

New Zealand Study Suggests Higher Rates Of Self-Harm And Suicidal Behavior For Same-Sex Attracted Individuals

By Roy Waller

A study appearing in the March 2003 issue of *The American Journal of Psychology* found higher rates of non-fatal suicidal behavior among those with homosexual attractions than among the heterosexual population.

The research, conducted in New Zealand among 946 men and women, dealt with three basic groups of respondents: 770 men and women who reported exclusive, life-long heterosexual attractions, 155 of both genders who claimed "minor" same-sex attraction, and 17 (eight men, nine women) who said they consistently experienced same-sex attraction.

The focus of the research was homosexual attraction, rather than actual behavior.

The study was actually conducted over 23 years, beginning with an initial group of 1,037 three-year old children who received extensive medical, psychological, and behavioral assessments for the next two decades.

Highlights of the study's findings include:

- Attempts at self-inflicted harm by both men and women were increased significantly with the degree of homosexual attraction. Even amongst men who reported only "minor same-sex attraction," a marked increase in the occurrences of physical injury was noted.

- Episodes of depression during the twelve months prior to the polling were significant, especially among the male subjects, and also increased greatly in proportion to increased levels of homosexual attraction.

- Substance abuse was also a major factor examined in the study. Both sexes reported elevated rates of substance abuse during the same twelve-month period. The researchers note that the women particularly appeared to show increased incidents of substance abuse with increased degree of lesbian attraction.

- Domestically, men and women who reported major, consistent homosexual attraction were less likely to be living with a spouse or partner of either gender.

- Overall, men who admitted any same-sex attraction of whatever degree and persistency, seemed to be at a significantly higher risk than women of like responses in their reporting of deliberate self-harm over the course of a lifetime.

The entire article may be read at <http://ajp.psychiatryonline.org>

Reference:

Skegg, K., S. Nada-Raja, N. Dickson, C. Paul, S. Williams, "Sexual Orientation and Self-Harm in Men and Women," *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 160:3; 541-546, 2003.