

Childhood sexual abuse and social shaming linked to health issues later

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Gay and bisexual men enrolled in a long-term study of HIV who reported sexual abuse and social shaming in childhood experience psychosocial health problems later in life that could put them at greater risk for HIV, report [University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health](#) researchers at the XVIII International AIDS Conference.

The study included more than 1,000 HIV-positive and negative gay and bisexual men enrolled in the Multicenter AIDS Cohort Study (MACS), which began in 1983 and is the longest-running National Institutes of Health-funded investigation of HIV/AIDS.

Almost 10 percent of the participants reported that they had been victims of [childhood sexual abuse](#) and nearly 30 percent had experienced gay-related victimization between the ages of 12 and 14, including verbal insults, bullying, threats of physical violence and physical assaults. Men who experienced childhood sexual abuse and a sense of masculinity failure were more likely to use [illicit drugs](#) and to engage in [risky sexual behavior](#) in adulthood.

According to study authors, these health issues combine to create a "syndemic," or linked epidemic, that together may be driving the AIDS epidemic in gay men.

"Our study shows that the early socialization experiences of gay men can be deeply stigmatizing and increase their risks for these syndemic conditions in adulthood," said Sin How Lim, Ph.D., study author and post-doctoral associate, Pitt's Graduate School of Public Health. "Given the long-lasting impacts, effective interventions should address multiple interrelated social issues early on rather than focusing on each problem in isolation."

Provided by University of Pittsburgh Schools of the Health Sciences

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