

Sexual minority women are often victims of abuse

June 14 2012

Adult lesbian and bisexual women are more likely to report childhood abuse and adult sexual assault than heterosexual women, according to a new study by Dr. Keren Lehavot from the VA Puget Sound Health Care System in Seattle, USA and her collaborators. Furthermore, the researchers' work shows that women who are more butch report more abuse in childhood, particularly physical and emotional neglect, while women who identify as femme, and have a more feminine appearance, report more adult sexual assaults. The work is published online in Springer's journal, *Sex Roles*.

It is yet not fully understood why [sexual minority](#) women are at greater risk of being abused both as children and adults compared to [heterosexual women](#). Using data from the Rainbow Women's Project in the US a national, web-based survey of adult women who identify as lesbian/gay and bisexual- the researchers examined whether reported experiences of childhood abuse and adult sexual assault differed among sexual minority women of varying gender identity* (butch, femme, androgynous, or other) and gender expression** (more butch/masculine vs. more femme/feminine).

A total of 1,243 adult sexual minority women completed an anonymous Internet survey posted on various listservs and website groups. Regarding gender identity, 40 percent of participants identified with the term 'femme' and 15 percent with the term 'butch'.

Dr. Lehavot comments: "The sexual minority women in our sample

reported high rates of [childhood abuse](#) and neglect and adult sexual assault. Women who described themselves as more butch reported significantly greater childhood emotional and physical neglect. Those who identified themselves as more femme reported significantly more forced adult sex. Given the gravity of this widespread problem, identifying the most vulnerable among this group is critical. Clinicians and providers working with sexual minorities should consider the role of gender identity and expression in targeted assessments and interventions."

More information: *The term butch and femme refer to masculine and feminine gender identities within lesbian and bisexual communities. Androgynous is another gender identity similar to a butch aesthetic style e.g. 'soft butch'.

**Gender expression is defined as the extent to which an individual engages in behaviors that are held to be traditionally characteristic of females or males i.e. more butch/masculine vs. more femme/feminine.

Reference

Lehavot K et al (2012). Childhood trauma, adult sexual assault, and adult gender expression among lesbian and bisexual women. *Sex Roles*; DOI [10.1007/s11190-012-0171-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11190-012-0171-1)

Provided by Springer

Citation: Sexual minority women are often victims of abuse (2012, June 14) retrieved 20 March 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-06-sexual-minority-women-victims-abuse.html>

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