

Sexual Violence is found to be much more prevalent in the LGBTQ community. While this suggests that support services are necessary, victims often feel marginalized and hesitate to seek help.

Research finds that members of the LGBTQ community endure high rates of sexual violence, but often fail to seek support services because of discriminative, socially constructed perceptions often held by service providers. Traditionally, researchers do not focus on the sexual orientation when conducting research on victims, and so little is known on how best to support members of the LGBTQ community who are victims of sexual violence.

Some studies (e.g. Logan, Cole, & Shannon, 2007) found a high prevalence of sexual violence in the U.S. However, researchers often use surveys that assume heterosexuality among the participants, making it difficult to identify sexual violence rates for members of the LGBTQ community. When victims of sexual violence do identify as members of the LGBTQ community, they often refrain from seeking help as they fear discrimination and judgement by service providers.

Of the few studies that examined sexual violence within the LGBTQ community, Balsam et al (2005) found that more than 10% of gay or bisexual men have experienced rape in adulthood (compared to only 2% of heterosexual men); and more than twice as many lesbian (16%) and bisexual women (17%) report being raped in adulthood, compared to heterosexual women (8%). These findings display a strong need for attention, prevention, and intervention regarding sexual violence within the LGBTQ community.

The current 'Engaging Change' study situated in Oregon, United States, involved conducting surveys and focus groups. Participants answered questions to reveal the level of knowledge and attitudes in regard to sexual violence among LGBTQ community members. By inviting participants of all sexual orientations, the results from this study highlight the need to investigate best ways to assist victims of sexual

violence in the LGBTQ community. Todahl et al found that of 130 participants, 72% strongly agreed that sexual violence is a problem in the LGBTQ community, while 87% agreed that LGBTQ specific prevention methods of sexual violence are needed. Many participants, even those identifying in the LGBTQ community, said they were unfamiliar with current prevention strategies of sexual violence used within the LGBTQ community. Almost half of the participants (42%) believed that open discussion about sexual violence in the LGBTQ community was not present. Most importantly, more than half of the participants (60%) strongly disagreed that the community is resourced well enough to deal with LGBTQ sexual violence. Researchers (e.g. Bieschke, Perez, & DeBord, 2007) have attributed these issues to social oppression, and negative perceptions of the LGBTQ community. LGBTQ members often feel targeted and harassed by some members of society. Many report being physically pelted with objects, or being verbally harassed by others, which reduces their trust and sense of safety within society. These discriminative actions can increase when members identify as victims of sexual violence. Sometimes while seeking service, LGBTQ members report being blamed for their victimization by some service providers, which further victimizes them. These factors, resulting from marginalization and discrimination, renders poor service support systems

that address the risk of multiple challenges.

Conclusion: Members of the LGBTQ community report experiencing higher rates of sexual violence than heterosexual adults. These higher rates of victimization are attributed to biases held by many within society. These biases not only contribute to the victimization but they also contribute to the problematic service responses because of "discriminatory, accusatory, and insulting responses when services are sought and received" (p. 954). The researchers reveal how social ideologies and perceptions of the LGBTQ community impact the level of support provided to sexual violence victims; and highlights the need for probation and correctional staff to investigate if people have experienced this type of violence and ensure victim services are provided. Service providers may need a wider menu of support strategies to better help their clients.

Reference: Todahl, J. L., Linville, D., Bustin, A., Wheeler, J., & Gau, J. (2009). Sexual assault support services and community systems: Understanding critical issues and needs in the LGBTQ community. *Violence against Women*, 15(8), 952-976.

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