



Harassing fertile female chacma baboons appears to give males a better chance of mating with them. IMAGEBROKER/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Are some primates wired for sexual harassment?

By [Michael Price](#) | Jul. 6, 2017, 12:15 PM

Male baboons that harass and assault females are more likely to mate with them, according to a new study, adding evidence that sexual intimidation may be a common mating strategy among promiscuous mammals. The study's authors even argue that the findings could shed light on the evolutionary origins of our own species' behavior, although others aren't convinced the results imply anything about people.

"I think the data and analyses in this study are first-rate," says Susan Alberts, a biologist who studies primate behavior at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina. "[But] I also think it's a big stretch to infer something about the origins of human male aggression towards women."

To conduct the research, Elise Huchard, a zoologist at the National Center for Scientific Research in Montpellier, France, and colleagues examined a group of chacma baboons (*Papio ursinus*) living in Tsaobis Nature Park in Namibia over a 9-year period. These brownish, dog-sized primates live in troops of dozens of males and females. Females will mate with multiple males throughout the year. The male chacma are about twice the size of females and aggressively fight one another and engage in howling competitions to establish dominance. The more dominant a male is, the more likely he is both to succeed in finding a mate and to sire offspring.

Males rarely force females to mate, but after years spent observing the animals in the wild, Huchard noticed that a subtler form of sexual coercion appeared to be going on. "Males often chase and attack some females of their own group when meeting another group, and they generally target sexually receptive females on such occasions," she says. "I spent a great deal of time studying female mate choice, and my main impression ... was that females don't have much room to express any preference."