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Study Shows Urban Gay Men as Likely to Be Battered as Heterosexual Women; HIV Diagnosis Often Triggers Violence

WASHINGTON, Jan. 28 [AScribe Newswire] – A new study shows that one in five urban gay men is battered by his partner, showing that homosexual men are just as likely as heterosexual women to be victims of domestic violence. This study, the first of its kind, appears in the December issue of American Journal of Public Health.

“While decades of research has yielded valuable information about violence among heterosexual partners, until now very little has been known about violence among same-sex partners,” said Michael Relf, assistant professor at Georgetown University’s School of Nursing and Health Studies and a lead author of the study. “This study shatters the myth that men are able to protect themselves from violence perpetuated by other men. We now know that domestic violence is an equal opportunity epidemic.”

The study also showed that HIV-positive men, as well as men 40 years or younger, were more likely to be abused.

“Perhaps the most startling and disturbing finding was that being HIV-positive increases the likelihood of being physically battered,” said Relf. “Many men in the study were subjected to physical and emotional violence after telling their partners they had been diagnosed with HIV. Tragically, men who rely on abusive partners for financial support often are forced to make the impossible choice between violence and homelessness.”

Relf and his colleagues surveyed 2,881 gay men in Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York and Chicago. [This sample included not only men who identified themselves as gay, but also bisexual men and men who identified themselves as heterosexual but who nevertheless have sex with other men.] Participants underwent a comprehensive phone interview of an average duration of 75 minutes, a length of time which is “virtually unheard of in telephone-based, scientific studies,” according to Relf.

Relf points out that a number of factors contribute to a lack of support system for gay men who are physically abused including a lack of safe places for abused men other than homeless shelters; police forces that are ill-equipped to handle male-male domestic violence complaints; and a medical community not trained to ask the questions that would unveil a path of violence.

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Little scientific study has been done in the past on the issue of gay domestic violence. In seven previous studies, methodology has been limited by using only people who identify themselves as gay, using very small samples, and interviewing people from gay enclaves where gay-identified men are more likely to live and socialize. Relf and his colleagues utilized sophisticated sampling methods including census data, mailing lists, and zip code overlays to find a much more diverse and statistically meaningful study group.

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