

The Effect of Alcohol Consumption on Aggression, Intimate Partner Violence and Self-Esteem in Young Adults

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Abstract: *'The drunken brawl' is a popular notion used when we hear about crime, since the idea of alcohol being thoroughly linked with aggression and violence is deep-rooted in our cultures. This research aimed to study- whether alcohol consumption is positively correlated with aggression; whether alcohol consumption is positively correlated with intimate partner violence; whether alcohol consumption is positively correlated with levels of self-esteem. A sample of 177 young adults were chosen via snowball method as the participants belonged from the state of Maharashtra, India. This research study is co-relational with a non-experimental design. Pearson's moment co-relation was used to express the results, quantitatively. The results indicated that alcohol consumption has a significant effect on aggression and levels of intimate partner whereas, it did not show any relation with self-esteem. Additionally, this paper discusses the impact of alcohol on everyday life and limitations of this study and implies the scope for further research.*

Keywords: Alcohol consumption, aggression, intimate partner violence, self-esteem, young adults

1. Introduction

Alcohol consumption has become a prevailing part of our lifestyle. Alcohol is readily available allows easy access to adolescents and young adults. The effects of alcohol on human body- physiologically, mentally worsens with frequency of consumption. However, when alcohol is consumed excessively it has always been linked with negative outcomes. Alcohol consumption can change the behavioural patterns leading to ambiguous decision making. According to a study conducted, due to the pandemic, the alcohol consumption has reportedly increased with binge drinking and extreme binge drinking in the participants. Participants who reported being stressed by the pandemic consumed more drinks over a greater number of days which raises concerns from both an individual and public health perspective. As you drink, your Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) increases, i.e. the amount of alcohol present in the bloodstream. Higher the BAC, the more impaired the individual becomes. The obvious consequences of increased BAC are slurred speech, reduced inhibition, difficulty in concentration, motor impairment, coma and even worse, death. (Overview of Alcohol Consumption, n.d.). Alcohol is a psychoactive substance with dependence-producing properties that has been widely used in many cultures for centuries. (Facts sheet Alcohol, 2018).

Aggression refers to a range of behaviours that can result in both physical and psychological harm to yourself, others or objects in the environment. (Cherry, 2020). Alcohol consumption and aggression, violent behaviour has semi-cealed relation. According to World Health Organisation (WHO), alcohol consumption is associated with aggressive behaviour more than any other psychotropic substance. Acute intoxication of alcohol plays a vital role in approximately half of violent crimes and sexual assaults all over the globe. (Beck & Heniz, 2013). Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) describes physical violence, sexual violence, stalking or psychological harm by a current or former

partner or spouse. (Violence prevention, 2015). The Intimate Partner Violence Attitude Scale (IPVAS) includes three factors- Abuse, control, violence. (Fincham, Cui, Braithwaite, & Pasley, 2008). Similarly, in the case of intimate partner violence, these behaviours have left traces of alcohol intoxication before a few hours. An article suggests, that there is a strong link between alcohol use and partner violence on the basis of factors like low socio-economic status, impulsive personality or because regular heavy drinkers often create an unhappy and stressful relation leading to risk of conflict and violence (WHO facts on alcohol and Violence: Intimate partner violence and alcohol, n.d.). To conclude, multiple factors influence how strongly alcohol can lead towards a violent behaviour.

Alcohol and self-esteem have a mutually destructive relationship. As a chemical depressant, alcohol can negatively impact one's mental health state, especially if they suffer from an external disorder or factors that affect their self-esteem. (Smith, 2021). Self-esteem and alcohol use have been found to be in a symbiotically destructive relationship. Both, extremely low self-esteem and high self-esteem can lead to drinking habits, resulting in addiction. However, people use alcoholism to temporarily enhance their self-esteem, it typically lowers the same in the long run, by creating a dependency on this mind-altering substance. Thus, alcoholism can drastically lower or enhance self-esteem with respect to one's personality. (Smith, 2022). Either way, it inclines the individual towards an addictive approach towards the substance.

The way alcohol influences behaviour, reactions and thought process, is worth paying attention to. Although, there aren't enough researches which prove that alcohol is the sole causal factor behind aggression and violence, many studies have proven that they heavily influence the magnitude of these acts. Documenting changes in alcohol consumption is critical for assessing future health service and alcohol treatment needs, evaluating efforts to modify drinking

behaviour and understanding the impact of shifting demographics and social norms. (Dawson, Goldstein, Saha, & Grant, 2015). This study is done to create awareness about the downfall of one's personal life due to reliance on alcohol, behavioural changes. Through this study, we have attempted to address the issue and warn people against the harm to oneself and their society caused due to the consumption of alcohol or under the influence of alcohol and the minutes of each variable. This research, shall aid a different perspective to alcohol abuse in correlation with three psychological and behavioural factors.

The readers shall acknowledge problematic behaviour that is under the influence of alcohol as aggression, intimate partner violence happening around them, seek help if they are going through such abuse. Information regarding socio-economic status, and personal details has also been collected which shall help us study how social, cultural environments play a vital role in addictions and how important it is to educate young adults with respect to substance abuse to avoid being either a perpetrator or a victim.

2. Literature Survey

In a study, Giancola, Levinson, Corman, Godlaski, Morris, Philips, Holt "Men and women, alcohol and aggression" in 2009, examined the acute effects of alcohol on aggressive behaviour in men and women in a laboratory setting. Alcohol increased aggression for both men and women but this effect was stronger for men. (Giancola, et al., 2009)

Brad. J. Bushman in his "Effects of alcohol on human aggression" in 2002, he stated that, alcohol increases aggression directly by anaesthetising the centre of brain that normally inhibits aggressive responding. According to the expectancy explanation alcohol increases aggression because people expect it to. (Bushman, 2002).

A study was conducted to investigate how self-reported psychosocial problems were associated with the use of alcohol in a community sample consisting of 4074 Finnish adolescents aged 13–18 years. The study concluded that aggressive behaviour associated with alcohol use and a high level of alcohol consumption, while internalizing problems did not associate with alcohol use. It highlighted points like alcohol use associated with a lack of problems in social relationships, alcohol use associated with aggressive behaviour. (Kivimäki, et al., 2014).

Andrea Finney in 2004, "Alcohol and Intimate Partner Violence: Key Findings from the Research"; Overall, research findings indicate that alcohol abuse is likely to contribute to intimate partner violence in a variety of ways. The levels of drinking associated with intimate partner violence; and whether alcohol problems that develop in the course of chronic intimate partner violence affect the patterns and nature of the violence. (Finney, 2004).

"The Role of Alcohol in Intimate Partner Violence: Causal Behaviour or Excusing Behaviour?" By Javaid, A, in 2015, the empirical research is based on 12 semi-structured interviews with professionals who deal with or have dealt with victims and/or offenders of intimate partner violence.

This research stipulates that alcohol is not causal in relation to intimate partner violence but it does offer the offender a 'shield', which allows them to identify themselves not as a 'violent abuser' but rather as someone whose drinking can lead them to do things they otherwise would not do. (Javaid, 2015).

Raul Caetano, John Schafer, Carol B. Cunradi authored "Alcohol-Related Intimate Partner Violence Among White, Black, and Hispanic Couples in the United States" in 2007, The rate of female-to-male partner violence was also high: 15 percent among white couples, 30 percent among black couples, and 21 percent among Hispanic couples, noted via surveyed report. It is also possible that people consciously use alcohol as an excuse for their violent behaviour or that alcohol appears to be associated with violence because both heavier drinking and violence have common predictors, such as an impulsive personality. (Caetano, Schafer, & Cunradi, 2017).

"Self-esteem and alcohol consumption: A study of college drinking behaviour in a naturalistic setting" a journal by Kent E Glindemann, E Scott Geller, Jason N Fortney in 1999, assessed 44 students for their levels of self-esteem via A self-esteem inventory. Analysis of Ryan's revealed a significant mean effect for the level of self-esteem. Results are compared with prior studies of self-esteem and alcohol consumption that also used self-report measures of drinking behaviour. (Glindemann, Geller, & Fortney, 1999).

A study on "Self-esteem and alcohol use: implications for aggressive behaviour" by Virgil Zeigler-Hill, Eric R.Dahlen, Michael B. Madson in 2017, speculates about the possible role that fragile high self-esteem may play in the connection between alcohol use and aggression. (Zeiger-Hill, Dahlen, & Madson, 2017).

A research study conducted in "Fragile Self-Esteem and Alcohol-Related Negative Consequences Among College Student Drinkers" in April,2013. Studied the connection between self-esteem and alcohol use among college students. Participants who completed measured of self-esteem level, non-contingent self-esteem alcohol use, harmful drinking patterns, and negative consequences of alcohol use. They concluded that individuals who possess high levels of self-esteem that are contingent report more alcohol-related negative consequences than individuals with noncontingent high self-esteem. (Zeigler-Hill, Stubbs, & Madson, 2013).

3. Methods

The sample size is of 177 young adults, between the age group 21-29. The sample is inclusive of all genders. The sample is selected only from the population of the state of Maharashtra, India. The sample was collected through snowball sampling method. Snowball sampling is a sampling method used by researchers to generate a pool of participants for a research study through referrals made by individuals who share a particular characteristic of research interest with the target population (Frey, 2018). The tests are provided to be the population based on purposive sampling

which means that the test was sent to the young adults residing in India who consumed alcohol and aged between 21 to 29. The tests were distributed through Google forms on platforms of social media such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn.

The Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT), the Buss Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ), The Intimate Partner Violence Attitude Scale (Revised), The Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale will be used. All the above-mentioned tools were procured from valid, trusted and official resources online. They were compiled and circulated as one test for the population mentioned priorly. Permission was taken from the respective heads of the college departments from where the data was collected.

The data collected was analysed using descriptive statistics and the correlation coefficient which was reported quantitatively, thus either accepting or not accepting the

hypothesis. The variables used in the study are quantifiable. The research will be a correlational study of non-experimental design. The results will be stated quantitatively using the correlation coefficient.

Since the nature of the research is correlational, Pearson's product moment correlation coefficient and descriptive statistics have been used to find the relationship between alcohol consumption and aggression separately, alcohol consumption and intimate partner violence separately and alcohol consumption and self-esteem separately. Pearson's product moment correlation is a measure of the strength of a linear association between two variables and is denoted by 'r'. The strength of relationship between variables is determined by seeing if the Pearson's product correlation coefficient value 'r' is closer to +1 or -1, depending on whether the relationship is positive or negative.

4. Methods/ Discussion

		Alcohol consumption	Aggression	Intimate Partner Violence	Self esteem
Alcohol consumption	Pearson correlation	1			
Aggression	Pearson correlation	.201**	1		
Intimate Partner Violence	Pearson correlation	.198**	.214**	1	
Self-esteem	Pearson correlation	.038	.238**	.088	1

(**) Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Based on the calculations from the Pearson's product moment correlation (see table 1), the calculated 'r' value for alcohol consumption and aggression is $r = -0.201$, the calculated r value for alcohol consumption and intimate partner violence is $r = -0.198$, and the calculated r value for alcohol consumption and self-esteem is $r = 0.038$. The sample size $N=177$, the degree of freedom (df)=175, the critical r value associated to df=175 at LOS=0.01 is $r(\text{crit})=0.181$.

Since $r(\text{calc})$ for alcohol consumption and aggression ($r = 0.201$) is greater than $z(\text{calc})$ at 0.01 LOS ($z = 0.181$), correlation is significant at 0.05 level and this the null hypothesis was rejected. Thus, alcohol consumption and aggression are positively correlated among young adults in India. Since $r(\text{calc})$ for alcohol consumption and intimate partner violence ($r = 0.201$) is greater than $z(\text{calc})$ at 0.01 LOS ($z = 0.181$), correlation is significant at 0.01 level and this the null hypothesis was rejected. Thus, alcohol consumption and intimate partner violence is positively correlated among young adults in India. The $r(\text{calc})$ for alcohol consumption and self-esteem ($r = 0.038$), and $z(\text{calc})$ at LOS 0.01 is ($z = 0.181$). Decision rule for 2 tailed (positive correlation) is we reject null hypothesis if z is ≥ 1.960 or $z \leq -1.960$. Therefore, null hypothesis is not rejected. Thus, alcohol consumption and self-esteem is not significantly correlated among young adults in India.

Out of all the respondents, a decent number ($n=30$) scored '0' in AUDIT indicating minimal or no problems with alcohol while a greater number ($n=91$) had symptoms of low-risk alcohol consumption. An exact number ($n=34$) of participants suggest harmful or hazardous consumption levels of alcohol and ($n=22$) scored high in AUDIT indicating moderate to severe level of consumption; likely to adopt alcohol dependence.

For BPAQ, ($n=16$) have scored high in the scale, indicating high aggression whilst ($n=10$) scored low in the BPAQ scale, indicating low aggression. Most of the participants ($n=151$) scored moderately, suggesting moderate level of aggression.

With respect to Intimate Partner Violence, ($n=2$) scored the lowest on IPVAS, denoting low to Intimate Partner Violence attitude, whereas, ($n=68$) scored high on IPVAS suggesting greater intimate partner violence behaviours, and ($n=107$) scored moderately on the scale.

Considering the self-esteem scale, ($n=6$) scored low, indicating typically low self-esteem, while ($n=8$) scored high on the Rosenberg self-esteem scale.

Based on the data collected and the results, most participants who scored moderating high in AUDIT, indicating a moderate level of alcohol consumption, also scored high in BPAQ, suggesting slightly higher aggression levels. As mentioned earlier, pre-existing studies cannot evidently claim alcohol as the causa scored low, denoting 1 factor, however, it promotes aggressive behaviour. Similar findings were noted in a study where they mention, experimental manipulations that increased aggression (e.g. frustrations, aggressive cues) had a stronger effect on intoxicated participants than on sober participants. (Bushman B. J., 2002). There are a number of social, cultural, neurobiological, cognitive factors that influence how alcohol can affect aggression. Reportedly, alcohol targets and anesthetizes the centre of brain, that inhibits aggression; thus, leading to outburst of violent behaviour. (Buddy T, 2021). Around ($n=19$) answered positively to getting into fights after drinking alcohol, which confirms the link between the two. If we view 'alcohol' as the compounding factor of aggression, it justifies the fact that on enough

provocation an intoxicated individual can lose his cognitive ability to think practically, and would react differently than he would, when sober. It will not only impair the thought-process but also, amplify anger; the research- “Alcohol and aggression: An integration of findings from experimental studies”, affirms the popular belief that alcohol consumption increases aggressive behaviour. (Exum M. L., 2006). Although, there are numerous factors that decide the magnitude of effect on the individual, one cannot neglect the strong relationship between intoxication of alcohol and increased levels of aggression. The impact of drinking alcohol on aggressive or violent behaviour is complex. It has also been found that binge drinking increases likelihood of aggression. (Alcohol and aggression, n.d.).

It was found that the respondents who scored modest to slightly high in IPVAS, indicating moderate to quiet high partner violence behaviour, were almost the same participants who scored moderate in AUDIT, suggesting the range from bearable to harmful amount of alcohol consumption. As mentioned above, alcohol plays as a ‘catalyst’ in partner and domestic violence. It catalyses the process of thinking and reacting violently. These statements can be backed up by Finney’s research findings that indicate that alcohol abuse is likely to contribute to intimate partner violence in a variety of ways. These include cultural factors, which relate to how alcohol and its link to violence are understood in society. (Finney, Alcohol and Intimate Partner Violence: Key Findings From the Research, 2004). Hence, intimate partner violence is accelerated by prior alcohol consumption and both of them are solidly correlated. This finding is in accordance with “Mechanisms of Alcohol-Facilitated Intimate Partner Violence” done in 2015, which stated that alcohol intoxication and a pattern of heavy alcohol consumption are robust correlates of IPV perpetration. (Eckhardt, Parrott, & Sprunger, 2015). A noticeable increase in the rate of partner violence was observed during pandemic, one reason being ‘alcohol’. Consistent with the results from Krishnakumar’s and Verma’s research study “Understanding Domestic Violence in India During COVID-19: a Routine Activity Approach” which stated that sources of motivation in domestic violence perpetrators during the lockdown were alcohol and unemployment. (Verma & Krishnakumar, 2019). Another research conducted in 2021 mentions about how partner violence has been increased since March 2020 with a staunch link being ‘alcohol. A large body of evidence documents a link between alcohol consumption and violence involving intimate partners. It also considers an important mechanism behind the increase in domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic an increase in the riskiness of alcohol, resulting in marked increase in domestic violence. (Chalfin, Danagoulain, & Deza, 2021).

Interestingly, the results indicated that there is no significant co-relation between alcohol consumption and levels of self-esteem. There are a few probable reasons as to why the results depicted no correlation. Consuming alcohol is still a concept, many people are not convinced by. Hence, the respondents who scored low in AUDIT, also attempted to answer the ‘Self-Esteem Scale’ with “socially-acceptable’ answers, which in-turn led to altering the pattern and interpretation of results. Numerous religions prohibit

consumption of alcohol because of the norms they follow, hence, this and develop a sense of guilt and remorse of the person volunteering for the same. The concerned age group constitutes majorly of students and employees, therefore, there are many factors like maintenance of work-life balance, work stress, peer influence, social status and so on, that contribute towards building and determining one’s self-image and self-esteem. Other reason, to put special emphasis on is, the impact of alcohol on the individual is highly subjective. For instance, amongst the respondents (n=44) consumed alcohol to feel good, (n=72) did not drink to feel good and (n=61) weren’t aware if alcohol makes them feel good or not. This indicates that alcohol affects each individual differently depending upon his social, cultural, neurobiological and cognitive make-up. Alongside, some participants mentioned ‘curiosity’ as the reason to start drinking, whilst others reported ‘peer pressure/ influence of an adult’ as the reason which creates ambiguity in the levels of self-esteem of participants due to the extrinsic factors that led them to consume alcohol or alcohol dependency.

5. Conclusion

The results of the study revealed that alcohol consumption is positively correlated with aggression, i.e. aggression increases with increase in alcohol consumption. Likewise, alcohol consumption is also positively correlated with intimate partner violence (IPV). These findings, although tested rarely in Indian populations, are consistent with previous findings from researches focused on samples from different nations. On the other hand, alcohol consumption is not correlated with levels of self-esteem among young adults in India. This brings us to the fact that every individual undergoes different experiences under the influence of alcohol which is majorly influenced by environmental cues. The process of beginning to drink alcohol to depending on alcohol can be over-whelming. Irrespective of the reason to initiate drinking, it is quintessential to know the onset the downfall. Lack of self-awareness, low self-esteem are some of the few reasons why people choose alcohol as a coping mechanism. People inclusive of all socio-economic statuses are the victims of alcohol addiction and their partners, families and closed ones- victims of their abuse. Advancements in the field of addiction studies, has led to development in rehabilitation centres which alcohol addictions can be brought in control. Anger management programs and apt counselling can surely aid the situation. Self-help groups and government helpline numbers have been generated to protect the victims from any abuse. Moreover, what matters is how woke the individual is. Hence, this research study will help the readers know and understand how dependency on alcohol can be a bane for lifetime.

6. Future Scope

- An extensive study on alcohol consumption using variables like escapism, if individuals opt for dependency on alcohol to escape real-life struggles, to cope up with negative emotions.
- Considering partner violence, most of the pre-existing studies have been focused on male-to-female partner violence (MFPV), additional research is required to study

female-to-male partner violence (FMPV) and same sex partner violence.

- Further research is needed that focuses explicitly on the nature of alcohol's contribution to intimate partner aggression. We already know that alcohol does contribute but now, more importantly we need to study 'how'.
- Similarly, limited research is present that examines the mediating mechanisms of how alcohol potentiates partner violence. Study can be focused on neurobiological and cognitive perspective.
- A study emphasizing on specific populations like-athletes, health-care workers, female-led families, and so on.

The limitations for the study are as follows:

- The age window is very limited.
- Due to the lack of in-person instructions, test administration and data collection, many participants opted out of the study, halfway through the study.
- The participants were restricted to the state of Maharashtra, India.
- The results might have been affected due to the removal of outliers.
- This paper did not provide a solution for alcohol dependency and violent behaviours.

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Author Profile



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