

Major Scientific Study Examines Domestic Violence Among Gay Men

By Roy Waller

The *American Journal of Public Health* has published a detailed study of battering victimization in the male homosexual community (December 2002, Vol. 92, No. 12). The probability-based sampling of "men who have sex with men" focused on four geographical areas (San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York) and resulted in 2,881 completed telephone interviews.

Based on these responses, this first-of-its-kind study determined that the rate of battering victimization among gay men in the target group (men over 18 who had engaged in homosexual activity since age 14, or who identified as gay, homosexual, or bisexual) is "substantially higher than among heterosexual men" and also possibly higher than the rate for heterosexual women, according to the study.

The researchers report a high rate of battering within the context of intimate homosexual partnerships, with 39% of those studied reporting at least one type of battering by a partner over the last five years.

In contrast, only about 7.7% of heterosexual men of all ages report physical or sexual partner abuse during their entire lifetimes. (Lifetime rates of abuse are generally higher than those within a five-year period.)

Figures were also compared with studies on heterosexual women who had been victims of violence within marriage or while cohabiting with men, also within five-year periods. Victimization for homosexual men (22%) was also substantially higher than for heterosexual women (11.6%).

The study, conducted by researchers with the Center for AIDS Prevention Studies (University of California, San Francisco), Whitman-Walker Clinic (Washington, D.C.) and Prevention Research Center, School of Social Work (University of Washington, Seattle), examines three specific types of gay-male-to-gay-male assault: psychological/symbolic battering (verbal threats, ridicule in front of others, forced substance abuse, destruction of property, stalking), physical battery, and sexual battery (forced sexual activity).

Demographic information collected included each respondent's age, educational level, race/ethnicity, employment status, income, sexual self-description (gay, homosexual, bisexual, etc.), HIV status, and city of residence.

The research interviews covered the most recent five years of the respondents' lives, revealing that, within that time frame, 34% of the urban males interviewed had been vic-

tims of psychological/symbolic abuse, 22% had been physically victimized, and 5.1% had experienced sexual abuse. Overall, 39.2% reported one or other type of battering, of which 18.2% reported being victimized by more than one type of battering over the five-year period.

In terms of personal statistics concerning the victims, it was found that homosexual males age 40 or younger were much more likely to be the victim of abuse by a same-sex partner than those age 60 or over. Those with graduate and professional degrees were also less likely to be the target of such violence than men with a college degree or lower.

HIV-Infected Men Most Likely to be Sexually Battered

Men infected with the AIDS virus were more at risk for psychological and physical abuse than their HIV-negative peers. HIV-infected men were also more likely to be victimized in a sexual manner.

According to the study, none of the battering outcomes appeared associated with racial or ethnic identity, income level, or the city of residence.

The study states that the most significant factor in male same-sex partner violence is age: a 3.8% rate for 18-29 year olds, 3.9% among those between the ages of 30 and 39, and 2.7% in the 40-49-age bracket. Men under the age of 40 were found to be six times more likely to report abuse than those 60 or older, with subjects between 40 and 50 being four times as likely.

"A Very Serious Public Health Problem"

The conclusion arrived at by the researchers, based upon these figures, is that the rate of abuse between urban homosexual men in intimate relationships "is a very serious public health problem."

However, a brief article in the January 29, 2003 edition of the [365Gay.com](http://www.365Gay.com) Newscenter—a gay news outlet—omitted mention of the abuse comparison between homosexual and heterosexual males. Instead, it highlighted the finding that men with the HIV virus are more likely to be targets of abuse than non-infected men, and it stated that the study reports that gay men "are as likely" to be the victims of domestic violence as heterosexual women.

The complete study may be found at <http://www.ajph.org/cgi/content/full/92/12/1964>. ■