

Study finds high rate of victimization among gays, lesbians and bisexuals

May 7 2012, by David Tenenbaum

(Medical Xpress) -- A new analysis of hundreds of existing research studies shows that lesbians, gays and bisexuals experience high rates of victimization.

Janet Hyde, a professor of psychology and women's studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, says, "Lesbians, gays and bisexuals, or LGBs, have received significantly more threats than straights, and significantly more physical assault."

And even though [public acceptance](#) of gay people has improved in the United States and some other nations, the rates of victimization have, if anything, risen since the first studies included in the new report were published in 1992.

The study was necessary, Hyde says, because, "From hate-crime statistics, we have some idea that victimization of LGBs occurs in American society and worldwide. But crime statistics are a huge underestimate since they only include reported crimes, and many people are reluctant to go to the police."

Hyde says this victimization, defined as harm caused by perpetrators whose [biases](#) guide their victim selection, "is much more widespread than people might imagine, and that has policy implications. Gay students report this happens in dorms. In colleges and universities, do we have adequate policies to reduce or absolutely eradicate this kind of harassment?"

The new study just appeared in the March-June *Journal of Sex Research*.

Co-author Sabra L. Katz-Wise, a graduate student in psychology and women's studies, says the new study was a [retrospective analysis](#) of existing studies of lesbian, gay and bisexual people. In such "[meta-analyses](#)," researchers set standards for existing studies and attempt to find the overall message from a much larger sample.

After reviewing published and unpublished literature, Hyde and Katz-Wise located 2,501 studies on the subject, published between 1992 and 2009. They culled this list and performed further analysis on 386 studies that reported on more than 500,000 people.

Overall, a large proportion of the respondents reported having been targeted for their sexuality, Hyde says. "Thirty-seven percent received threats, 28 percent were physically assaulted, 24 percent experienced property violence, and 25 percent report discrimination in the workplace," she says.

Males had a slightly higher rate of some types of victimization than females.

Although social acceptance of lesbians, gays and bisexuals has increased in the past few years in the United States, the study found disturbing trends, Katz-Wise says. "[Physical assault](#), and sexual assault both inside and outside the family all increased."

She says this may have resulted from more recognition of victimization due to the focus on combating high-school bullying, which is often directed at LGBs. The increasing visibility of gay, lesbian and bisexual people that has accompanied the relaxation of social tensions could also help perpetrators identify targets for their intolerance.

Particularly disturbing was the increase in abuse within the family, Hyde says.

"Some families are not pleased to know they have a gay son or lesbian daughter, so the person suffers verbal and sometimes physical abuse," Hyde says.

To Hyde, putting numbers on the problem proves that "despite societal improvement in attitudes toward lesbian, gay and bisexual people and increased civil rights for this population, they are still experiencing substantial victimization — more so than heterosexual people."

Despite the ongoing changes in social attitudes and legal status, assault and harassment should be treated as the crimes they are, Hyde says. "We have to make it easier for LGB people to report this kind of victimization, much as we did for women reporting rape. They must be sure they will not be penalized and the perpetrators will be punished for the consequences for their bad behavior."

Provided by University of Wisconsin-Madison

Citation: Study finds high rate of victimization among gays, lesbians and bisexuals (2012, May 7) retrieved 1 May 2024 from

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