

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

NISVS 2010: Findings on Victimization by Sexual Orientation Report

The following questions and answers are intended to anticipate questions that might be raised by various constituencies – such as the media, funders, collaborators, etc. – and provide possible responses to those questions.

The questions are organized by the following categories:

- General Questions
- Background and Methods
- Interpreting NISVS Results
- Implications of the Findings
- Limitations of this Report
- NISVS & Other Surveys

● **General Questions**

Q. What is this report about?

This special report examines lifetime victimization of sexual violence, stalking and intimate partner violence by respondents' self-reported sexual orientation.

Q. What is the most important thing people need to know about this report?

This report is the first of its kind to report the national prevalence of intimate partner violence, sexual violence and stalking victimization by respondents' sexual orientation. Lesbians and gay men reported levels of violence victimization equal to or higher than those of heterosexuals. Violence affects everyone regardless of sexual orientation.

Q. Do you plan to issue a report like this every year? Why or why not?

We do not plan to release a report focused on sexual orientation every year. However, we anticipate releasing this information periodically.

Q. Why is this report important?

This the first report based on national data that examines the prevalence of lifetime victimization of sexual violence, stalking, and intimate partner violence among lesbian, gay, and bisexual women and men in the United States. This special report focuses on victimization by sexual orientation and highlights which groups are heavily affected by these types of violence. The findings in this report have implications for prevention, i.e., where to focus primary prevention efforts and services, and ensure that the lesbian, gay, and bisexual communities are included in these efforts.

Q. What are the key findings?

- Lesbians and gay men reported levels of violence victimization equal to or higher than those of heterosexuals. Violence affects everyone regardless of sexual orientation.
- Bisexual women had significantly higher lifetime prevalence of rape and sexual violence other than rape by any perpetrator (which includes an intimate partner, acquaintance, family

member, stranger, or person of authority), when compared to both lesbian and heterosexual women.

- Bisexual women had significantly higher lifetime prevalence of rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner when compared to both lesbian and heterosexual women.
- The vast majority of bisexual women who experienced rape reported having only male perpetrators.

Q. What should people do with this information?

We hope this information will shed light upon the types of interpersonal violence experienced by the LGB population and that it will help inform programs and policies aimed at raising awareness, services and protections for lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals.

Q. How does this compare to the report you released last year?

The 2010 NISVS Summary Report (Summary Report) presented the prevalence estimates for all women and men in the United States regardless of self-reported sexual orientation. The key findings in this special report are analyses based on sexual orientation. *The most appropriate comparisons are within the NISVS Sexual Orientation Report (Sexual Orientation Report) rather than across the two reports.* The Sexual Orientation Report provides prevalence estimates for distinct groups based on sexual orientation, while the 2010 NISVS summary report includes all of the subgroups combined. For example, in the Summary Report the prevalence estimates for women included lesbian, bisexual and heterosexual women.

Q. What is the CDC planning to do with this information?

CDC's Division of Violence Prevention encourages the inclusion of lesbian, gay, and bisexual community in violence prevention and outreach efforts, plans to broaden our partnership base to include LGB specific IPV/SV organizations, provide resources that expand the visibility of these data for lesbian, gay, and bisexual communities, engage in discussions, and engage in further research.

Q. Why is there no state level data?

Currently, we are only able to produce national level estimates by sexual orientation. Hopefully, at some point in the future we will be able to combine data across years in order to produce state level estimates of intimate partner violence, sexual violence, and stalking by sexual orientation.

Q. How was the survey funded?

The 2010 data collection was funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in cooperation with the National Institute of Justice and Department of Defense.

● Background and Methods

Q. What was the survey methodology of NISVS?

NISVS is a national random digit dial (RDD) telephone survey of the non-institutionalized English and Spanish-speaking U.S. population aged 18 or older. NISVS uses a dual-frame sampling strategy that includes both landline and cell phones. One in 4 adults in the U.S. now live in a cell phone only household. NISVS makes use of the latest U.S. telephone user and usage information. This dual-frame sampling strategy is used in other RDD telephone surveys conducted by the CDC and by other government agencies. The survey was conducted in all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

Q. What was the overall response rate to the survey of NISVS?

The overall weighted response rate for the 2010 data collection for NISVS ranged from 27.5% to 33.6%, while the weighted cooperation rate was 81.3%. In short, once contact was made and eligibility determined, the majority of respondents chose to participate in the survey.

Q. How was sexual orientation measured?

Sexual orientation was asked in the following way:

Do you consider yourself to be...

- Heterosexual or straight
- Gay or lesbian
- Bisexual

Q. How was sexual orientation of respondent determined?

Sexual orientation of respondent was self-reported at time of survey, which may or may not have been their sexual orientation at the time of the victimization.

Q. Why didn't you ask about whether a person is transgender and will future reports include transgender individuals?

We fully recognize the importance of understanding the victimization experience of transgender individuals. A random digit dial telephone survey may not be the most appropriate way in which to gather victimization experiences, especially victimization over a lifetime. In an effort to include transgender individuals in our national surveillance of interpersonal violence, we are following developments in the field, including current HHS efforts to develop standardized measures of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Q. What do you mean when you say bisexuality (how was it defined)?

For the purposes of this report, bisexuality, as well as other measures of sexual orientation, was self-defined by the participant. No definitions were given prior to answering the question on sexual orientation.

● Interpreting NISVS Results

Q. Why do the numbers in this report differ from the summary report (for example between heterosexual women raped in their lifetime)?

The 2010 NISVS Summary Report did not separate the lifetime prevalence of intimate partner violence, sexual violence, and stalking for women and men by respondents' sexual orientation. Instead, it presented the prevalence estimates for all women and men in the United States regardless of sexual orientation. Therefore, comparisons between the findings in this special report and the main summary report cannot be made.

Q. How meaningful are the differences reported when comparing lesbians, bisexual women and heterosexual and comparing gay men, bisexual men and heterosexual men?

One indicator of whether differences are meaningful is whether the differences were noted as being statistically significant. Statistical testing was conducted to compare differences by sexual orientation for the three groups of men and the three groups of women. Some differences in prevalence may seem large and not be significantly different. Other differences in prevalence may seem small yet be noted as

significantly different. These situations may be explained in more technical terms, but in general, could be due to aspects such as the magnitude of the difference in prevalence, the spread of the data, and the sample sizes of the two groups being compared.

Q. Why are rates so high among bisexual women?

The NISVS data helps us to better understand the experiences across groups in the prevalence and consequences of violence, but they do not provide information on the variety of factors that may cause victimization experience to be higher among some groups in comparison to others. There are a number of social factors such as attitudes about violence, poverty and disadvantages, sexism, homophobia/heterosexism and other forms of discrimination and social exclusion that contribute to risk for victimization. Other factors include prior exposures to violence in childhood and adolescence, and stressors resulting from limited access to community support, community resources, and service that may contribute to the differences presented in this special report.

Q. Does this represent the sexual orientation of the person when they experienced violence?

Respondents were asked to self-report their sexual orientation at the time of the survey and their sexual orientation may or may not have been the same at the time of victimization. Respondents were not explicitly asked about sexual orientation at time of victimization.

● Implications of the Findings

Q. What implications do these data have for prevention efforts and services?

First, in our prevention efforts, we need to consider the range of populations that are potentially affected by violence and ensure that messages, programs, and activities are responsive to different groups. Second, the scope of this report does not directly address service provision, but the levels of violence experienced by gay, lesbian, and bisexual men and women being equal to or in many cases higher than heterosexuals, suggest a particular need for services and support systems focusing on these groups. Also, it suggests the need for prevention and intervention resources serving this population as well as the heterosexual population.

Q. What implications do these data have for future research?

The use of consistent measures of sexual orientation and gender identity will help to consistently report these types of violence occurring within LGB communities and to LGB individuals. It is clear that more research is needed to better understand the health consequences of victimization for these groups. Additional research is also needed to better understand the risk and protective factors associated with victimization for these groups and the key differences depending on the type of victimization experienced. This information is critical to informing specific prevention programs and policies. We also need to develop and rigorously evaluate prevention strategies with these populations. More research is also needed to figure out how best to reach these populations for prevention efforts.

● Limitations of this Report

This report provides an examination of sexual violence, stalking victimization and intimate partner violence by self-reported sexual orientation using data collected in the 2010 NISVS survey. One goal of this report was to present findings in a way that is similar to the 2010 NISVS Summary Report with the

added dimension of respondents' sexual orientation at time of the survey. The inclusion of a question on sexual orientation in NISVS provides a unique opportunity to assess the prevalence of violence victimization among those who self-report being lesbian, gay, or bisexual. We acknowledge there are many important questions about violence experienced by LGB persons that are not addressed in this report. Despite the relatively large number of completed interviews in the 2010 data collection (n=16,507), we were unable to report the prevalence of violence for some specific LGB subgroups or to further explore certain patterns of victimization due to instability in the estimates. NISVS is an ongoing data collection system and many of these questions will be addressed as we pool data together across multiple years.

Q. Why weren't you able to address specific questions having to do with age when victimized or types of victimization in specific types of relationships?

We were unable to assess how these findings differ across various categories including age, and relationship type based on a single year of data. NISVS is an ongoing data collection system and as we are able to combine data across years, we will be able to better describe the interaction of age, sexual orientation and victimization.

Q. How do the findings vary across different demographic groups (Spanish speaking, geographic population, age etc.)?

Since 2010 was the first year of data collection, we were unable to produce reliable estimates for certain groups due to small sample sizes. In order to provide reliable estimates, we need to pool data across years.

Q. Why are there so many numbers not reported (for example, numbers for men)?

Estimates that were based on 20 or fewer cases were considered unreliable and therefore are not reported. In addition, any estimate that had a relative standard error greater than 30% was also deemed unreliable and not reported. This standard for determining the reliability of estimates is widely used by the CDC.

Q. Should people interpret these data with caution given the small percentage of people in the population who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual? Why or why not?

All samples have a degree of error or uncertainty associated with estimates. This special report includes estimates that are statistically reliable for lifetime victimization of intimate partner violence, sexual violence, and stalking among lesbian, gay, bisexual, and heterosexual men and women in the United States. CDC uses two criteria to determine the reliability of an estimate: a) the case count in the numerator (i.e., the number of people reporting a certain type of victimization); and b) the relative standard error (i.e., $RSE > 30\%$). For some types of violence, we were not able to produce reliable estimates based on these criteria; and, therefore, do not report them. For example, we were unable to produce reliable lifetime prevalence estimates of rape for gay or bisexual men. For these estimates and others, we will need to pool data across years in order to provide reliable annual estimates.

Q. Why doesn't this report focus on violence happening within the context of same sex couples?

The data presented in this report describe violence experienced by both same-sex and opposite-sex partners. While NISVS does capture the sex of the perpetrator and the relationship between respondent and perpetrator, this report focuses on lifetime victimization experiences of the respondent and not the violence that happens within the context of specific couples.

● NISVS & Other Surveys

Q. How does NISVS differ from other surveys?

Previous surveys have:

- Primarily been conducted within the context of crime or public safety. For example, the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) collects data on the frequency, characteristics and consequences of criminal victimization. If a person is hit or punched by a spouse or boyfriend or girlfriend, they may not consider those actions to be crimes or report them as such when asked. NISVS uses a public health context and victims of violence are more likely to disclose their victimization experiences when discussing their health. For example, respondents are first asked about various health conditions to establish a health context for the survey and then they are asked about victimization experiences using behaviorally-specific questions (e.g., has anyone ever use physical force to make you have vaginal sex).
- Covered only select populations – such school or college populations, or people living in particular states (e.g., state-based modules from BRFSS (Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System), CHIS (California Health Interview Survey)).
- Included a small number of questions. NISVS assesses 60 different violent behaviors.
- Different sampling strategies. For example, NVAWS (National Violence Against Women Survey), ICARIS-2 (Injury Control and Risk of Injury Survey-2), and BRFSS were all telephone surveys, but landline only. NISVS includes a cell phone sample because one in four adults in the United States now live in a cell phone only household.
- Asked different questions in order to assess the types of violence victimization experienced by respondents. For example the CHIS asked one question regarding physical violence victimization by an intimate partner. NISVS asks a series of behaviorally specific questions to assess intimate partner violence victimization.

NISVS is also unique because:

- NISVS is focused exclusively on violence; surveys that include modules or a few questions on violence and cover other topics in the same survey (e.g., BRFSS, ICARIS-2) typically yield lower prevalence estimates.
- NISVS uses behaviorally-specific questions and avoids the use of questions such as “have you ever been abused?” Or “have you ever been raped,” which are subject to interpretation by respondents.
- NISVS is designed to monitor the magnitude and impact of violent victimization and has been designed to be consistent with the way victims recall experiences of violence – all behaviors are linked to a specific perpetrator and all questions are asked within the context of that perpetrator. In this way, NISVS is able to measure the patterns and impacts of the violence.

Q. How is NISVS different from crime data on sexual violence, stalking, and intimate partner violence?

NISVS examines sexual violence, stalking, and intimate partner violence as public health issues, not as crime issues. To determine how these different contexts affect the reporting of sexual assault, the National Institute of Justice and the Bureau of Justice Statistics conducted the National College Women Sexual Victimization (NCWSV) Study in 2000, comparing the methodologies of the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) and the National Violence Against Women Survey (NVAWS), which used a health and behavior-based methodology similar to that used in NISVS. The NCWSV study demonstrated that health-based, behaviorally specific questions, like those asked in NISVS, substantially increase

disclosure of violence. People may not identify their experiences with sexual violence, stalking, and intimate partner violence as crime, especially when it involves someone they know or love.

Q. How do NISVS results compare to those from other surveys?

Given all the differences listed above as well as other methodological differences and differences in timing, it is not appropriate to compare NISVS results to those from other surveys.

Q. Why is there a difference in CDC's rape data and UCR and NCVS?

NISVS examines sexual violence as a public health issue, not as a crime issue. To determine how these different contexts affect the reporting of sexual assault, the National Institute of Justice and the Bureau of Justice Statistics conducted the National College Women Sexual Victimization Study in 2000, comparing the methodologies of NCVS and the NVAWS. The study demonstrated that behaviorally specific questions outside of the crime context, like those asked in NISVS, substantially increase reporting of violence. People may not identify their experiences with sexual violence as a crime, especially when it involves someone they know or love.

For more Frequently Asked Questions on NISVS or the 2010 NISVS Summary Report, please view the Communications Toolkit at www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/nisvs.