

Rainbow Colored Rape Prevention: Sexual Violence Prevention Education for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Questioning Youth

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At our most recent quarterly meeting of Rape Prevention and Education Program subgrantees, we talked about statistics and evaluation. One point that has clearly stood out is the need for comparison studies to validate the results formulated during any one research study. Considering that there is very little research available on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) victim/survivors of sexual violence, it is a constant challenge to cite studies or other research to validate the need for these services. In fact, the Wingspan Anti-Violence Project is such an innovative program that we regularly provide service and victim statistics to national research studies, including the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Program (NCAVP), which publishes an annual report of statistics and data regarding violence within and against the LGBT community.

As the Program Coordinator of the Wingspan Anti-Violence Project (AVP), a program in Southern Arizona that provides services to (LGBT) survivors and prevention education in the community, to demonstrate the need for our program I consistently cite the following statistic (Duncan, 1997): “In a study of university students, 42.4% (30.6% female and 11.8% male) of lesbian, gay, and bisexual students said they have been sexually assaulted or raped, as compared to 21.4% of heterosexual subjects (17.8% female and 3.6% male).” This statistic has helped frame our work in prevention education to college-aged students and the LGBT community. However, this statistic is a study of 412 college age students and therefore in no way representative of all communities. There are also no comparison studies to use to evaluate accountability of Duncan’s study.

Due to the limited research on this topic, I can only speak from my experience as an advocate and community educator. One strong pattern that we have seen in our direct client services is that the majority of sexual violence cases we have had included the perpetrator making homophobic comments at the time of the assault. Research indicates that sexual violence is often used as a form of hate violence against the LGBT community. The National Coalition of Anti-Violence Projects (www.ncavp.org) cites that in their 2004 National Hate Violence Report, of 1,792 reported incidents of hate violence, 112 cases included sexual violence. This tells me that I can deduce that nearly 10% of hate violence against LGBT people is perpetrated as a sexual assault, or that one in every ten acts of hate violence against LGBT people (which includes verbal harassment, destruction of property, and a number of other specific crimes) includes sexual violence. Unfortunately, there are not statistics that tell us how many LGBT people were sexually assaulted in 2004 and what percentage of those assaults were perpetrated as hate violence. Again, very few people are tracking this information.

I have further noticed the virtual non-existence of sexual violence prevention programs that specifically target lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer (LGBTQ) youth.

Because of the Centers for Disease Control's innovative youth targeted Choose Respect Initiative, the Wingspan Anti-Violence Project has spent the past three weeks researching this topic. We have found one program in the Anti-Violence Project in Milwaukee that targets youth, which is still in its beginning stages. Although the Wingspan AVP is not currently funded to work with youth, this lack of information and programming has led me to a new personal passion. I would like to work to develop a sexual violence prevention program that specifically targets LGBTQ youth. But, there are hurdles to overcome.

First of all, it is currently illegal in the State of Arizona to teach about same-sex relationships in a positive light in public schools (A.R.S. 15-716). This makes it difficult for the Wingspan Anti-Violence Project to work with public schools and do rape prevention and education. Considering that sexual violence is often used as a form of hate violence, talking about homophobia is a crucial aspect of effective prevention. That means that we need to talk about all relationships openly.

Fortunately we have a solution. Wingspan, in partnership with CODAC Behavioral Health Services, Inc., the Pima County Health Department and the Southern Arizona Aids Foundation has a youth program called Eon. Eon serves over 300 youth ages 13-23 per year. The Wingspan Anti-Violence Project is currently developing a curriculum of sexual violence prevention and education targeting this population.

Secondly, there is almost no comparison programming that specifically works with the population we hope to target with this project in the future. However, several other subgrantees work with youth in their rape prevention and education. And youth, whether they are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning or straight, are still young people, and subjected to society's messages about relationships, about power dynamics, about respect, and healthy communication. We can look to other programs and draw from their experience while working to evaluate what we need to add specifically for same-sex relationships.

This is an exciting time for rape prevention and education in Arizona. We have revolutionary youth programming coming from several of the subgrantees and the Choose Respect Campaign Initiative. The Wingspan Anti-Violence Project is hoping that in the next funding year, we will be able to join this movement. We have the opportunity to pioneer sexual violence prevention for LGBTQ youth in partnership with all of the Rape Prevention and Education Program subgrantees and the Arizona Department of Health Services.

References

Duncan, D. F. (1997). Prevalence of sexual assault victimization among heterosexual and gay/lesbian university students. *Psychological Reports*, 66,65-66.