

Abusive men likely to repeat violence if attraction to women is superficial

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Abusive men who select partners mainly based on appearance are likely to be violent again after completing an abuser intervention program, according to a new University of Michigan study.

Fifty-nine percent of those who mentioned at least one physical trait as the reason for their attraction were violent again after the program, compared with 39 percent who did not mention [physical traits](#) as a reason.

"This finding is consistent with the notion that offenders who view their partners superficially will be less likely to end their [violence](#)," said Daniel Saunders, professor of [social work](#) and the study's lead author.

This type of offender was also more likely to mention their own needs as reasons they were attracted to their partners. They had histories of very severe forms for violence—throwing their partners and hitting them with objects.

This is the first study to ask [men](#) who abused an intimate partner the reasons they were attracted to that partner. Other research has found that abusers tend to choose women who are smaller in size than the average woman. Once in the relationship, abusers often try to make their partners very dependent on them.

The researchers used responses from 181 offenders during a program intake interview that asked "What attracted you to your partner?"

Reports of violence after the program were based on police records and interviews with the men's partners.

The men often gave more than one reason for their attraction. Sixty-six percent of the total number of reasons given centered on their partners' physical traits, for example her "looks" or "smile"; 70 percent were for nonphysical traits, like communication style and being outgoing or caring.

Twenty percent of the reasons given by the men focused on their own needs, such as their need for acceptance and companionship. Much less often, reasons centered on what the men had in common with their partners (12 percent) or on their partners' needs (4 percent).

As the researchers expected, those whose attraction to their partner focused on their own needs scored higher on personality tests of emotional neediness. The violence history of these men was characterized by screaming, smashing objects and driving recklessly to frighten their [partners](#).

Those who tended to mention nonphysical traits had lower scores on personality measures of antisocial traits and aggressiveness.

To the extent that partner selection by abusers is tied to their traits and behavior, this shifts the focus from asking "Why did she seek out a violent partner?" or "Why does she stay with him?" to asking "What is he looking for in a partner?"

The study, which is co-authored by U-M students Jennifer Kurko, Kirsten Barlow and Colleen Crane, appears in the September issue of the *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*.

Provided by University of Michigan

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