



## REVIEW ARTICLE

## ALCOHOL INFLUENCES AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR THAT INCREASES LIKELIHOOD OF INITIATING DATING VIOLENCE AMONG MALE YOUTH IN COLLEGES WITHIN WESTERN COUNTRIES: A SCOPING REVIEW

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## Abstract



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The youth demographic are often linked to alcohol consumption, and it is a widespread assumption that consuming alcohol will increase the likelihood of initiating violence. In the United States, alcohol is the most popular psychoactive drug used and contributes to 40% of violent crimes happening in the country. Among the many forms of violence, dating violence or interpersonal violence are often related to alcohol. Dating violence is often caused by male partners. 20% to 30% of male college students physically abuse their dating partners. Thus, this review study proposes the influence of alcohol on behaviour on male youth in Western colleges and the likelihood of dating violence to emerge. Online journals involving alcohol and violence among male college students in Western countries are searched on PubMed. The Western country selected in the studies found is the United States. The studies chosen were randomised and quantitative studies. Hence, the review hopefully serves as a trigger for future policies to consider the dangers of intoxication more seriously and more research should be done regarding the relationship between alcohol and violent behaviour so that interpersonal violence among adolescents can be reduced.

**Keywords:** Alcohol, interpersonal violence, male youths.

## INTRODUCTION

Alcohol is formed when oxygen is broken down from sugars in various foods. At lower doses, alcohol can stimulate emotions<sup>1</sup>. For example, wine is produced out of grapes, cider is created from apples and vodka is from potatoes. Alcohol is popular among youth or young people. Drinking alcohol is common in parties or social events, which are popular activities for youth in Western countries. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines young people as people ageing from 10-24 years old<sup>2</sup>. Drinking alcohol may be considered a norm even since adolescence as many young people are introduced to it by their parents<sup>3</sup>. Parents can be seen as a model for the youth, affecting their exposure to alcoholic beverages. Other factors of alcohol consumption can also be related to low self-esteem, peer pressure or psychological issues<sup>4</sup>. Alcohol consumption brings various risks and consequences and is often related to violent behaviour. In the United States, alcohol is the most popular psychoactive drug

used and contributes to 40% of violent crimes happening in the country<sup>5</sup>. Data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales suggests that for more than half of crimes happening in the area, offender for violent crimes are often perceived to be influenced by alcohol<sup>6</sup>. Alcohol consumption is a serious issue that had caused roughly 6% of deaths throughout the globe in 2012<sup>4</sup>. Furthermore, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), in 2006, an average of 565 people of 10-29-year-olds loses their lives every day due to interpersonal violence<sup>7</sup>. This suggests that interpersonal violence can be a serious issue and cause of death among young adults. Research also suggests that each year about 20-30% of male college students will commit physical aggression towards their dating partner<sup>8</sup>. In this context, dating partner refers to the person who is undergoing or who has undergone a romantic or an intimate social relationship with the abuser, such as sexual partners, married couples and non-married couples who may refer to themselves as 'boyfriends and girlfriends'<sup>9</sup>. Dating violence is any

form of threat towards the partner and reported cases claimed to have the abuser commit physical acts such as hitting, scratching or psychological attacks like bringing up painful experiences<sup>10</sup>. Dating violence can come in many ways, such as sexual aggression and coercion. An example would be a case in 2015, where University of Chicago student Olivia Ortiz was touched without consent despite setting boundaries regarding sexual conduct with her boyfriend<sup>11</sup>. She was also forced to perform sexual acts despite not being mentally ready for their relationship to progress in said way. Research also discovered that drinking is a common factor involving dating violence among college students<sup>12</sup>. Thus, since alcohol consumption is popular among youths, and that 20-30% of male youths in college may commit violence towards their dating partners, the scoping review aims to touch upon the

relation between alcohol consumption and dating violence. The scoping review aims to obtain a better understanding on how alcohol influences aggressive behaviour or mentality among male youths in colleges within Western countries and provide insight regarding the problem.

The study design, demographic, intervention and outcomes of articles chosen for this scoping review would follow a few inclusion and exclusion criteria. Inclusion criteria are eligibility criteria that ensure the studies selected for review are relevant to the aim. The exclusion criteria would serve as a thorough standard of elimination for articles irrelevant to the aim and focus of the scoping review, and ensure studies are only excluded after proper evaluation. These criteria are shown in detail in Table 1.

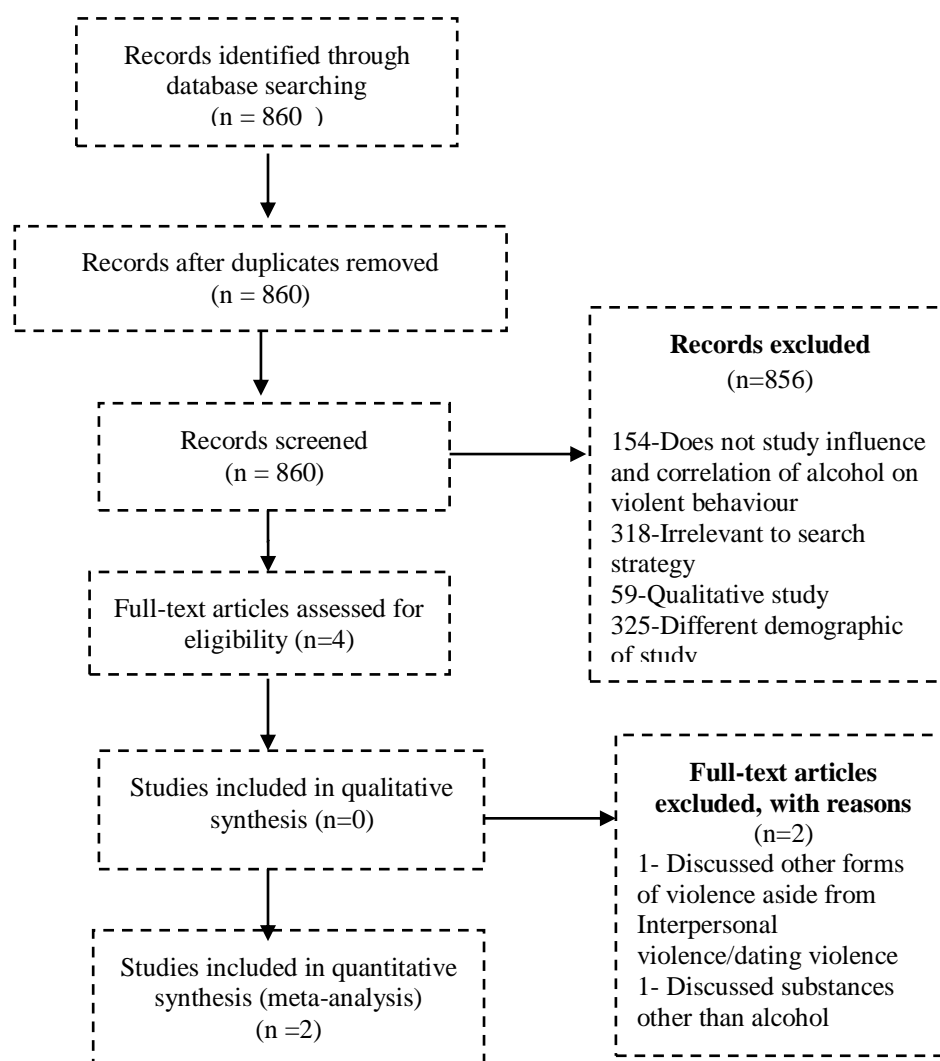


Figure 1: Prisma flow diagram.

## METHODS

The review adopted the following steps:

1. Identifying the purpose of review;
2. Conducting an article search using a search strategy;
3. Searching for related articles;
4. Inclusion and exclusion of articles;
5. Extraction of data from chosen articles;
6. Tabulation of data;
7. Summarizing, evaluating collected data and providing supporting evidence for claims.

**Table 1: Inclusion and exclusion criteria.**

	<b>Inclusion Criteria</b>	<b>Exclusion Criteria</b>
Study Design	Randomized study, Quantitative study, Full-text free open access articles, Alcohol, Interpersonal Violence, Male Youths	All review articles, irrelevant articles, abstract only articles, Non-randomized study, Qualitative study, articles with irrelevant keywords
Participants	Male youths in Western countries (10-24 years old)	Demographic other than male youths in Western countries
Intervention	Violent behaviour leading to dating violence in male youths are influenced or caused by alcohol consumption	Violent behaviour in male youths is influenced by other factors or violence is not related to dating violence.
Outcomes	Likelihood that alcohol induces or increases likelihood of dating violence and the reasoning behind it.	Does not mention about factors on whether alcohol induces or increases likelihood of violent behaviour and the reasons.

**Table 2: Data Extraction.**

<b>Author Name</b>	<b>Shorey <i>et al.</i></b>	<b>Shorey <i>et al.</i></b>
Year	2015	2017
Type of Study and Methodology Used	Randomised, Quantitative	Randomised, Quantitative
Total Sample Size	204	67
Demographic	Male undergraduate students from an undisclosed large south-eastern university in the United States	Male undergraduate students from an undisclosed university in the United States
Age	18 years old or older	18 years old or older
Data Analysis Method and/or Software Used	The Alcohol Use Disorders identification Test (AUDIT), The Revised Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS2), Analyses of Covariance (ANCOVAs)	State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory (STAXI), The Anger Management Scale (AMS), Revised Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS2), Multilevel modelling with HLM 7

The premise of the research is summarized in the question (Are male adolescents in college more likely to commit dating violence after consuming alcohol?) and all related articles are selected and filtered. The articles were searched using the search engine PubMed as medical journals are suited for the objective of study. Online journals involving alcohol and violence among male college students in Western countries are searched on PubMed.

The search strategy used in finding articles combines the following keywords:

As a result, a total of 860 related literatures were found in PubMed.

Out of 860 articles, a literature screening is performed. The process is demonstrated in the Figure 1

From 860 articles, 856 articles were excluded due to:

1. The article is irrelevant to the search strategy.
2. The article does not study the influence and correlation of alcohol on the violent behaviour of male youths in college.
3. The type of study and methodology is not consistent with the inclusion criteria.
4. The demographic is unrelated to Western countries and/or male youths in college.

Four articles were relevant to the objective of review. Out of the 4 articles, 2 were excluded, due to discussing forms of violence other than dating violence and discussing other substances instead of alcohol. A final total of 2 articles were used for the scoping review. Inclusion and exclusion of articles are subjected to the following criteria:

## RESULTS

Two articles were found explaining the likelihood of alcohol consumption to influence male adolescents in colleges within Western countries to commit dating violence, and they also discuss the reasoning behind the phenomenon. The Western country selected in the studies found is the United States. After examining the filtered articles, main elements were determined and selected to explain the effect of alcohol consumption towards male adolescents in college and how it affects the probability of dating violence.

### **Element 1: Hazardous drinkers have increased odds of perpetrating physical, psychological and sexual aggression towards dating partners**

According to Shorey *et al.*, there are three types of aggression that can be done towards dating partners—psychological, physical and sexual. There are minor and severe forms of three of them<sup>13</sup>. A psychological form of aggression is more verbal, mental, and emotional than it is physical. Usually, it occurs when someone verbally insults someone and as a result hurt that someone mentally and emotionally. A physical form of aggression is a behaviour in which physical harm is caused or threatened by someone to the victim. It can involve hitting, punching, kicking, and even breaking objects. A sexual form of aggression is a behaviour in which a sexual act is forced upon someone. It does not only include sexual intercourse, as long as it is forced, even a kiss or hug counts.

The AUDIT (The Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test) value reported has shown that the rate of drunkenness is directly related to each type of

aggression, minor and severe<sup>13</sup>. The most prominent relation found were between the rate of drunkenness and sexual aggressiveness. Moreover, drinking in the most cases is related with an increase in the aggression psychologically and sexually. It seems drinking alcohol in a dangerous manner will result in aggressive action. A daily diary conducted over an extended period of time is used in another relevant recent study and it shows that male college students commit physical and psychological aggressions more often on drinking days than on non-drinking days<sup>13</sup>.

As expected, the rate of drunkenness is related to all forms of violence in dating. However, there are certain circumstances and characteristics elements that need to be taken into account, not everyone who drinks will commit violence in dating. The next elements will explain why not everyone who drinks will commit violence in dating.

### **Element 2: Alcohol expectancies affect alcohol-related behaviour among alcohol consumers**

Alcohol expectancies are what people expect to happen when they consume alcohol, regardless of good or bad. Drinking behaviour is heavily affected by alcohol expectancies as people drink more when they have positive expectancies and vice versa<sup>13</sup>. People who believe they carry out a certain action after consuming alcohol are more likely to do that action. There has been a theory that aggression can be caused by alcohol more when the individual is under negative effects such as anger, stress and frustration. Research has also shown that there is a stronger relationship between alcohol usages and dating violence is more prevalent among male college students that have more beliefs in alcohol causing aggression<sup>13</sup>. It is discussed in a broader picture somewhere else that alcohol makes aggression easier by over-focusing on negative, aggressive signals, holding back an individual's ability to focus on non-aggressive signals<sup>13</sup>.

As discussed extensively elsewhere, it has been proposed that alcohol facilitates aggression through an excessive focus of attention on negative, aggressive cues, limiting one's ability to focus on non-aggressive cues<sup>13</sup>.

### **Element 3: Acute intoxication and anger management plays a role in aggressive behaviour**

Alcohol consumption alone may not be the direct cause in violent behaviour as anger management of the individuals strongly affect their behaviour after consuming alcohol<sup>14</sup>. Anger management is the ability to manage or suppress anger for a more efficient outcome. Alcohol is strongly related to increased chances of physical aggression among men with comparatively love relationship-related high anger management issues<sup>14</sup>. In comparison, there are increased chances of sexual aggression among men with comparatively love relationship-related low anger management issues<sup>14</sup>.

Violent actions related to alcohol may occur more often among individuals who have a lower threshold for aggression<sup>14</sup>. That is, individuals who have a "lower boiling point" or bad anger management are more likely to take violent actions when under the influence of alcohol due to alcohol weakening executive

functioning and as a result, it increases the individuals' risk of aggression.

## **DISCUSSION**

As shown in the above elements, alcohol increases the likelihood of interpersonal violence. The statistics in Australia also support this element as an estimated 33% incident involving violence were related to alcohol, and family violence is experienced by 28% of respondents which reportedly binge drinking in the past year<sup>15</sup>. However, alcohol is not the sole factor in producing violent behaviours as there are things such as alcohol expectancies which can affect people's action after consuming alcohol<sup>16</sup>. Furthermore, people that are already prone to aggression are more likely to commit violence after consuming alcohol.

Youths' alcohol-related point of view and behaviours are depicted by expectancies that aggressive behaviour is enhanced by alcohol and also being able to behave differently when in the state of being drunk<sup>17</sup>. They also believe drinking can help with dealing with negative emotions. People who are looking for a better ability to focus on a certain task and less about anxiety will drink alcohol for enhancement purposes. People who have higher anxiety sensitivity will drink alcohol for conformity purposes and people that have high trait anxiety will drink alcohol solely to cope with their anxiety<sup>18</sup>.

There is consistent speculation that alcohol will only lead to aggression for people who are already going to conduct themselves in that matter<sup>19</sup>. From this point of view, alcohol facilitates rather than triggering aggression and it might not affect people who were never going to use violence in the first place. This is supported by experimental research which proposes that test subjects who were already susceptible to aggression are more likely to display aggressive behaviour when under the influence of alcohol in the laboratory<sup>19</sup>. Those who have withdrawal symptoms may also vent their anger on their partners for their inability to provide a source of money to buy alcohol or simply to release pent up emotions<sup>20</sup>.

Alcohol causes high degree of damage to the humans' cognitive performance and weaken hazard perception, time of reaction, awareness, attentiveness and hand-eye coordination<sup>21</sup>. Drinking too much alcohol in a short time will be leading to a condition of enfeeble capacity of attention and restricted ability to process information, which in turn results in instantaneous reaction and direct conflict, in the form of violent behaviour for some humans, rather than a reasonable reaction in a normal state<sup>21</sup>. In a similar way, decreased control physically and ability to sense danger can make some drinkers easier target for victimization of violence acts<sup>7</sup>. Beliefs that alcohol increase confidence and aggression, individually or societal, can make alcohol a tool as a preparation for violent actions.

People that usually do not think much about the consequences of their actions would also be more likely to show violent behaviour as alcohol has a myopic effect that restricts attention to only what is important to the person and what one perceives rather

than the actual situation<sup>22</sup>. The constraint theory shows that brain mechanisms that usually control impulsive behaviour are enfeeble by alcohol. To be more specific, alcohol affects Serotonin, a chemical which function is to serve as a behavioural inhibitor. Its activity is decreased after alcohol consumption, which results in an increase of impulsivity and aggressiveness as well as the urge to drink more alcohol after the first few drinks among men<sup>23</sup>.

Other factors such as quality of childhood also relates to alcohol facilitating violence. Low quality childhoods which include an abusive relationship or being neglected can result in people with restricted abilities to work out a threatening situation, increased boldness and a limited ability to think about what consequences might be caused by one's actions; increased victimisation and perpetration can be a result of these factors<sup>24</sup>. Individuals' abilities to think about the likely consequences or to avoid violent situations will be damaged additionally with the consumption of alcohol.

## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, there are evidences that suggest alcohol is related to increased aggression psychologically, physically and sexually but there are also other elements that can affect a persons' behaviour such as alcohol expectancies and anger management. A few elements were determined to explain the effect of alcohol consumption on male adolescents in college and how it affects the probability of dating violence. The few elements are:

1. Hazardous drinkers have increased odds of perpetrating physical, psychological and sexual aggression towards dating partners.
2. Alcohol expectancies affect alcohol-related behavior among alcohol consumers.
3. Acute intoxication and anger management plays a role in aggressive behavior.

Alcohol is not the sole factor or the trigger to violent behaviour, but acts as a facilitator. Alcohol expectancies affect people's action after consuming alcohol. Furthermore, alcohol affects people that are already prone to aggression. Alcohol causes a high degree of damage to the humans' cognitive performance and weakens hazard perception, time of reaction, awareness, attentiveness and hand-eye coordination. Alcohol has a myopic effect that restricts attention to only what is essential to the consumer rather than the actual situation in hand. Other factors, such as quality of childhood, also relates to alcohol facilitated violence. In the discussion, we have also brought up other factors that could affect alcohol-related aggression such as an individual's quality of childhood. From this perspective, alcohol only triggers aggressive behaviour in people that were already prone to aggressive behaviour. Alcohol works as a facilitator more than a trigger and there are scientific facts to back that up as alcohol weakens one's cognitive ability and ability to act logically.

Hence, the review hopefully serves as a trigger for future policies to consider the dangers of intoxication more seriously and more research should be done

regarding the relation between alcohol and violent behaviour, so that interpersonal violence among adolescents can be reduced.

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## AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION

**Mohd Anis MAAB:** writing original draft, methodology. **Pius PCS:** investigation, formal analysis, conceptualization. **Aslam MS:** writing, review and editing. Final version of manuscript is approved by all authors.

## DATA AVAILABILITY

The data and material are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No conflict of interest associated with this work.

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