



Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, Transgendered (LGBT) Populations and Sexual Assault

The term “sexual violence” includes rape, incest, child sexual assault, ritual abuse, stranger rape, date/acquaintance rape, partner/marital rape, sexual harassment, exposure, and voyeurism. Sexual assault also includes situations in which a person may be drunk, high, unconscious, or has a disability and cannot consent to sexual activity. Sexual assaults are predominantly acts of violence or coercion, in which sex is used as a weapon. Assaults are motivated primarily out of anger and/or a need to feel powerful by controlling, abusing, dominating, or humiliating the victim. Victims/survivors of sexual violence are forced, coerced and/or manipulated to participate in unwanted sexual activity. Victims/survivors do not cause their assaults and are not to blame. Offenders are fully responsible for their actions.

Sexual assault can happen to anyone regardless of their race, class, age, appearance, or sexual orientation. Lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgender people are subject to the same spectrum of sexual violence as the general population. In fact, according to many statistics, they are subject to more. Approximately ten percent of hate crimes against gay men and lesbians include sexual assault (Comstock, Violence Against Lesbians and Gay Men, 1991). This percentage may be higher, since it is sometimes difficult for lesbians to discern whether they were attacked because of being identified as a lesbian or as a woman. Sexual assault is not defined by the gender of the offender or the victim: anyone is capable of assaulting a person of any gender. Still, perpetrators are male in the vast majority of assaults in Wisconsin (Sexual Assaults in Wisconsin 1998, Wisconsin Office of Justice Assistance). In general, situations of sexual assault that involve LGBT people are very similar to those that heterosexuals experience. However, there are concerns and factors that are unique in the experiences of LGBT people who are victims/survivors of sexual assault.

Same-Sex Sexual Assault

- In a study of 162 gay men and 111 lesbians, 52% reported at least one incident of sexual coercion by same-sex partners. Gay men experienced 1.6 incidents per person; while lesbians experienced 1.2 incidents per person.¹
- Studies over the past two decades on lesbian sexual violence show a range from a low of 5% to a high of 57% of respondents claiming they had experienced attempted or completed sexual assault or rape by another woman, with most studies finding rates of over 30%.²
- Men living with male intimate partners experience more intimate partner violence than do men living with female intimate partners. 15% of men who lived with a man as a couple reported being raped/assaulted or stalked by a male cohabitant.³

Sexual Violence Against LGBT Individuals

- In a sample of 412 university students, 16.9% of the subjects reported that they were lesbian, gay, or bisexual; the remainder identified themselves as heterosexual. Of the lesbian, gay, and bi-sexual subjects 42.4% (30.6% female and 11.8% male) and 21.4% of the heterosexuals (17.8% female and 3.6% male) indicated they had been forced to have sex against their will.⁴
- A 1991 study of university students reported that of their sample of gay/bi-sexual students (including both gay men and lesbians) approximately 18% had been victims of rape, approximately 12% had been victims of attempted rape, and approximately 37% had been victims of sexual coercion.⁵
- There were 2,552 reported anti-gay incidents in 1998, of these 88 were sexual assaults/rapes.⁶

COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Is same sex assault motivated by homosexual attraction?

Heterosexual attraction and/or homosexual attraction are not the key issues when trying to understand what motivates offenders. Sexual assault is predominantly an act of violence, and is committed for similar reasons as other types of assault. Offenders may be acting out of the desire to control, humiliate or harm the victim. Commonly, victims are chosen for their perceived vulnerability to attack rather than how sexually appealing they are to the offender. If someone is a victim of same sex sexual violence, it does not necessarily mean they are LGBT.

Are LGBT people more likely to be perpetrators of sexual violence than heterosexuals?

No. As part of the oppression that LGBT people have faced for their sexual orientation and/or gender identification, their sexual activities have sometimes been criminalized. In some areas of the U.S. they still are. Legally speaking, this may put sexually active LGBT people in violation of the sex codes, but it does not make them perpetrators of sexual violence. Historically, society has been unwilling to recognize that sex offenders are often well respected community members rather than “deranged outsiders.” LGBT people are often identified as outsiders, and sexual deviates, and are scapegoated as sex offenders. However, in the vast majority of sexual assaults, offenders are heterosexual men. (Anti-Violence Project, male sexual assault statistics, 1992.) Another common myth about LGBT people is that they are child molesters. This is also untrue; in fact a groundbreaking study of sexual-abuse offenders concluded that a heterosexual adult is more likely to be a threat to children than a homosexual adult is. (Groth A.N., *Men Who Rape*, Plenum Press, NY, 1979.)

How and why are LGBT people more likely to be victims/survivors of sexual assault?

Homophobia in our culture puts LGBT people at greater risk for sexual assault. It is common for perpetrators to use sexual violence as a way to punish and humiliate someone for being LGBT, and/or for sexual assault to be one type of violence that occurs during an anti-LGBT battering. A common example of this, is when individuals who think they can “change” a person’s sexual orientation specifically target lesbians and bi-sexual women for sexual assault.

Do LGBT people face the same danger from acquaintance, date and partner rape as heterosexuals?

Yes. According to research, LGBT people are at approximately the same risk as heterosexuals of being sexually assaulted by someone they know:

- 52% of participants in a study of sexual coercion in gay/lesbian relationships reported at least one incident of sexual assault/coercion.
- Gay men reported 1.6 incidents on average; in comparison the 1.2 incidents reported by lesbians. (Waldner-Haugrud, Lisa K., & Vaden Gratch, Linda. (1997). *Sexual Coercion in Gay/Lesbian Relationships: Descriptives and Gender Differences*. Violence and Victims, 12 (1), 87-98.)
- LGBT people are more likely to be victims of domestic violence (including sexual assault) than of anti-LGBT violence. (National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, 1992.)

Unfortunately, LGBT people may also face further victimization when dealing with sexual violence perpetrated by an acquaintance, date, or partner. Often a perpetrator will use homophobia/heterosexism as a weapon to threaten victims including:

- No help is available because the police and justice system are homophobic.
- The victim/survivor will not be believed because LGBT people do not sexually assault.
- LGBT people deserve to be sexually assaulted for being LGBT.
- The victim/survivor is ‘outed’ or threatened with being outed to friends, family, employer, police, church, or others if the victim/survivor reports a sexual assault experience.

Victims/survivors may:

- Fear being forced to 'come out' if they approach their family, the courts, or the police to report their sexual assault.
- Feel that they are betraying an LGBT community, which is already under attack, by 'accusing' another LGBT person of sexual assault.
- Feel that they are exposing their assailant to a homophobic criminal justice system if they pursue a legal solution.
- Feel that they have nowhere to turn for help and fear hostile responses from the police, courts, service providers, and therapists, because of homophobia and anti-LGBT bias.

What resources are available for LGBT people who have been victims of sexual violence?

LGBT victims/survivors of sexual assault can contact their local sexual assault programs for services. WCASA can also help victim/survivors find the services nearest them, and provide resources on LGBT populations and sexual assault. However, there are also some resources available that specialize in LGBT issues that may be helpful:

Outreach, Inc.- (608) 255-4297. This LGBT community center may be helpful for referrals to resources or support. Provides information about LGBT resources in Dane County. Provides peer counseling. Not a crisis line.

The UW-Madison Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Campus Center- (608) 265-3344. This LGBT student organization can provide referrals to victims of violence. Provides LGBT related resources for students. Not a crisis line.

National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs- <http://www.avp.org>, (212) 714-1141 (24-hour crisis line). This New York City-based coalition serves LGBT populations exclusively. It provides a crisis line specifically for LGBT victims of violence and connects them to the closest chapter of the Anti-Violence Programs.

1. Waldner-Haugrud, Lisa K. and Vaden Gratch, Linda, 1997. "Sexual Coercion in Gay/Lesbian Relationships: Descriptives and Gender Differences." *Violence and Victims* 12(1): 87-98.

2. Brand, P.A. & Kidd, A.H. 1986. Frequency of Physical Aggression in Heterosexual and Female Homosexual Dyads. *Psychological Reports*, 59, 1307-1313.

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3. Salzman, L., Fanslow, J., McManon P., Shelly, G., 1999. National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. "Intimate Partner Violence Surveillance: Uniform Definitions and Recommended Data Elements." National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

4. Duncan, David F., 1990. "Prevalence of Sexual Assault Victimization Among Heterosexual and Gay/Lesbian University Students." *Psychological Reports* 66: 65-66.

5. Baier, John L., Rosenzweig, Marianne G., and Whipple, Edward G., 1991. "Patterns of Sexual Behavior, Coercion, and Victimization of University Students." *Journal of College Student Development* 32: 310-322.

6. New York City Gay and Lesbian Anti-Violence Project. 1999. *Anti-Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, and Transgender Violence in 1998*. New York, NY: National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs.

This information sheet was compiled in 2003 by the Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault (WCASA). WCASA is a membership organization of sexual assault centers, other organizations, and individuals throughout Wisconsin working to end sexual violence. For information sheets on other topics or to become a member contact WCASA, 600 Williamson St., Suite N-2, Madison, WI 53703, (608)257-1516, www.wcasa.org. For more information about sexual assault or to receive support with a sexual assault experience, contact your local sexual assault program. This sheet may be reproduced in its original format only.