

# Community Attitudes Towards HIV/AIDS And Homosexuality

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## Abstract

Little is known about variations in attitudes towards HIV/AIDS and homosexuality as a function of age, gender, race, education level, religion, political party, and personal knowledge of homosexuals or persons with HIV/AIDS. Community attitudes toward HIV/AIDS and homosexuality were examined.

## Introduction

Early studies suggested prevalent negative attitudes towards persons with HIV/AIDS (Blendon & Donelan, 1988). Although there is evidence that severely punitive attitudes have diminished, there is also evidence that stigma and fear of AIDS remain prevalent in the U.S. (Herek, Capitanio, & Widaman, 2002) and other countries (Visser, Makin, & Lehoby, 2006). Social stigma could impact a person's decision to be tested for HIV, as seen in a survey where 37% of participants stated that fear of stigma would affect their decision to be tested (Herek, Capitanio, & Widaman, 2003). Unfortunately, evidence suggests that interventions that merely increase knowledge of HIV have limited effects on individuals' attitudes toward persons with HIV/AIDS (Zagumy & Deckbar, 1995).

Furthermore, this stigma and fear have been linked to sexual prejudice, especially homophobia (Herek & Capitanio, 1999; Summers, 1991). Vanderstoep and Green (1988) found that ethical conservatism was a significant predictor of homonegativity. Individuals who indicated dedicated religious confirmations held stronger negative attitudes toward homosexuals than those individuals who were not as religious. This finding is similar to other predictors of homonegativity, such as religiosity (Schulte & Battle, 2004) and respondents' sexual preference (Vanderstoep & Green, 1988). In addition, Hansen (1982) found that knowing homosexuals was associated with lower homonegativity and men were found to be more homophobic than women.

## Method

### Participants:

A total of 463 adult participants were recruited for the study. The sample was predominantly Caucasian (72.8%), female (57.9%), and Baptist (30.5%), with a mean age of 42.

### Procedures:

Following IRB approval, a convenience sample of participants was recruited from area retail centers. After verbal consent, participants anonymously completed demographic items and self-report questionnaires. A debriefing myths/facts sheet about HIV/AIDS and homosexuality was then given to participants. Participation was anonymous and voluntary.

## Method (continued)

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Sample (N = 464)

	n	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	268	57.9
Male	193	41.7
Missing	2	0.4
<b>Race/ethnicity</b>		
Black/African American	81	17.5
White/Caucasian	337	72.8
Other	45	9.7
<b>Religious Affiliation</b>		
Baptist	141	30.5
Catholic	76	16.4
Methodist	44	9.5
Non-Denominational Christian	46	9.9
Other	59	12.7
Protestant	29	6.3
Missing	68	14.7
<b>Political Affiliation</b>		
Democrat	134	28.9
Republican	172	37.1
Other/none specified	157	33.9
<b>Education</b>		
Less than 12 years	18	3.9
12 years or equivalent some college	115	24.8
4 years of college	161	34.8
Greater than 4 years of college	93	20.1
Missing	70	15.1
<b>Know someone with HIV/AIDS</b>		
No	258	55.7
Yes	202	43.6
Missing	3	0.6
<b>Know someone who is homosexual</b>		
No	215	46.4
Yes	246	53.1
Missing	2	0.4

### Measures:

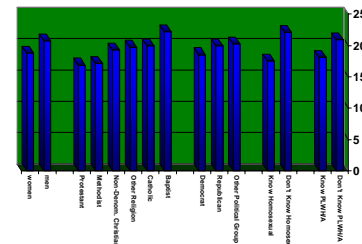
Attitudes toward homosexuality were measured with the single factor, 7-item Homophobia Scale. Attitudes toward HIV/AIDS were measured with the three factor, 14-item Fear of AIDS Scale. Each scale possesses adequate psychometric properties ( $\alpha = .89$  and  $.80$ , respectively) (Bouton et al., 1987).

## Results

Age correlated positively ( $r = .14$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and education level correlated negatively ( $r = -.20$ ,  $p < .01$ ) with Fear of AIDS. Men ( $M = 20.7$ ) had higher Fear of AIDS than women ( $M = 18.8$ ),  $t(285) = 2.54$ ,  $p < .05$ . No differences among racial groups were found. Baptists' Fear of AIDS scores ( $M = 22.16$ ) were higher than several other religious groups,  $F(5, 327) = 7.09$ ,  $p < .001$ . There was no difference as a function of political party affiliation on Fear of AIDS. Significant differences in Fear of AIDS scores were found as a function of whether individuals knew someone with HIV/AIDS,  $t(385) = 4.03$ ,  $p < .001$ , and/or someone who is homosexual,  $t(386) = 6.69$ ,  $p < .001$ . (Figure 1)

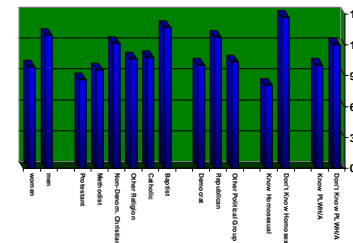
## Results (continued)

Fear of AIDS Scores



Age correlated positively ( $r = .17$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and education level correlated negatively ( $r = -.10$ ,  $p < .05$ ) with Homophobia. Men ( $M = 12.91$ ) had higher Homophobia than women ( $M = 9.88$ ),  $t(285) = 4.71$ ,  $p < .01$ . No differences among racial groups were found. Baptists' Homophobia scores ( $M = 13.69$ ) were higher than several other religious groups  $F(5, 350) = 5.18$ ,  $p < .001$ . Homophobia scores were higher for Republicans ( $M = 12.72$ ) than Democrats ( $M = 10.03$ ) and Others ( $M = 10.33$ ),  $t(2, 415) = 4.71$ ,  $p < .01$ . Significant differences in Homophobia scores were found as a function of whether individuals knew someone with HIV/AIDS,  $t(414) = 3.08$ ,  $p < .002$ , and/or someone who is homosexual,  $t(415) = 11.66$ ,  $p < .001$ .

Homophobia Scores



Stepwise multiple regression using age, gender, racial group, education level, religious affiliation, political affiliation, knows/has known someone with HIV/AIDS, and knows/has known homosexual as predictors were performed with Fear of AIDS and Homophobia as criterion variables. Fear of AIDS was predicted by knowing someone who is homosexual, religious affiliation, political affiliation, education, and knowing someone with HIV/AIDS,  $R^2 = .18$ ,  $F(1, 321) = 14.37$ ,  $p < .001$ , while Homophobia was predicted only by knowing someone who is homosexual,  $R^2 = .24$ ,  $F(1, 347) = 107.44$ ,  $p < .001$ .

## Discussion

When variables were examined individually, results revealed that males, Baptists, and individuals who haven't known someone with HIV/AIDS or someone who is homosexual scored significantly higher than their counterparts on both homophobia and fear of AIDS. Republicans scored higher on homophobia but not fear of AIDS. Older age was related to greater homophobia and fear of AIDS; greater education was related to lower homophobia and fear of AIDS.

Stepwise regression analysis was used to examine the unique contribution of variables in the prediction of homophobia and fear of AIDS. Interestingly, several variables (knowing someone who is homosexual, religious affiliation, political affiliation, education, and knowing someone with HIV/AIDS) formed a model that predicted 18% of the variance in fear of AIDS. On the other hand, only one predictor variable was significant for homophobia, knowing someone who is homosexual, accounting for 24% of the variance. Additional variables did not increase the prediction of homophobia.

These findings are consistent with other research. Results of the regression suggest that there is significant multicollinearity across variables that should be considered in future studies.

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