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The role of dysfunctional sexual beliefs and sexual self-esteem in sexual aggression: a study with male college students

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Resumo

Introduction: Sexual violence has been a topic of priority research in university populations. Considering previous literature on the psychological features characterizing sexual aggressors, sexual beliefs are of interest to this context. Dysfunctional sexual beliefs lead men to establish high expectations about sexual performances, enhancing their own vulnerability. Such vulnerability may increase the need to reinforce the individual's manhood, resulting in sexual aggression as a mean to establish it. Additionally, there were reasons to believe that sexual self-esteem may be the bridge through which that association occurs. **Objectives:** This study aimed to understand how the endorsement of dysfunctional sexual beliefs is associated with sexual self-esteem and sexually aggressive behavior in male college students; it further aimed to test the mediating role of sexual self-esteem in the relationship between sexual beliefs and sexual aggression. **Method:** Three hundred sixty-four male participants submitted their answers to an online questionnaire assessing sexual beliefs, sexual self-esteem, and aggressive sexual behavior. The study inclusion criteria required all participants to be 18 years of age or older, attending college and to

report themselves as heterosexual. In order to pursue the aims of the study, the statistical approach accounted for a mediation analysis. **Results:** Findings revealed that 36,2% of participants reported having used aggressive strategies to attempt sexual interactions. Findings also revealed a significant relationship between sexual dysfunctional beliefs and sexual aggression, with models explaining between 13% and 20% of the variance of results. Despite that, the results didn't support the hypothesis of the mediating role of sexual self-esteem in that relationship. **Conclusion:** Results suggest that students' beliefs about sexuality, namely, a conservative pattern of sexual beliefs, work as predisposing factors for sexual aggression. Overall, considering the content of these beliefs, the present findings align with the idea that the traditional masculinity profile associates with sexual aggression [1-3]. Additionally, these findings are consistent with previous ones [4], demonstrating that not only rape-specific sexual beliefs, but overall cognition and general attitudes about sexuality may have a great impact on sexual aggression. The current results add to the knowledge on the preventive targets regarding sexual offending behavior in community samples.

Keywords: sexual aggression; sexual beliefs; sexual self-esteem; college students.

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