

Rate at Which Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Citizens Are Victims of Physical Assaults Due to Their Sexual Orientation

James R. Jones, PhD
Lincoln University

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the rate at which lesbian, gay, and bisexual United States citizens are victims of physical assaults due to their sexual orientation. The research consisted of 198 participants. Closed ended surveys were provided to the participants. The question for this study was "How many times have you been physically assaulted because of your sexual orientation". An ordinal regression was conducted to determine the extent to which physical assaults were related to the outcome measured.

Introduction

On Friday June 26, 2015 the United States Supreme Court overturned the ban on same sex marriages there by making it legal for same sex couples to wed. Despite the recent victory for the LGBT community, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender citizens continue to experience challenges in their daily life due to a significant number of citizens not accepting their lifestyle. Many of the challenges include discrimination, and physical assaults. Prior to the 5-4 Supreme Court ruling on same sex marriage, and in response to assaults on certain groups of people, the United States created laws to protect people against crimes motivated, in whole or in part, by the offender's bias against a race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, or ethnicity/national origin (Department of Justice, 2004). While the aforementioned intentions were good, the laws have not worked as well as anticipated.

Presently, members of the LGBT community continue to be assaulted due to their sexual orientation. Like other crimes, hate crimes are recorded via the Uniform Crime Report (UCR). The UCR is the largest database, compiled by the FBI, of crimes reported and arrests made each year throughout the United States (Siegel, 2015). However, the UCR is only as accurate as what is reported. In many assaults when the victim is lesbian, bisexual, gay, or transgender, the act is often not reported. As a result of the aforementioned, law enforcement is not aware of the assault, and it is never recorded on the Uniform Crime Report. This makes it difficult to address the problem of targeted assaults on members of the LGBT community. In addition, when attacks are recorded on the UCR, they are not categorized into victim demographics. The UCR does not take into account the rate at which different races, genders, and age groups are victims of violent assaults due to their sexual orientation. Also, the UCR does not identify or record the difference in victimization rates between someone that is gay versus someone that is bisexual. It is important to understand how often individuals of the LGBT community are being assaulted. The purpose of this research is to examine the rate at which members of the LGBT community are assaulted, and to identify if there are differences between the rates of victimization as it relates to age, race, gender, and sexual orientation. The results from this study will assist in identifying information that is not recorded on the Uniform Crime Report and assist law enforcement personnel with addressing the problems of targeted attacks on members of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender community.

Literature Review

Some lesbian, gay, and bisexual citizens of the United States have been forced to keep their sexual orientation a secret due to the fear of being physically assaulted. In instances when their sexual orientation has been discovered and an attack has occurred as a result, many do not notified law enforcement. Failure to inform law enforcement of targeted attacks results in inaccurate recording of hate crimes on the Uniform Crime Report. There have been many studies that examined the difference between the rate of victimization of heterosexual citizens and citizens that are members of the LGBT community.

Previous LGBT Victimization Studies

Balsam and Rothblum (2005) conducted a study on victimization over a life span. They compared victimization of lesbian, gay bisexual, and heterosexual siblings. The purpose of the research was to examine if there was a difference in the rate of victimization over the lifespan of the aforementioned sexual orientations. The sample consisted of the study consisted of 557 gay/lesbian, 163 bisexual, and 525 heterosexual adults (Balsam & Rothblum, 2005). The research suggests sexual orientation was a significant predictor of most of the victimization variables (Balsam & Rothblum, 2005). The research also contends that compared with heterosexual participants, LGB participants reported more childhood psychological and physical abuse by parents or caretakers, more childhood sexual abuse, more partners psychological and physical victimization in adulthood, and more sexual assault experiences in adulthood (Balsam & Rothblum, 2005). Unlike Balsam and Rothblum, Rothman, Exner, and Baughman (2011) examined the prevalence of sexual assault victimization among gay or bisexual (GB) men, and lesbian or bisexual (LB) women, in the United States. Their research included a larger than normal sample size. There were 139,635 participants in this study. The results of the study suggests lesbian or bisexual women were more likely to report childhood sexual assault, adult sexual assault, lifetime sexual assault victimization, and intimate partner sexual assault victimization than gay or bisexual men, whereas gay or bisexual men were more likely to report hate crime-related sexual assault than lesbian or bisexual women (Rothman, et. al., 2011). This study was unique because of the extremely large sample size, as well as its focus on sexual assaults on members of the LGBT community. Much of the current literature concentrates on physical assaults due to sexual orientation.

While the majority of studies on victimization due to sexual orientation focus on civilians, Burks (2011) research concentrates on the rate of victimization on members of the LGBT community that are enlisted in the military. One of the major challenges in this study was the under reporting of any type of assault due to sexual orientation. Among samples of LGB individuals, some who experienced sexual victimization also experienced negative consequences associated with reporting the incidents, such as being “outed,” as well as negative reactions by the individual’s social network (Todahl et al., 2009). It was for this reason that obtaining accurate data was difficult and in some instances impossible. Such experiences not only contribute to fears of reporting their victimization to law enforcement but may also contribute to the decision to not participate in research (Otis, 2007). Due to the lack of compliance by participants to provide data that was applicable for the study; the researcher was only able to obtain minimal results. Burks (2011) found that in general, incidents of sexual assault and harassment in the military are reported by women at rates disproportionate to those for men. A significant amount of resistance from participants in the study can be directly attributed to the Don’t Ask Don’t Tell policy created by the George W. Bush administration.

Many studies conducted on victimization due to sexual orientation examined adults. However, D’Augelli (2003) studied victimization experiences of lesbian and gay youth ages 14 to 21. The purpose of the study was to analyze developmental challenges and victimization experiences of female youth. The results of the research found that half of the participants experienced repetitive verbal abuse, 12% reported several threats, and 7% had been assaulted multiple times (D’Augelli, 2003). The study also revealed that youth who had self-identified as lesbian or bisexual or had told others of their sexual orientation reported more lifetime sexual orientation victimization (D’Augelli, 2003). This study provides clear insight on the victimization of youth that identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. This research assisted in bridging the gap between what was discovered in adult research and what was unknown as it related to juveniles who are members of the LGBT community. However, due to the length of time since the research was conducted, generalizing the results to current youth may be challenging.

Summary

Lesbian, gay, and bisexual citizens have often been the target of violent assaults in the United States due to their sexual orientations. Many studies have been conducted to examine if there is a correlation between certain variables and physical assault. However, much of the research does not examine the rate at which members of the LGBT community are assaulted, and fail to identify if there are differences between the rates of victimization as it relates to age, race, gender, and sexual orientation.

Methodology

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this research is to examine the rate at which members of the LBGT community are assaulted, and to identify if there are differences between the rates of victimization as it relates to age, race, gender, and sexual orientation. While many studies in the past have analyzed the difference between the rate of victimization of heterosexual citizens, and members of the LBGT community, much of the research leaves a gap between comparative victimization rates among age, race, gender, and sexual orientation. This study will bridge the gap in the literature and contribute to the current body of knowledge; providing criminal justice professionals, and policy makers the ability to address the problems of targeted attacks on members of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender community.

Target Population and Participant Selection

The target population of this study consisted of American citizens that were 18 years of age or older and identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. From this population, 198 participants made up the sample size for this research. All races and genders were eligible to participate.

Sampling Procedure

Snow ball sampling was used for this study. This sampling technique was adopted because of the difficulty obtaining trust from members of the LBGT community. Due to past negative interactions between the aforementioned group and people that do not support their lifestyle, lesbian, gay, and bisexual citizens were not comfortable providing information on their experiences due to their sexual orientation. As a result, the only way to obtain participants for this research was through snowball sampling. Snowball sampling begins by identifying a single subject of small number of subjects and then asking the subject(s) to identify others like him or her who might be willing to participate in a study (Maxfield & Babbie, 2011).

Data Collection Procedures

Closed ended surveys were provided to the participants. Each survey was administered electronically and consisted of five closed ended questions. All of the responses of the participants were confidential. Information received from the survey was the participant's race (coded as 1 for White, and 2 for Non-white), age (coded as 1 for 18-24, 2 for 25-34, 3 for 35-44, and 4 for 45-54), gender (coded as 1 for male and 2 for female), sexual orientation (coded as 1 for gay, and 2 for bisexual), and number of assaults due to sexual orientation (coded as 1 for never, 2 for 1 time, 3 for 2 times, and 4 for 3 or more times).

Data Analysis

The question created for this study was "How many times have you been physically assaulted because of your sexual orientation". In the study the independent variables were race, age, gender, and sexual orientation. The dependent variable was rate of physical assault. An ordinal regression was conducted to determine the extent to which physical assaults were related to the outcome measured.

Results

Description of Sample

The final sample consisted of 198 participants. As shown in Table 1, the majority of the sample was female (62.1%) and White (67.7%). Due to the unequal distribution among racial categories, race was coded into White and non-White for the analysis. The largest percentage of participants was 18 to 24 years of age (40.4%). The majority of the sample did not identify as bisexual (identified as gay or lesbian) (62.6%) and reported never having been assaulted because of sexual orientation (60.1%).

Table 1: Frequencies and Percentages of Gender, Race, Age, Bisexual Orientation, and Assault Rate

	n	%
Gender		
Female	123	62.1
Male	75	37.9
Race		
White	134	67.7
Non-White	64	32.3
Age		
18 to 24	80	40.4
25 to 34	66	33.3
35 to 44	18	9.1
45 to 54	34	17.2
Do you identify yourself as bisexual?		
Yes	74	37.4
No	124	62.6
How many times have you been physically assaulted because of your sexual orientation?		
Never	119	60.1
1 time	14	7.1
2 times	22	11.1
3 times or more	43	21.7

Assault Rate

Although the overall model was not significant ($p = .181$), being bisexual significantly predicted assault rate. Age was also a significant predictor. In order to determine whether bisexual orientation significantly predicted assault rate, an ordinal regression was conducted on assault rate using bisexual orientation, gender, race, and age as dummy-coded predictors in the model (see Table 2). Because of the positively skewed distribution of assault rate, the complementary log-log link was used in the model (Agresti, 2002). Although the overall model was not significant, $\chi^2(6) = 8.86$, $p = .181$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .050$, bisexual orientation was a significant predictor in the model ($B = .532$, $p < .001$). Given all predictors in the model, the proportion of individuals identifying as bisexual who were more likely to be the victims of assault (at any rate of assault) was equal to the proportion of individuals identifying as non-bisexual raised to the $e^{0.532} = 1.702$ power. These results indicated that as likelihood of being assaulted increased for individuals identifying as non-bisexual, the chances of being assaulted increased at a greater rate for individuals identifying as bisexual. For example, if individuals identifying as non-bisexual were 50% likely to experience higher levels of assault, then individuals identifying as bisexual were 30.7% more likely than were individuals identifying as non-bisexual to experience higher levels of assault. Age was also a significant predictor in the model. Given all predictors in the model, as the likelihood of being assaulted increased for 18 to 24 year olds, the chances of being assaulted increased at a greater rate for 35 to 44 year olds' ($B = .947$, $p < .001$). For example, if 18 to 24 year olds were 50% likely to experience higher levels of assault, then 35 to 44 year olds were 16.7% more likely than were 18 to 24 year olds to experience higher levels of assault. Gender and race were not significant predictors in the model, $p_s > .05$.

Table 2: Summary of Ordinal Regression Predicting Assault Rate from Bisexual Orientation, Gender, Race and Age

Predictor	B	SE	Wald	95% CI		p
				LL	UL	
Bisexual ^a	.532	.26	4.36	.033	1.032	.037
Female ^b	-.074	.24	.10	-.543	.395	.758
White ^c	.297	.26	1.28	-.217	.811	.257
25 to 34 years ^d	.250	.29	.77	-.309	.808	.381
35 to 44 years ^d	.947	.38	6.23	.203	1.691	.013
45 years or older ^d	.363	.36	1.04	-.336	1.063	.309

Note. $\chi^2(6) = 8.86$, $p = .181$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .050$.

^aCompared to non-bisexual. ^bCompared to male. ^cCompared to non-White. ^dCompared to 18 to 24 years.

Discussions

While the research suggests the majority of Americans that identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual were never victims of physical assaults due to their sexual orientation (60.1%), there is still a cause for concern as the study recorded 39.9% that have been victims of a physical assault at least one time in their life due to their sexual orientation. For those that were assaulted due to being lesbian, gay, or bisexual, they were often victimized three or more times (21.7%). The study also indicates that bisexual citizens experience physical assaults at greater rates than gay citizens. Finally, the research also identified age as a predictor of physical assaults. Lesbians, gays, and bisexuals of both genders, ages 35 to 44 were at greater risk of being victims of a physical assault.

Recommendation for Future Research

The research identified at what rate members of the LBGT community are victims of physical assaults due to their sexual orientation. However, it did not examine physical appearance as a predictor of violence. The survey provided to the participants did not inquire about men and women whose appearance, presentation, and or mannerisms were gender non-conforming (K. Daly, personal communication, July 3, 2015). As a result, it was impossible to identify if a physical attack was based on a more visible issue of gender presentation and gender non-conformity (which is a largely publically accessible and visual apparent), as oppose to sexual orientation, which may be assumed by some attackers, but is less readily quantified by an attacker, and less readily confirmed by him or her as well (K. Daly, personal communication, July 3, 2015).

Conclusion

The United States recently legalized same sex marriage (June 26, 2015) for all of the states in America. The aforementioned action by the U.S. Supreme Court shows evidence of the country moving more towards equality. However, while the government is beginning to recognize and enforce equality for all groups of people, individual citizens are not as supportive. Despite the majority of members of the LBGT community not being victims of physical assaults due to their sexual orientation per the results of this study, the rates at which those that are victimized still warrants monitoring. Nearly 40% of those that identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual experience being physically assaulted due to their sexual orientation. While not the majority, the number is still alarming. It is important for United States law makers, and law enforcement officials to recognize the rate of assaults occurring due to sexual orientation, and construct methods to have them significantly decreased.

References

- Agresti, A. (2002). *Categorical data analysis* (2nd ed.). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- Balsam, K., Beauchaine, T., & Rothblum, E. (2005). Victimization Over the Life Span: A Comparison of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Heterosexual Siblings. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 73*(3), 477-487.
- Burks, D. (2011). Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Victimization in the Military, *American Psychologists, 66* (7), 604-613.
- D'Augelli, A. (2003). Lesbian and Bisexual Female Youths Aged 14 to 21: Developmental Challenges and Victimization Experiences, *Journal of Lesbian Studies, 7*(4), 9-29. doi: 10.1300/J155v07n04_02
- Gold, S. D., Marx, B. P., & Lexington, J. M. (2007). Gay Male Sexual Assault Survivors: The Relations among Internalized Homophobia, Experiential Avoidance, and Psychological Symptom Severity. *Behavior Research and Therapy, 45*, 549-562. doi:10.1016/j.brat.2006.05.006
- Herek, G. M., Gillis, J. R., & Cogan, J. C. (1999). Psychological Sequelae of Hate Crime Victimization Among Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Adults. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 67*, 945-951. doi:10.1037/0022-006X.67.6.94
- Huebner, D. M., Rebhook, G. M., & Kegeles, S. M. (2004). Experiences of Harassment, Discrimination, and Physical Violence among Young Gay and Bisexual Men. *American Journal of Public Health, 94*, 1200-1203. doi:10.2105/AJPH.94.7.1200
- Pilkington, N., & D'Augelli, A. (1995). Victimization of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Youth in Community Settings. *Journal of Community Psychology, 23* (1), 34-56.
- Street, A. E., Gradus, J. L., Stafford, J., & Kelly, K. (2007). Gender Differences in Experiences of Sexual Harassment: Data From A Male Dominated Environment. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 75*, 464-474. doi:10.1037/0022-006X.75.3.46
- United States Department of Justice. (2004). Retrieved from <http://www.justice.gov/>.
- Maxfield, M., & Babbie, E. (2011). *Research methods for Criminal justice and Criminology*. Wadsworth. Belmont, CA.
- Morris, J. F., Waldo, C. R., & Rothblum, E. D. (2001). A Model of Predictors and Outcomes of Outness among Lesbian and Bisexual Women. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 71*, 61-71.
- National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs. (2010). *Hate violence against the LGBTQ communities in the U.S. in 2009*. New York, NY: Author
- Otis, M.D. (2007). Perceptions of Victimization Risk and Fear of Crime among Lesbians and Gay Men. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 22*, 198-217, doi: 10.1177/0886260506295346
- Parrott, D. J., Adams, H. E., & Zeichner, A. (2002). Homophobia: Personality and Attitudinal Correlates. *Personality and Individual Differences, 32*, 1269-1278. doi:10.1016/S0191-8869(01)00117-9
- Parrott, D. J., & Zeichner, A. (2005). Effects of Sexual Prejudice and Anger on Physical Aggression toward Gay and Heterosexual Men. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity, 6*, 3-17. doi:10.1037/1524-9220.6.1.3
- Parrott, D. J., & Peterson, J. L. (2008). What Motivates Hate Crimes Based on Sexual Orientation? Mediating Effects of Anger on Antigay Aggression. *Aggressive Behavior, 34*, 306-318. doi:10.1002/ab.20239
- Parrott, D. J. (2009). Aggression Toward Gay Men As Gender Role Enforcement: Effects of Male Role Norms, Sexual Prejudice, and Masculine Gender Role Stress. *Journal of Personality, 77*, doi: 10.1111/ j.1467-6494.2009.00577.x
- Research Methods with Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Populations*. (2003). doi: 10.4324/9780203057155
- Rothman, E. F., Exner, D., & Baughman, A. (2011). The prevalence of sexual assault against people who identify as Gay, Lesbian or Bisexual in the United States: A systematic review. *Trauma, Violence & Abuse, 12*(2), 55-66. doi:10.1177/1524838010390707
- Siegel, L. (2015). *Criminology: The Core*. Cengage Learning. Stamford, Ct.
- 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*, 952-976. doi:10.1177/1077801209335494