

## Predicting predisposition to risky dating behaviors in college women

Risky dating behaviors can be defined as the propensity to engage in sexual activities under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol, with multiple partners, or in unfamiliar situations. Despite programs aimed at increasing people's knowledge of risky situations, some women continue to engage in risky dating behaviors. Little is known about potential interactions between emotion dysregulation and characteristics of the sexual preferences of these women.

To determine the sexual preferences and predispositions of women who engage in risky dating behaviors, we recruited 80 women, ages 18-25, from the University of Vermont. Participants had at least one sexual experience with a male partner prior to joining the study. They completed a series of questionnaires that assessed sexual behaviors, attitudes, and arousal. We computed a 2-step hierarchical regression to test each of the following hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 1:* The inability to understand or modulate emotions will predict greater tendencies to engage in risky dating behaviors because emotions that normally keep individuals away from dangerous situations are misread.

*Hypothesis 2:* The ability to become sexually aroused will predispose women to seek more partners to satisfy their sexual needs.

*Hypothesis 3:* Women reporting greater inhibition in their sexual arousal will be less likely to engage in risky dating behaviors.

Our results showed that having poor strategies to modulate emotions and having poor clarity of one's emotions predicted greater risky dating behaviors. Also, the ability of woman to become sexually aroused and the tendency to experience sexual inhibition added significantly to the model, suggesting that such tendencies play a pertinent role in risky dating behaviors independent of emotion regulation. Taken together, this understanding of the characteristics of women who do not respond to general educational messages may help us better satisfy their needs, the function of their behaviors, and help them create safer environments for themselves.