

DATING VIOLENCE AND HIV/AIDS AMONG LGBTQ YOUTH

Youth who experience physical and sexual dating violence are three times more likely than youth who are not abused to be diagnosed with HIV or another STD.ⁱ Their rates go up because youth who fear or suffer dating and domestic violence are less likely to suggest condom use, seek out HIV/AIDS information, be tested, disclose HIV status, or obtain services.ⁱⁱ

For the majority of LGBTQ teens, growing up LGBTQ means bullying at school by peers and rejection by family. Many LGBTQ teens come to believe the negative things they hear about themselves and may think they deserve bad and even violent treatment. As a result, LGBTQ teens are more likely than heterosexual peers to engage in high-risk behaviors for HIV infection like having unprotected sex, having more sex partners and using injection drugs.ⁱⁱⁱ

On top of these risks, one in two LGBTQ youth will be abused by an intimate partner^{iv} compared to one in three youth overall. Doing the math, we see that LGBTQ teens' higher probability of HIV infection is multiplied by their higher probability of falling into an abusive relationship.

What the numbers say:

- There are 40,000 new HIV infections in the United States every year. Young people under age 25 account for at least 20,000 of these new infections. Youth between the ages of 13 and 20 make up half of that 20,000.^v
- Young lesbians often think they have no HIV infection risk. But over two-thirds of lesbians have a history of sex with men. Nearly 50% have a history of sexual abuse,^{vi} and 30% of lesbians report sexual abuse before age 15.^{vii}
- Seven percent of young bisexual and gay men ages 15 to 22 have HIV. Three percent of all HIV infections are found in bisexual and lesbian women.^{viii}

On a daily basis I was humiliated, disempowered, verbally abused – for three years. I left the relationship believing everything he said. I was a worthless person that was nothing without him. Safe sex wasn't an option.

– Devon, HIV+, Chicago

Complicated Aftermath:

No matter which part of the equation came first, dating violence and HIV tangle LGBTQ youth in a thick net of obstacles to getting help. Victims of dating violence who are HIV+ may fear being “outed” as positive by their abusers. They may feel guilty about reporting a partner who is also HIV+ to the police. They may feel that no one else will love them because they are “damaged goods” and that no one else will take care for them if they get sick. These fears are especially strong among youth who have strained or no relationships with their parents. As these youth get older, the victim and the abuser may depend on each others' joint income to pay for medication, literally making the victim unable to survive without the abuser.^{ix}

If you are an LGBTQ teen and are concerned about how being in an abusive relationship increases your risk of exposure to HIV, please contact Break the Cycle for more information.

**You have the right to a safe and healthy relationship..
free from violence and free from fear.**

ⁱ Decker, Silverman & Raj. 2005.

ⁱⁱ "What Works in HIV Prevention for Youth," AIDS Action, 2001. < http://www.aidsaction.org/legislation/pdf/ww4youth_final.pdf>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Gómez CA, Garcia DR, Kegebein VJ, et al. Sexual identity versus sexual behavior: implications for HIV prevention strategies for women who have sex with women. *Women's Health: Research on Gender, Behavior and Policy*. 1996; 2: 91-109.

^{iv} Solorio, R., Swendemann D., & Rotheram-Borus, M.J. (2003). Risk Among young gay and bisexual men living with HIV. *AIDS Education and Prevention*, 15(supplement A), 80-89.

^v "What Works in HIV Prevention for Youth." AIDS Action. 2001. < http://www.aidsaction.org/legislation/pdf/ww4youth_final.pdf>.

^{vi} Nurses in AIDS Care, "Vulnerable Populations: HIV and Women," *Medscape* 2003. <http://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/466017_2>

^{vii} Id.

^{viii} "Fact Sheet: HIV/AIDS among Women Who Have Sex With Women." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. June 2006.

<<http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/topics/women/resources/factsheets/wsw.htm>>.

^{ix} See Janice Ristock PhD and Norma Timbang. Relationship Violence in Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender/Queer [LGBTQ] Communities. Violence Against Women Online Resources. July 2005. <http://www.mincava.umn.edu/documents/lgbtqviolence/lgbtqviolence.html#id2628354>