio of men reporting IPV was 3.42 times greater for regular heavy episodic drinkers than for abstainers, and every point decrease in gender equity attitude on the GEM scale was associated with 7% increased odds of IPV.

When their effects were combined, regular heavy episodic drinking and lower gender-equitable attitudes were *together* associated with IPV over and above the relationship of the two factors separately.

Lead author Dr. Anne-Marie Laslett explains: "This interaction suggests that traditional gender norms, which we already know increase the risk of IPV victimisation, may be particularly dangerous when combined with binge drinking. To address the problem of intimate partner violence everywhere, but especially in low and middle income countries, we will need to tackle both entrenched inequitable attitudes toward women and risky alcohol consumption."

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For editors:

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To speak with lead author Dr Anne-Marie Laslett: contact her at La Trobe University, Australia by email (a.laslett@latrobe.edu.au) or telephone (+61 408 338 093).

Funding: Partners for Prevention: a UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women and UNV regional joint programme for the prevention of violence against women and girls in Asia and the Pacific and the Australian Research Council.

Full citation for article: Laslett A-M, Graham K, Wilson IM, Kuntsche S, Fulu E, Jewkes R, and Taft A (2021) Does drinking modify the relationship between men's gender-inequitable attitudes and their perpetration of intimate partner violence? A meta-analysis of surveys of men from seven countries in the Asia Pacific region. *Addiction* 116: doi: 10.1111/add.15485

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