

Homophobic Violence and HIV Risk Behaviors Among Men Who Have Sex with Men (MSM) in Campinas, SP, Brazil

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Conclusion

- The prevalence of homophobic abuse experienced by Brazilian MSM population in this study is very high. Roughly five out of six MSM have suffered some kind of homophobic abuse in their lifetime, and 70% had experienced it within the last year alone.
- MSM who suffered homophobic violence were more likely to have experienced risky behaviors such as substance abuse, engaging in commercial sex and in unprotected anal intercourse, which in turn increased their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS.
- Younger MSM were more likely to suffer psychological violence; and MSM who disclosed their sexual orientation may have been more exposed to episodes of physical violence.
- The impact of psychological and physical oppression experienced by these MSM on engaging in sexual risk behaviors may be mediated by some mental health factors such as feelings of low self-esteem and substance abuse.

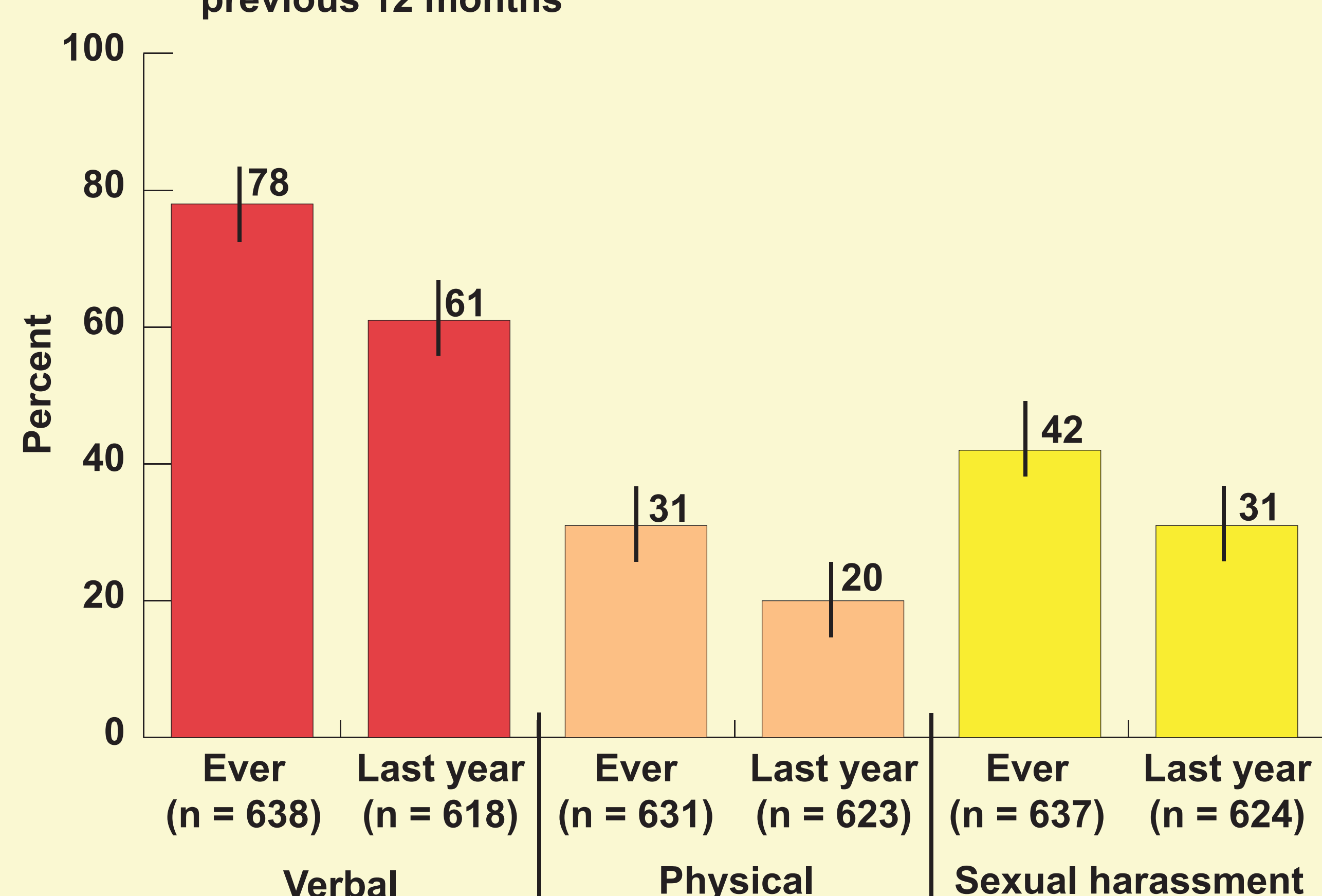
Recommendations

The astonishingly high levels of homophobia found in this study clearly support the need for strong and effective policies against discrimination and violence, and for HIV prevention intervention. It is necessary to address issues beyond individual behavioral change and to take into account the negative attitudes toward homosexuality still present in Brazilian society.

Key Findings

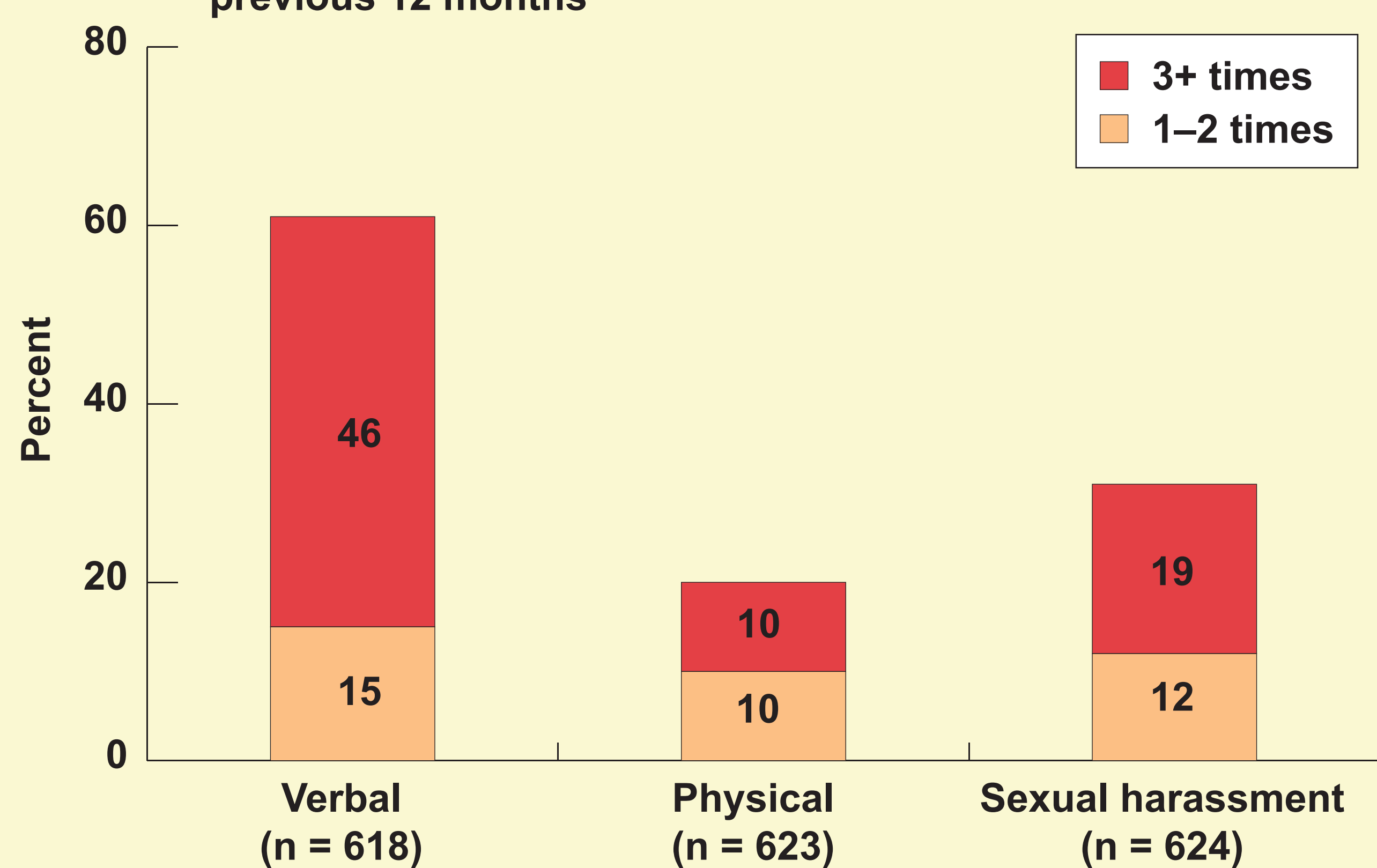
- 85% (80.4–88.4) experienced homophobic abuse in their lifetime.
- 70% (65.0–75.2) experienced homophobic abuse in the previous 12 months.
- 9% (6.1–12.6) ever experienced homophobic abuse from police and 6% (3.6–7.9) in the previous 12 months.
- 11% (5.7–17.1) of those who experienced physical abuse or sexual harassment had sought medical attention.
- 6% (3.1–9.3) of those who experienced any type of violence reported it to the police.
- Psychological abuse was the most common form of violence experienced in their lifetime and in the previous 12 months, followed by sexual harassment and physical abuse (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Prevalence of homophobic violence in lifetime and in the previous 12 months



- 46% reported having suffered psychological abuse three times or more in the previous 12 months, followed by 19% reporting sexual harassment, and 10% physical abuse with the same frequency (Figure 2).

Figure 2 Frequency of homophobic violence experience in the previous 12 months



Background

Recent research has highlighted the vulnerability of MSM to discrimination and homophobic violence and the association of these experiences with HIV risk behaviors. A cross-sectional survey was conducted to examine the prevalence of homophobic violence against MSM using respondent driven sampling (RDS) in Campinas, Brazil, a city located in southeastern Brazil.

Methodology

- A total of 658 MSM, at least 14 years of age, from the metropolitan area of Campinas, and willing to undergo a syphilis test were recruited into the study between October 2005 and October 2006 through RDS.
- Data collection consisted of an audio computer-assisted self-interview (ACASI) to obtain information on risk behaviors and experiences of anti-gay or transvestite abuse.
- Participants were asked if they had experienced any form of abuse perceived as homophobic both in their lifetime and during the previous 12 months.

Definitions:

Psychological or verbal abuse: Experiences of being cursed, threatened to be beaten, pursued in the street, or having personal objects broken because the participant was either gay or transvestite.

Physical abuse: Any experience of being hit, spat upon, slapped, kicked, or beaten because the participant was gay or transvestite.

Sexual harassment: Experience of being forced or threatened to have any sexual contact in a disrespectful manner with the participant or against the participant's will because the participant was either gay or transvestite.

Comparison of MSM who suffered homophobic violence and those who did not in the past twelve months (Table 1)

- MSM who experienced homophobic abuse were significantly more likely than those who had not suffered abuse to:
 - be younger (for verbal abuse)
 - have primary or secondary schooling (for physical abuse)
 - have low self-esteem (for verbal and physical abuse)
 - have disclosed their sexual orientation to mother (for physical abuse)
 - have engaged in sex work in the past 2 months (for verbal and physical abuse)
 - have had unprotected anal receptive intercourse in the past two months (for verbal and physical abuse)
 - have used illicit drug in the past 6 months (for physical abuse)
- MSM who did not experience homophobic abuse were significantly more likely than those who had suffered abuse to:
 - be older (for verbal abuse)
 - have higher schooling degree (for verbal and physical abuse)
 - live with a male partner (for verbal abuse)

Table 1 Comparison of some characteristics of MSM who suffered homophobic violence in the past 12 months with those who did not*

Characteristics	Verbal abuse				Physical abuse			
	Yes (n = 400)		No (n = 218)		Yes (n = 144)		No (n = 479)	
	Population-based estimates ^a		Population-based estimates ^a		Population-based estimates ^a		Population-based estimates ^a	
	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	%	95% CI
Age (years)								
14–24	65.7	57.6–72.6	43.2	33.8–53.1	59.0	46.5–72.4	55.4	47.3–61.8
25+	34.3	27.4–42.4	56.8	47.0–66.3	41.0	27.6–53.5	44.6	38.2–52.8
Schooling								
Primary/secondary	18.3	13.5–24.4	14.6	7.5–20.3	30.3	19.9–42.8	11.6	7.3–15.4
High school	60.8	54.2–66.9	41.3	34.1–51.4	58.9	46.5–69.7	52.3	46.8–59.5
College	20.9	15.3–26.4	44.2	34.5–53.5	10.8	5.8–17.2	36.0	29.3–42.5
Live with MSM partner	6.9	3.7–11.0	17.1	10.5–23.6	8.0	2.2–15.9	11.2	7.4–15.5
Self-esteem (Rosenberg's scale)								
Low	60.0	54.2–66.4	42.7	33.5–51.3	73.9	63.9–83.7	48.2	42.9–55.0
High	40.0	33.6–45.8	57.3	48.7–66.5	26.1	16.3–36.1	51.8	45.0–57.1
Disclosed sexual orientation to mother	51.6	44.8–58.8	48.9	38.3–58.1	73.8	61.1–84.1	45.4	39.7–52.5
Unprotected anal receptive intercourse ≤ 2 months	45.9	39.7–52.6	30.2	21.5–37.4	51.6	41.6–65.3	36.5	30.7–42.5
Engaged in sexual work ≤ 2 months	20.1	15.1–26.5	7.6	3.5–13.3	35.9	24.4–47.3	9.4	6.6–13.8
Used illicit drug ≤ 6 months	36.2	29.7–42.5	24.6	13.2–33.4	44.9	34.3–57.6	27.2	21.9–33.3

*Population-based estimates are based on analysis in RDSAT, which is adjusted for personal network sizes and recruitment patterns.

^aBold type data indicates significant difference between those who did and did not suffer homophobic violence in the past 12 months, evaluated by the not overlapping of the 95 percent confidence intervals.

This study could not have been implemented without the strong support from the local NGOs who fight for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transvestite, transsexual and transgender rights in the region, especially Grupo Identidade and E-jovem, as well as from Campinas HIV/AIDS Program, Municipal Laboratory of Campinas and the Municipal Reference Centre for Gays, Lesbians, Transsexuals, Transvestites and Bisexuals of Campinas. We also thank the CDC/GAP in providing technical support for implementing respondent driven-sampling.

For a copy of the report, visit the Population Council booth (#449), the Population Council website (www.popcouncil.org) or contact Adriana Pinho (adriapinho@yahoo.com.br).