

Intimate Partner Violence in Canadian LGB communities

After nearly three decades of scholarship, it is no longer contestable that intimate partner violence (IPV) is found within gay, lesbian, and bisexual (LGB) communities just as it is in heterosexual partnerships. However, much of the research has been devoted to comparing heterosexual to same-sex couples and we know much less about the specific experience of bisexual-identified people.

In this research we aimed to address these gaps by providing a look at within-group variations of LGB-identified individuals and their experiences of IPV. More specifically, we examined the following questions:

- The prevalence and severity of IPV (emotional/financial and physical/ sexual) experienced by LGB individuals
- Group differences in reported rates of IPV within this population based on (a) socio-demographic factors, (b) past experiences with discrimination based on sexual orientation, (c) sexual orientation, and (d) gender.
- Differences in severity of violence experienced based on (a) sexual orientation and (b) gender.

The analysis is based on a subsample of gay, lesbian, or bisexual respondents from the 2004 General Social Survey (GSS) who reported a current or former spouse or common-law partner.

Results

The study found that just over one in three LGB persons experienced IPV. More specifically, approximately 20 percent experienced physical or sexual victimization and roughly one in three experienced emotional or financial abuse.



About this Research Highlight

This *Research Highlight* draws on Betty Jo Barrett and Melissa St. Pierre (2013), "Intimate Partner Violence Reported by Lesbian-, Gay-, and Bisexual-Identified Individuals Living in Canada: An Exploration of Within-Group Variations," *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services*, 25:1. It was prepared by Sarah Fortin, Knowledge Transfer Coordinator at the Canadian Research Data Centre Network (CRDCN).

The CRDCN is a research infrastructure created to improve researchers' access to Statistics Canada detailed microdata files, to expand the pool of skilled quantitative researchers and to improve communication between social scientists and research users.

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- Individuals who experienced IPV were significantly younger than those who did not.
- Individuals who currently did not have a partner in their household were significantly more likely to have experienced IPV than individuals who currently had a partner.
- A significantly higher proportion of LGB persons with a high school diploma or less had experienced IPV compared to LGB persons with higher levels of education.
- Persons with a physical or mental limitation were also significantly more likely to have experienced IPV than persons without such limitations.
- A significantly higher proportion of bisexual individuals, bisexual females in particular, experienced any form of IPV compared to gay or lesbian individuals reporting such violence. Bisexual individuals also reported significantly more instances of violence. This study did not allow to assess whether IPV reported by bisexual individuals happened in the context of same-sex or opposite-sex couplings.
- Past experiences with discrimination based on sexual orientation was not found to be associated with experiencing IPV.

Implications

- This study's findings suggest that bisexual identity carries a unique social positioning and that bisexual-identified individuals experience vulnerabilities for IPV that are unique from that of heterosexual and gay- and lesbian-identified individuals.
- Further research is needed to sort out whether this vulnerability reflects traditional male-female relationships - if IPV reported by bisexual individuals disproportionately occurs in opposite-sex partnerships – or if it reflects the biphobia present in both heterosexual and gay and lesbian communities marginalizing bisexuals within both.
- The fact that individuals experiencing multiple sources of stress and forms of discrimination (based on socioeconomic status or due to physical or mental limitations for instance) are at a heightened risk of experiencing IPV suggests that the dynamics of power, privilege, and control between privileged and less privileged individuals which have long been theorized to contribute to IPV among heterosexuals is also at play within LGB communities. In other words, unequal access to power and privilege based on membership in categories other than sexual orientation may render some LGB persons more vulnerable to violence at the hands of their partners.
- In order to further investigate this question, four elements should be considered in future data collection: oversample LGB individuals to increase the number of respondents; include individuals involved in non-traditional relationships; develop measures of IPV that reflect the abuses that may be specific to LGB relationships; and inquire about the gender of the perpetrators.