

Study says just talking about alcohol causes aggression

By Amanda Taylor

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SALT LAKE CITY — A new study suggests the mere mention or hint of alcohol can create an aggressive response.

A group of researchers from California State University at Long Beach, the University of Kent and the University of Missouri worked together to determine how alcohol can enhance aggressive behavior.

“It has been well documented by previous research that the consumption of alcohol is directly linked to an increase in aggression and other behavioral extremes,” [an article on Science Codex said](#). “But can simply seeing alcohol-related words have a similar effect on aggressive behavior?”

Two experiments determined the results of the study, published in the “[Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin](#).”

The first required participants to write a short essay about a controversial topic, with the participants being told the effort would be evaluated by a fellow participant. After writing, one group was shown a series of alcohol-related words: whiskey, beer, vodka, etc. Another group saw words about beverages without alcohol, such as milk, water and coffee.

Participants were split into three groups — in one, they received blatantly negative responses to their essays; in another, ambiguous responses, and those in the third group did not receive an evaluation.

Each person in the study was asked to put his hand in a bucket of ice water for a number of seconds. That participant was then asked how long the person who evaluated the essay should be asked to put his hand in ice water.

“If you've ever gone searching in the cooler for a drink once the ice has started to melt you've probably experienced this feeling; it can really hurt if you leave your hand in for more than a few seconds ... Because participants know how painful this is, we can say that their recommendation represents their level of aggression toward the other person,” lead researcher Bill Pedersen said in the Science Codex article.

The participants who had been shown alcohol-related terms were more likely to show aggression — by suggesting the reviewers of their essays be punished with longer exposure to the water — whether the reaction to their writing was negative or ambiguous.

“The researchers found the increased-aggression effect diminished at seven minutes, and was virtually absent after a 15-minute delay,” an article on [Pacific Standard said](#). “Of course, if you're in a tavern and reminders of alcohol are everywhere, that tapering off would not occur until you have left the building.”