

## A Descriptive Analysis of Same-Sex Relationship Violence for a Diverse Sample

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*This study contributed to the data about same-sex relationship violence with a large sample (n = 499) of ethnically diverse gay men, lesbians, and bisexual and transgendered people. Physical violence was reported in 9% of current and 32% of past relationships. One percent of participants had experienced forced sex in their current relationship. Nine percent reported this experience in past relationships. Emotional abuse was reported by 83% of the participants. Women reported higher frequencies than men for physical abuse, coercion, shame, threats, and use of children for control. Across types of abuse, ethnic differences emerged regarding physical abuse and coercion. Differences across age groups were found regarding coercion, shame, and use of children as tools. Higher income was correlated with increased threats, stalking, sexual, physical, and financial abuses. Preliminary patterns of same-sex relationship abuses were examined for bisexual and transgendered people.*

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The words *battering* and *domestic* and *family violence* conjure images of men beating women. However, same-sex relationship violence is receiving more documentation. A few research studies have examined violence in lesbian relationships; even fewer exist regarding those of gay men. Even with documentation, the antifamily violence movement largely ignores service provision to victims of same-sex relationship violence; conversely, the gay and lesbian community ignores the violence. Both of these phenomena result in a silence about gay/lesbian battering, much like that of heterosexual relationship violence of decades past.

The purpose of this study was to ascertain an estimated prevalence

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rate of same-sex relationship violence in southeast Texas for lesbians, gay men, and bisexual and transgendered people for both current and past relationships in an ethnically diverse sample. Due to the hidden nature of many gay men and lesbians, a true random sample is impossible. Studies of this population can utilize only those participants who self-identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered. Therefore, results should be interpreted cautiously, and may not be indicative of the entire gay/lesbian population.

## LESBIAN RELATIONSHIP VIOLENCE

Across different samples and methodologies, most of the studies have been surveys of well-educated white lesbian women and have found a wide range of reported frequencies of physical relationship violence. In increasing frequencies, these are Wood (1987), 8%; Loulan (1987), 17%; Brand and Kidd (1986), 25%; Lockhart *et al.* (1994), 31%; Lie *et al.* (1991), 45%; Waldner-Haugrud *et al.* (1997), 48%; Lie and Gentlewarrier (1991), 52%; and Bologna *et al.* (1987), 60%. The variability of these percentages may be due to the different operationalizations of physical violence and/or aggression across studies. (For a more complete description of this frequency research for lesbian couples, please refer to Renzetti [1997]).

Other studies surveyed lesbians about their perpetration of violence. When asked about their own violent behavior, a mostly white lesbian sample endorsed 12–68% of specific items (Fenoglio, 1987). Using the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS), Gardner (1988) indicated that 48% of the women surveyed had scores high enough to be considered violent. In one of the few studies that is ethnically diverse, Coleman (1990) found that 47% of couples surveyed exhibited violent behavior. Kelly and Warshafsky (1987) also found a 47% admitted perpetration rate for a mixed sample of lesbians and gay men. Because perpetrators may abuse several partners over a lifetime, this percentage may be measuring a different prevalence rate than that of other studies, which measure victimization rates.

Physical violence is just one type of abuse in relationships. Estimates of sexual violence in lesbian relationships vary. Loulan (1987) found that 5% of lesbians surveyed had been forced sexually by their partners. A 7% frequency of date rape was reported by Brand and Kidd (1986). In committed relationships, Lie *et al.* (1991) indicated that 9% of lesbians were experiencing sexual violence in current relationships, and 57% had experienced some form of sexual abuse in the past. Their definition of sexual abuse was very broad, and may not yield a true picture of the phenomenon. Midrange frequencies were reported by Bologna *et al.* (1987), 26%; Waterman *et al.* (1989), 31%; and Waldner-Haugrud and Gratch (1997), 50%.