

Exploring sexual orientation and intimate partner violence

4 March 2014

Two studies at Sam Houston State University examined issues of sexual orientation and intimate partner violence, including its impact on substance abuse and physical and mental health as well as the effects of child abuse on its victims.

"We wanted to see how characteristics of the victims might differ based on if they were heterosexual or non-heterosexual," said Maria Koeppel, a Ph.D. student at the College of Criminal Justice, who coauthored the studies with Dr. Leana Bouffard. "These studies show the need to have specialized programs designed for non-heterosexual victims to deal with their victimization in addition to minority stress issues."

The first study found that homosexuals and bisexuals were more likely than heterosexuals to be victims of [intimate partner violence](#), a risk compounded by those who experienced [abuse](#) as a child. In the second study, homosexual or bisexual victims of [intimate partner](#) violence were more likely to use drugs and alcohol and have health issues compared to heterosexual victims.

Homosexuals and bisexuals are victims of intimate [partner violence](#) more frequently than their heterosexual counterparts – at rates of 50 percent and 32 percent respectively. If non-heterosexual individuals are abused as children, two-thirds will face abuse as adults at the hands of intimate partners, according to the CVI report "Child Abuse, Sexual Orientation and Intimate Partner Violence." The study was based on a sample of 7,216 women and 6,893 men from the National Violence Against Women Survey from 1995 and 1996.

"The finding of higher rates of adult IPV victimization for non-heterosexual child abuse victims lend support to the need for special social welfare programs for non-heterosexual victims, programs which are currently severely lacking," the report said.

One example of such a program is the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center, which works with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender shelters and legal services and provides training, education and counseling services on domestic violence issues to non-heterosexuals.

The second study, using the same data from the National Violence Against Women Survey, found that homosexual and bisexual victims of intimate partner violence are more likely to abuse drugs and alcohol following their victimization, with 35 percent turning to drugs compared to 23 percent among heterosexuals. In addition, non-heterosexual victims were at higher risk of alcohol abuse and health problems, although heterosexual victims were more likely to suffer mental health issues, the study found.

The two studies have been accepted for publication in academic journals and summaries were released by the Crime Victims' Institute at Sam Houston State University. The Institute, created by the Texas Legislature, studies the impact of crime on its [victims](#), relatives and society and makes policy recommendations for improvements to the adult and juvenile [criminal justice](#) systems.

More information: A summary of the child abuse study can be found at the Crime Victims Institute Web site at www.crimevictimsinstitute.org/publications/ and has been accepted for future publication by *Violence and Victims*. The study on the effects of IPV on victims will be published in a future issue of *Women and Criminal Justice*.

Provided by Sam Houston State University

APA citation: Exploring sexual orientation and intimate partner violence (2014, March 4) retrieved 22 July 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-03-exploring-sexual-intimate-partner-violence.html>

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