



## Life Span

The greater incidence of physical and mental health problems among gays and lesbians has serious consequences for length of life. While many are aware of the death toll from AIDS, there has been little public attention given to the magnitude of the lost years of life.

An epidemiological study from Vancouver, Canada of data tabulated between 1987 and 1992 for AIDS-related deaths reveals that male homosexual or bisexual practitioners lost up to 20 years of life expectancy. The study concluded that if 3 percent of the population studied were gay or bisexual, the probability of a 20-year-old gay or bisexual man living to 65 years was only 32 percent, compared to 78 percent for men in general.<sup>1</sup> The damaging effects of cigarette smoking pale in comparison -cigarette smokers lose on average about 13.5 years of life expectancy.<sup>2</sup>

The impact on length of life may be even greater than reported in the Canadian study. First, HIV/AIDS is underreported by as much as 15-20 percent, so it is likely that not all AIDS-related deaths were accounted for in the study.<sup>3</sup> Second, there are additional major causes of death related to gay sex. For example, suicide rates among a San Francisco cohort were 3.4 times higher than the general U.S. male population in 1987.<sup>4</sup> Other potentially fatal ailments such as syphilis, anal cancer, and Hepatitis B and C also affect gay and bisexual men disproportionately.<sup>5</sup>

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### References

[1]R. S. Hogg, S. A. Strathdee, et al., "Modeling the Impact of HIV Disease on Mortality in Gay and Bisexual Men," *International Journal of Epidemiology*, 26(3): 657-661, p. 659 (1997). Death as the result of HIV infection has dropped significantly since 1996. "Life Expectancy Hits New High in 2000; Mortality Declines for Several Leading Causes of Death," CDC News Release, October 10, 2001, [www.cdc.gov/nchs/releases/01news/mort2k.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/releases/01news/mort2k.htm). Nevertheless, it remains a significant factor in shortened life expectancy for homosexual practitioners.

[2]Press Release, *Smoking costs nation \$150 billion each year in health costs, lost productivity*, CDC, Office of Communication, April 12, 2002, [www.cdc.gov/od/oc/media/pressrel/r020412.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/od/oc/media/pressrel/r020412.htm).

[3]Hogg, et al., p. 660.

[4]*Ibid.*

[5]"Hepatitis A vaccination of men who have sex with men – Atlanta, Georgia, 1996-1997," *Morbidity and Mortality Report*, CDC, 47(34): 708-711 (September 4, 1998).