

Gay, Bisexual Teens Face Greater Parenthood Risk

BY MICHELE G. SULLIVAN
Mid-Atlantic Bureau

ST. LOUIS — Homosexual and bisexual youth appear to be overrepresented among teen parents, with 1 in 3 teen fathers and 1 in 10 teen mothers reporting either same- or both-gender sexual partners, Rebekah Forrest, R.N., said at the annual meeting of the Society for Adolescent Medicine.

"The high percentage of teen parents reporting same- or both-gender sexual partners raises important policy and practice considerations," said Ms. Forrest, a public

A lack of preparedness for opposite-gender sexual relations may be one factor. Another may be the desire to make a social statement about sexuality.

health nursing master's degree candidate at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis. "We naturally assume all teen parents are heterosexual, but this is not the case."

Although overall, births to teenagers have fallen by 30% over the last decade, the risk of pregnancy among homosexual and bisexual teens has increased; these teenagers are 2-4 times more likely to become pregnant or cause a pregnancy than are heterosexual teens.

To explore the sexual orientation of teen parents in Minnesota, Ms. Forrest and Elizabeth Saewyc, Ph.D., also of the University of Minnesota, performed a secondary analysis of a 1998 statewide survey of students in the 9th and 12th grades.

The Minnesota Student Survey covers 97% of the state's public school students in those grades; it includes students in alternative schools and juvenile correction facilities.

Included in this analysis were 1,018 students who reported having primary responsibility for raising a child of their own and who answered questions about the gender of their sexual partners within the previous 12 months—either same gender only, opposite gender only, or both genders.

Of the students included in the analysis, 44% were in ninth grade and 56% were in 12th grade; 77% were white, and 55% were male.

About one in three teen fathers (36.6%) and one in 10 teen mothers (12%) reported same- or both-gender sexual partners within the previous 12 months.

Since this reporting could be confounded by sexual abuse, any teen with a self-reported history of sexual abuse at any time was excluded.

This adjustment lowered the percentages only slightly: 30% of teen fathers and 8.6% of teen mothers still reported sexual minority experiences within the previous 12 months.

Homosexual or bisexual teen parents were in the ninth grade vs. one-third of teen parents with opposite-gender-only partners.

Among all sexually experienced boys, 14% reported same- or both-gender partners, while among teen fathers, 37% reported same- or both-gender partners, a 2.5-fold increase.

Among all sexually experienced girls, about 4% reported same- or both-gender partners, while among teen mothers, 12%

reported these experiences—a threefold increase.

No studies have identified the reasons that may put homosexual or bisexual teens at an increased risk for pregnancy and parenthood, Ms. Forrest said.

A lack of preparedness for opposite-gender sexual relations may be one factor. Another factor, she said, may be the desire—either conscious or unconscious—to make a societal statement about their sexuality or to gain social acceptance.

Regardless of the reasons, she said, health care and parenting programs should support the needs of all teen parents.

Future research in this area should focus on the prevention of pregnancy in homosexual and bisexual parents, Ms. Forrest noted.

Ms. Forrest cautioned that the results of this analysis might be confounded by the higher dropout rate among teen parents. ■

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Reference: 1. Data on file, Shire US Inc., 2002.
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