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**HIV Seroprevalence and Risk Behaviors  
Among Lesbians and Bisexual Women:  
The 1993 San Francisco/Berkeley  
Women's Survey**

Surveillance Branch, AIDS Office  
San Francisco Department of Public Health  
October 19, 1993

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HIV seroprevalence and  
risk behaviors among  
1993.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of a survey of 498 lesbians and bisexual women 17 years of age and older who were randomly sampled at 25 locations in San Francisco and Berkeley, CA during 1993. The survey was conducted by the San Francisco Department of Public Health AIDS Office Surveillance Branch, in collaboration with the Berkeley Department of Health and Human Services and the Division of HIV/AIDS, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The study found that 1.2% of lesbians and bisexual women were infected with HIV, 5.4% had markers for hepatitis B, and 0.4% had markers indicating a history of syphilis. The prevalence of HIV infection did not differ significantly by age, race/ethnicity, or sexual orientation.


infection in this population was more than three-fold higher than adolescent women in San Francisco (0.35%; based on household keys of childbearing women, clinic-based surveys, and screening recruits).

women in this survey reported very high levels of injection drug use with male and female partners. A substantial proportion of women reported injection drug use since 1978 (10.4%), and 3.8% reported injecting drugs in those reporting a history of injection drug use since 1978, 71% reported sharing needles, and 31% reported sharing needles with gay/bisexual

who reported a history of sex with men, many reported a history of vaginal (39%) or anal (10.9%) sex with men during the past three years. These women reported a high rate of unprotected oral, vaginal, anal sex (14.6%, 9.6%, 3.2%, respectively) or with male injection drug users (14.6%, 9.6%, 3.2%, respectively) during the past three years.

who reported a history of sex with women, 91.9% reported a history of unprotected oral sex, 28.8% reported unprotected sharing of "sex toys" and 25.2% reported unprotected vaginal fisting during the past three years.

Sixty-eight percent of the women reported that they had been previously tested for HIV antibody. Among the 492 HIV seronegative participants, 32.3% had not previously been tested for HIV, whereas five of the six HIV-infected women had been tested before and were aware of their infection.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The study found that 1.2% of lesbians and bisexual women were infected with HIV, 5.4% had markers for hepatitis B, and 0.4% had markers indicating a history of syphilis. The prevalence of HIV infection did not differ significantly by age, race/ethnicity, or sexual orientation.

The prevalence of HIV infection in this population was more than three-fold higher than that estimated for all adult or adolescent women in San Francisco (0.35%; based on household and street-based surveys, surveys of childbearing women, clinic-based surveys, and screening of blood donors and military recruits).

Lesbians and bisexual women in this survey reported very high levels of injection drug use and unsafe sexual behaviors with male and female partners. A substantial proportion of women reported injection drug use since 1978 (10.4%), and 3.8% reported injecting drugs in the past three years. Among those reporting a history of injection drug use since 1978, 71% reported a history of sharing needles, and 31% reported sharing needles with gay/bisexual men.

Among the 405 women who reported a history of sex with men, many reported unprotected oral (56.3%) vaginal (39%) or anal (10.9%) sex with men during the past three years. Of particular concern, these women reported a high rate of unprotected oral, vaginal, or anal sex with gay/bisexual men (14.6%, 9.6%, 3.2%, respectively) or with male injection drug users (6.4%, 5.2%, 1.7%, respectively) during the past three years.

Among those reporting a history of sex with women, 91.9% reported a history of unprotected oral sex, 28.8% reported unprotected sharing of "sex toys" and 25.2% reported unprotected vaginal fisting during the past three years.

Sixty-eight percent of the women reported that they had been previously tested for HIV antibody. Among the 492 HIV seronegative participants, 32.3% had not previously been tested for HIV, whereas five of the six HIV-infected women had been tested before and were aware of their infection.

The study found no clear evidence of woman-to-woman transmission among the six HIV-infected women in the survey. All of these women reported either a history of injection drug use or a history of anal or vaginal sex with men. Despite the lack of clear evidence of woman-to-woman transmission in this survey, the high rates of injection drug use and unsafe sexual behaviors with male and female partners suggests a potential for continued transmission of HIV in this population.

Previous studies released by the Department of Public Health have shown that focused prevention campaigns have been very successful in San Francisco when targeted to populations at high risk through comprehensive community-based prevention efforts. Although the rates of HIV infection among lesbian and bisexual women are currently low, these rates may rise given the high levels of risk behaviors in this population. These studies suggest that targeted prevention programs should be expanded to address the needs of lesbians and bisexual women.

## Objectives

The objectives of the Women's Survey were 1) to estimate the prevalence of HIV infection, and markers for hepatitis B virus and syphilis among women who have sex with women or with men and women, who frequent venues in San Francisco and Berkeley, CA, and who reside in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area, 2) to estimate the level of risk behaviors in this population, and 3) to measure the association between HIV infection and various factors including sexual and drug histories, HIV antibody testing history, medical history, and demographic characteristics.

## Methods

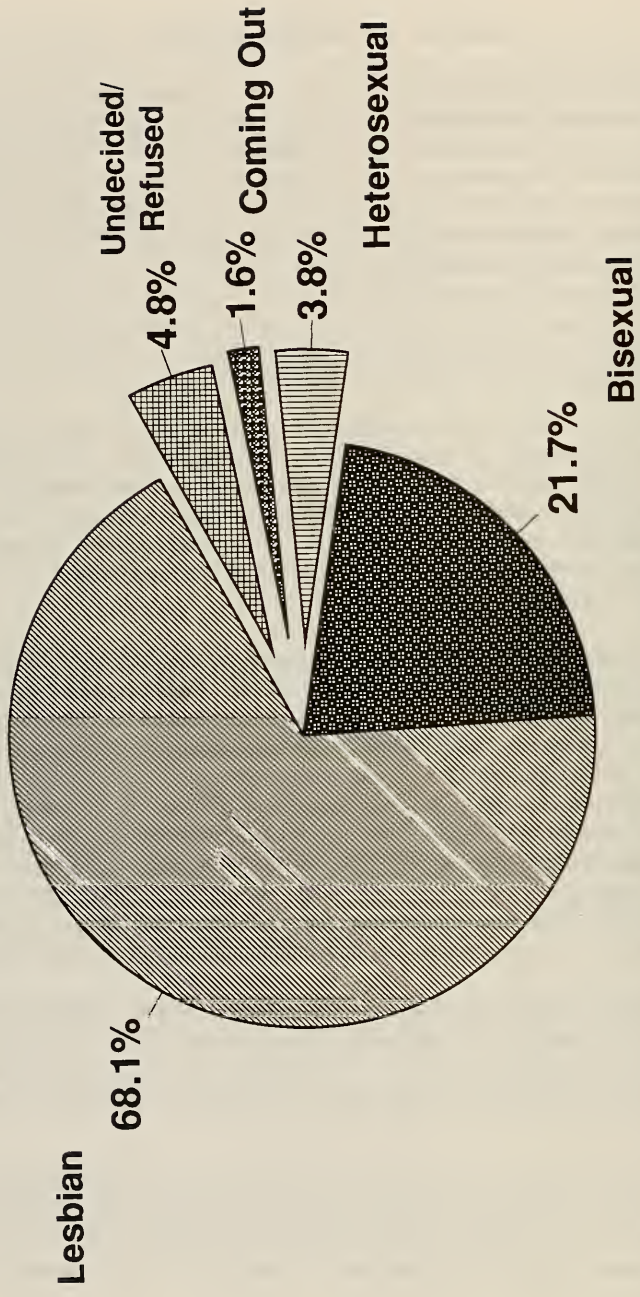
A total of 550 women were randomly surveyed from 25 venues located in San Francisco and Berkeley, CA between January and August 1993. Survey locations included bars, dance clubs, street locations, and special events identified through community-based focus groups as sites where lesbians and bisexual women congregate. The number of women selected from each venue was proportional to the estimated number of persons frequenting the venue. Volume estimates for all sampling locations were determined by field enumeration and adjusted as volume changes occurred.

During field visits, women were randomly selected as they walked down a pre-selected stretch of sidewalk, or as they entered a club or bar. Field investigators recruited women who were 17-years and older, and who resided in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area. Selection of participants was not based on sexual orientation. Field investigators recorded the number of women approached for participation, their age, race/ethnicity, county of residence, and whether they accepted or declined enrollment. Of the 798 women eligible for the survey, 550 (69%) agreed to participate in the survey. Informed consent, interview, blood draw, and prevention counseling were performed in a specially-equipped van parked near the sampling venue. A trained interviewer conducted a structured face-to-face interview using a standardized questionnaire. Interview questions included demographics, sexual behaviors with both men and women, drug histories, HIV testing history, and medical histories.

Blood specimens were tested for HIV, present and past syphilis infection (VDRL and MHA-TP), and markers for hepatitis B (HBsAg and anti-HBc). Results and post-test counseling were offered two weeks after interview and blood draw. The analysis was limited to 498 women who had sex with women since 1978 or who self-identified as lesbian or bisexual.

The survey was conducted by a team from the San Francisco Department of Public Health led by Dr. George Lemp, Melissa Jones, Tim Kellogg, and Giuliano Nieri, in collaboration with researchers from the Berkeley Department of Health and Human Services and the Division of HIV/AIDS, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

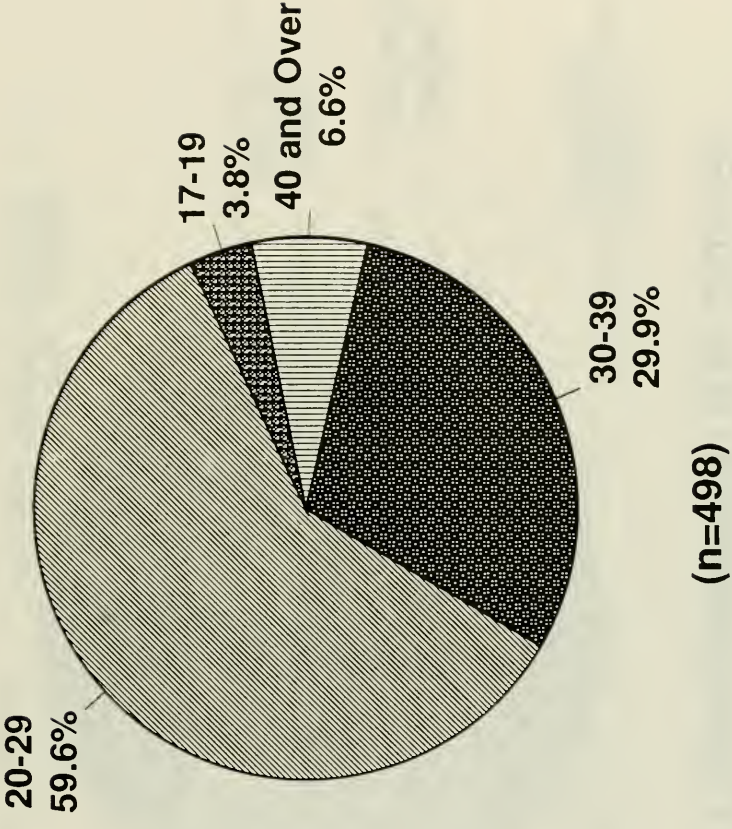
# Self-Identified Sexual Orientation of Survey Participants



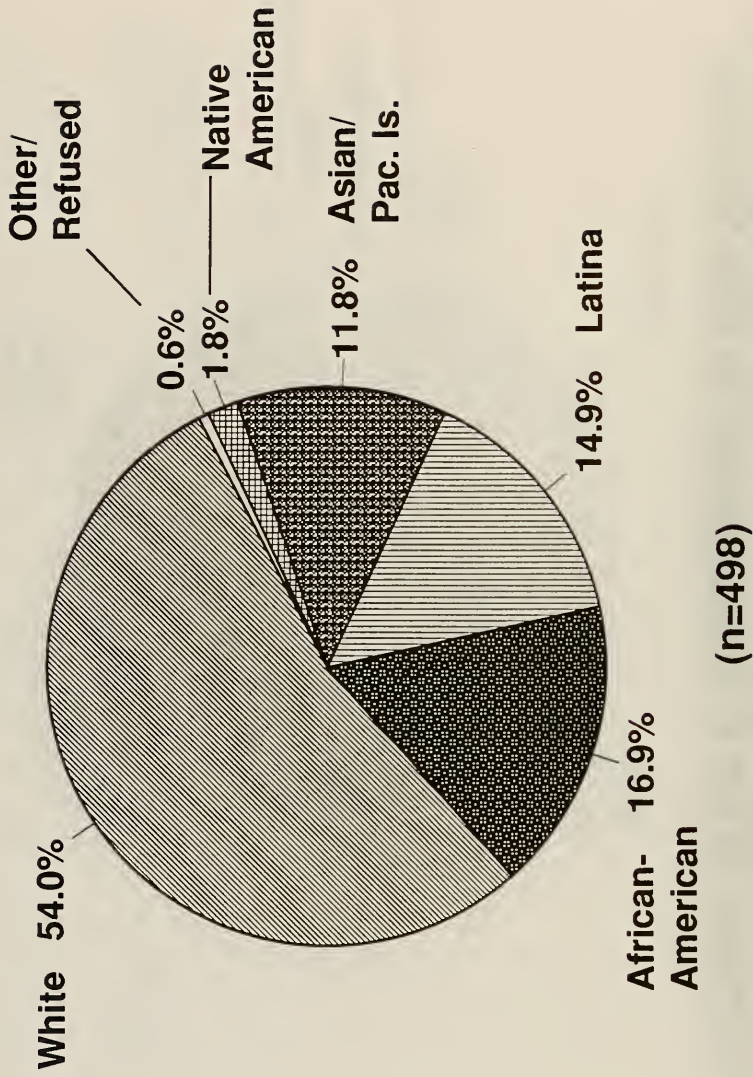
(n=498)



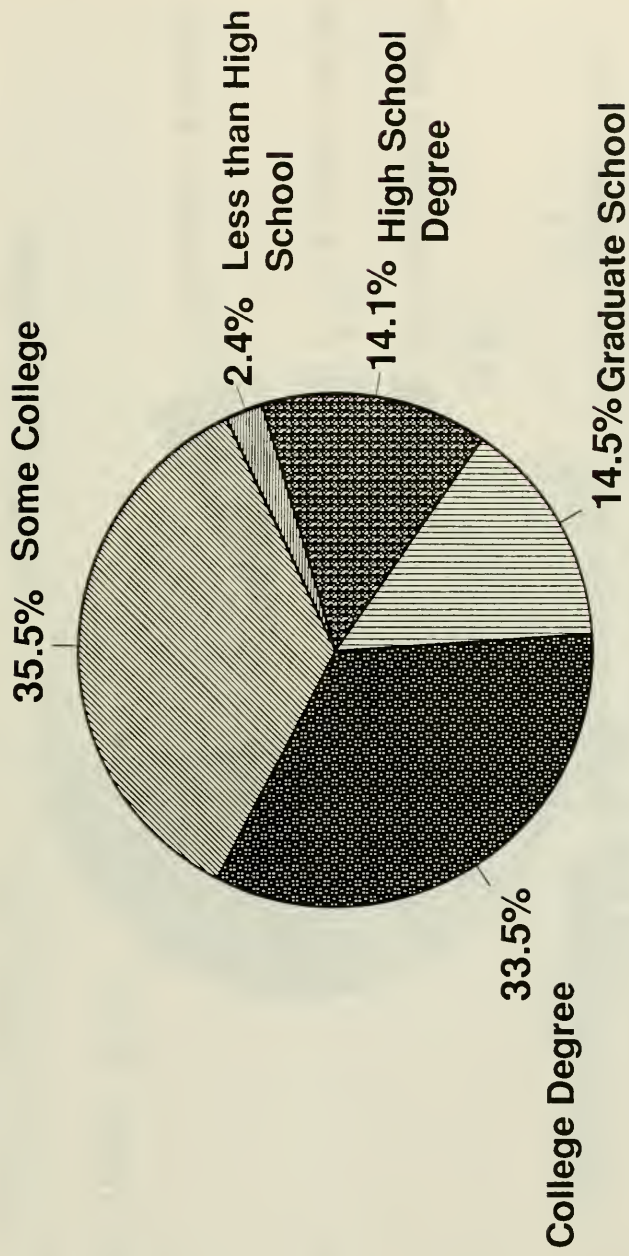
# Age-Group (Years) for Lesbians and Bisexual Women Who Participated in the Survey



# Race/Ethnicity for Lesbians and Bisexual Women Who Participated in the Survey

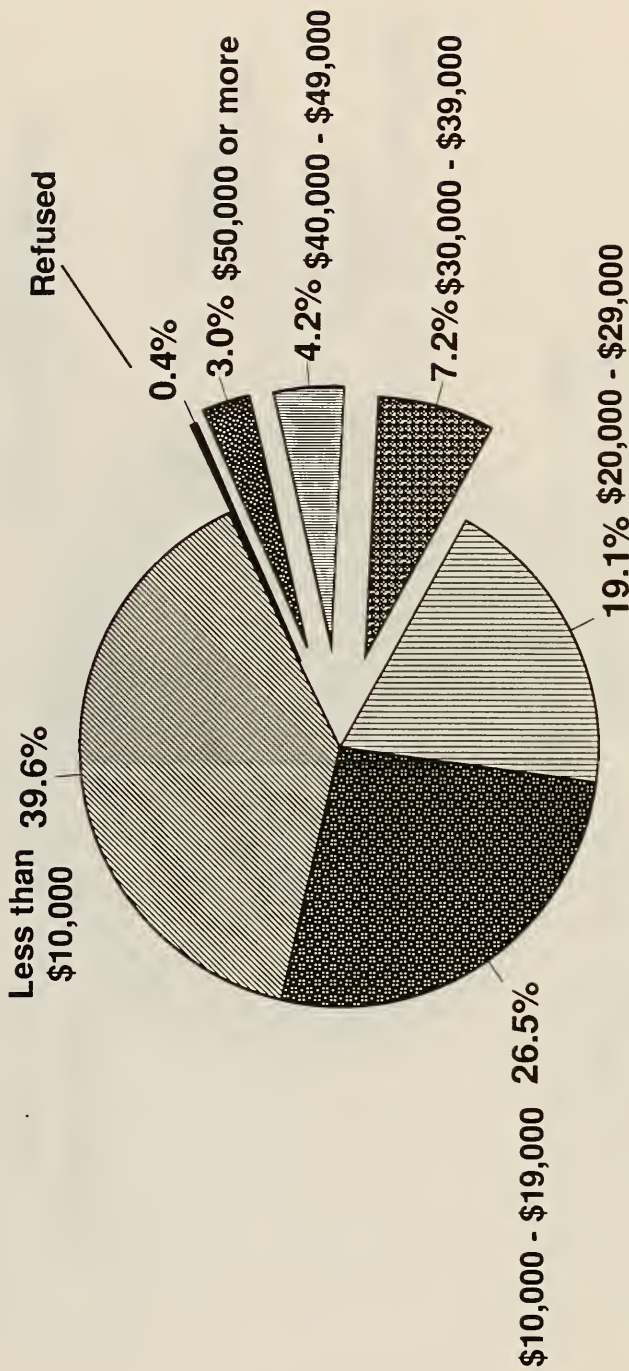


# Educational Level of Lesbians and Bisexual Women Who Participated in the Survey



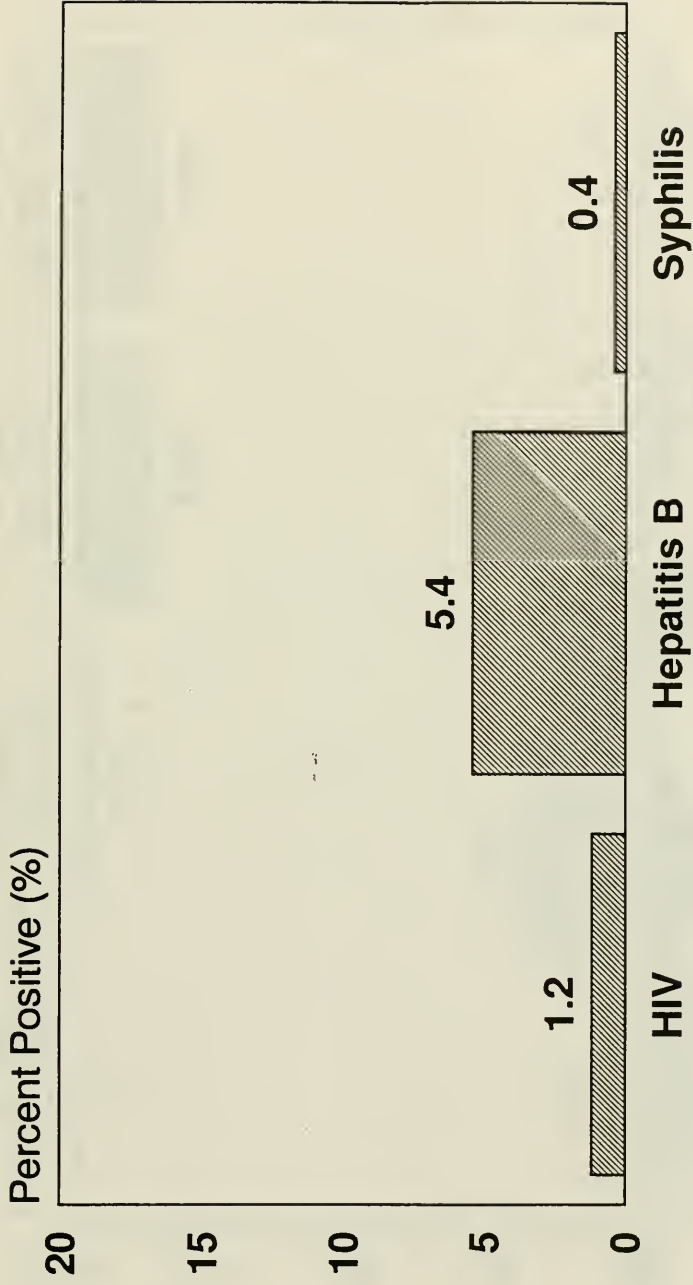
(n=498)

# Annual Income of Lesbians and Bisexual Women Who Participated in the Survey



(n=498)

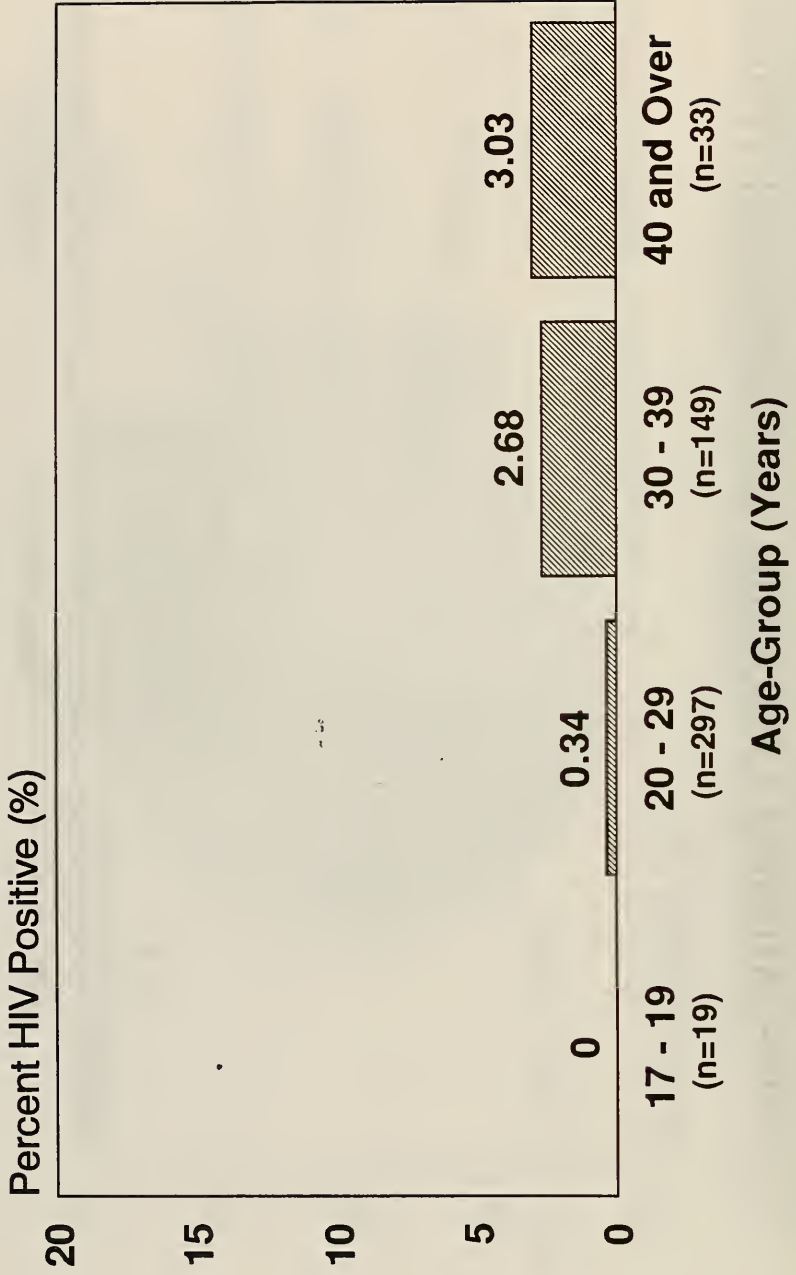
# Overall Seroprevalence of HIV, Hepatitis B, and Syphilis Among Lesbians and Bisexual Women



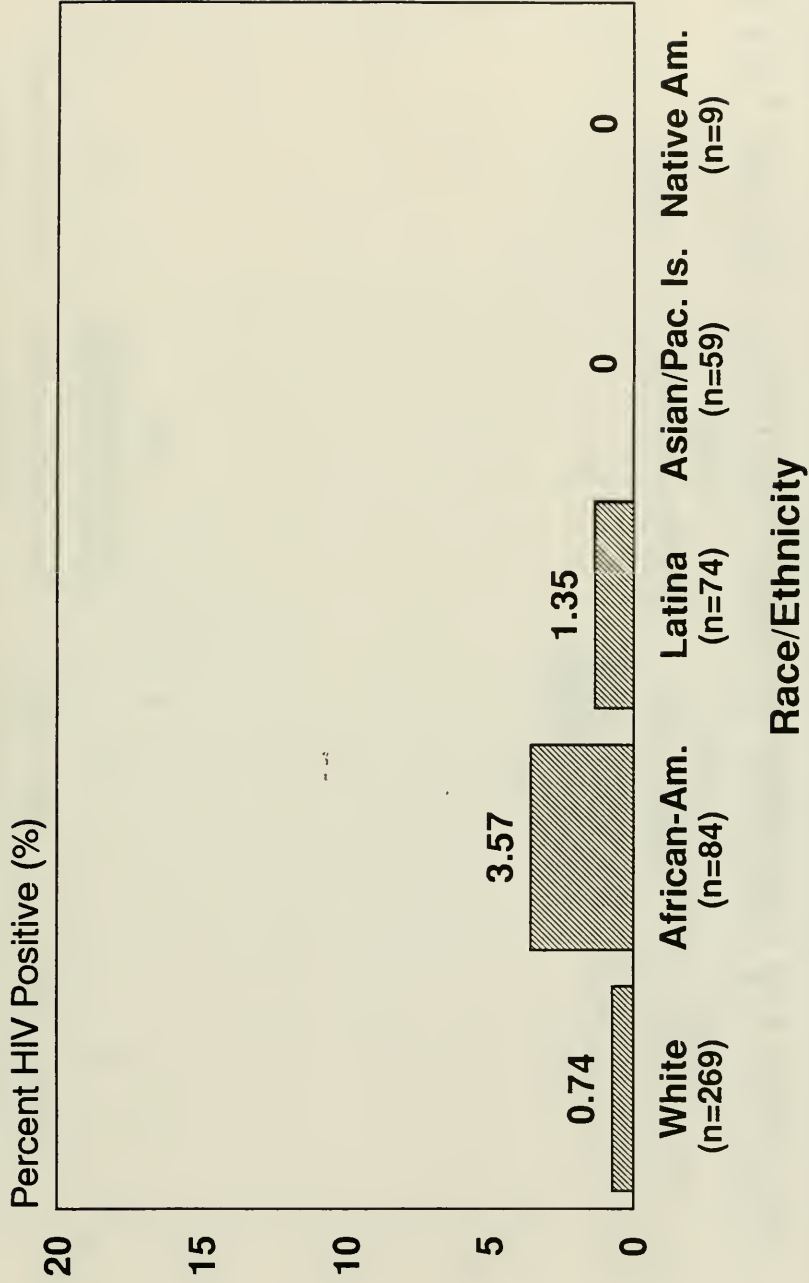
(n=498)

WS: 1993 San Francisco/Berkeley Women's Survey

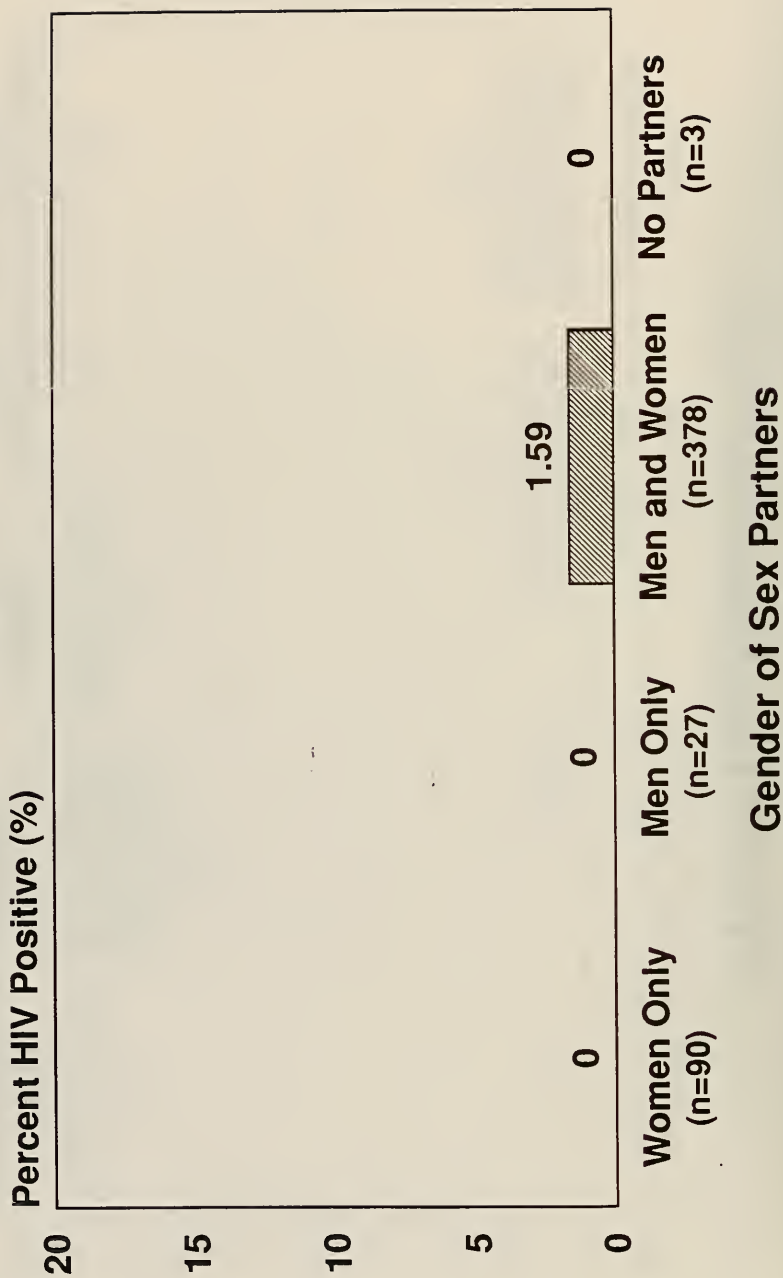
# HIV Seroprevalence Among Lesbians and Bisexual Women by Age-Group



# HIV Seroprevalence Among Lesbians and Bisexual Women by Race/Ethnicity

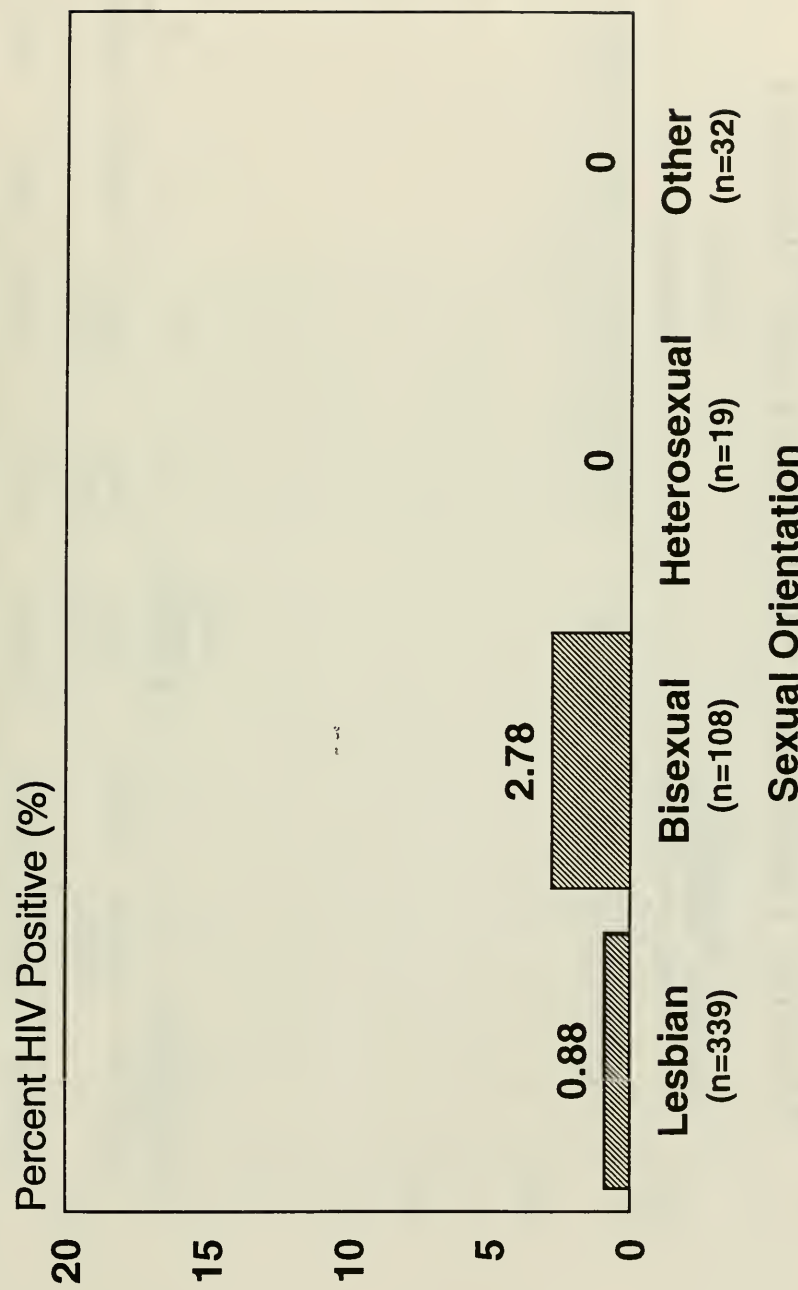


# HIV Seroprevalence Among Lesbians and Bisexual Women by Gender of Sex Partners Since 1978

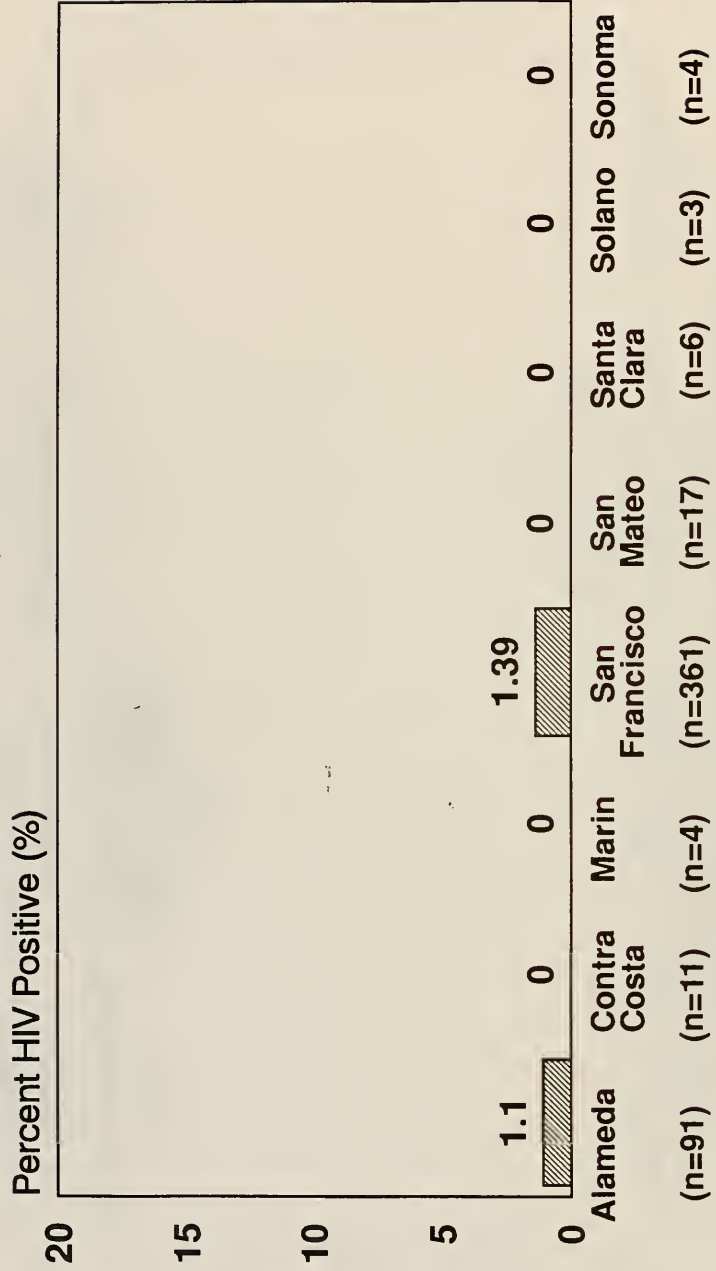




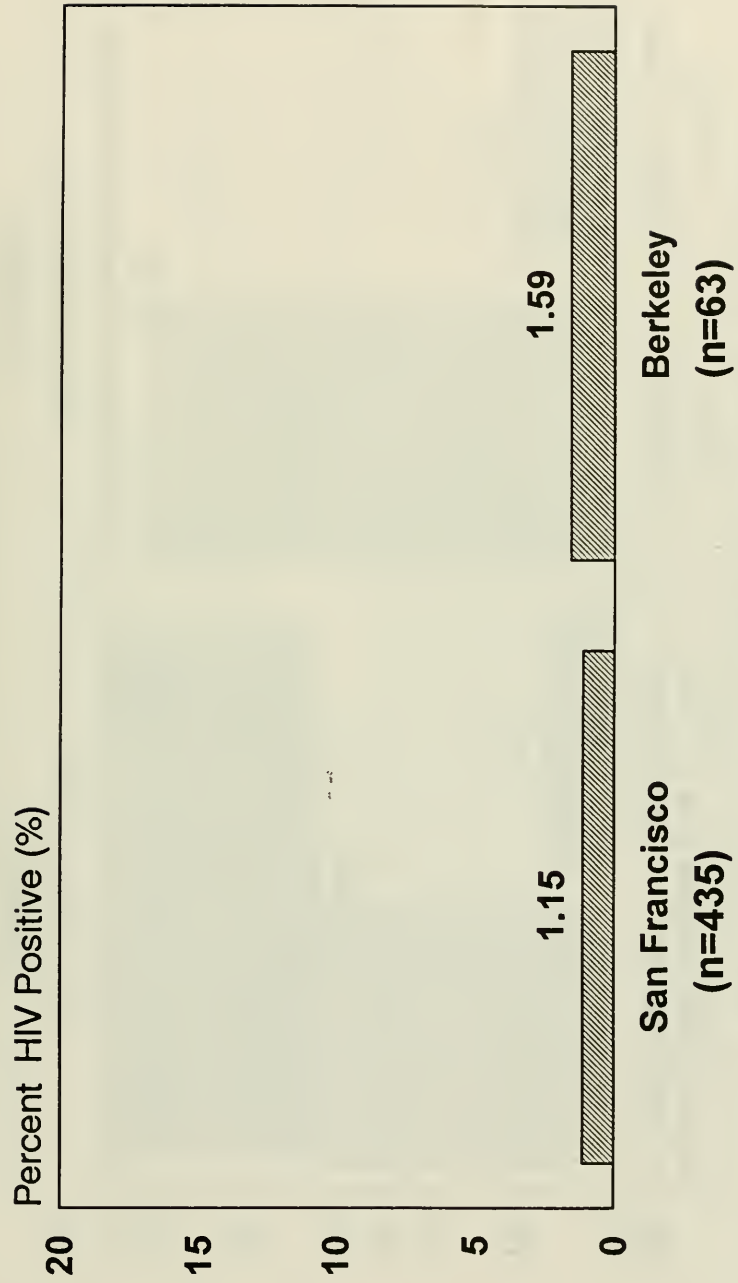
# HIV Seroprevalence Among Lesbians and Bisexual Women by Sexual Orientation



# Seroprevalence of HIV by County of Residence Among Lesbians and Bisexual Women

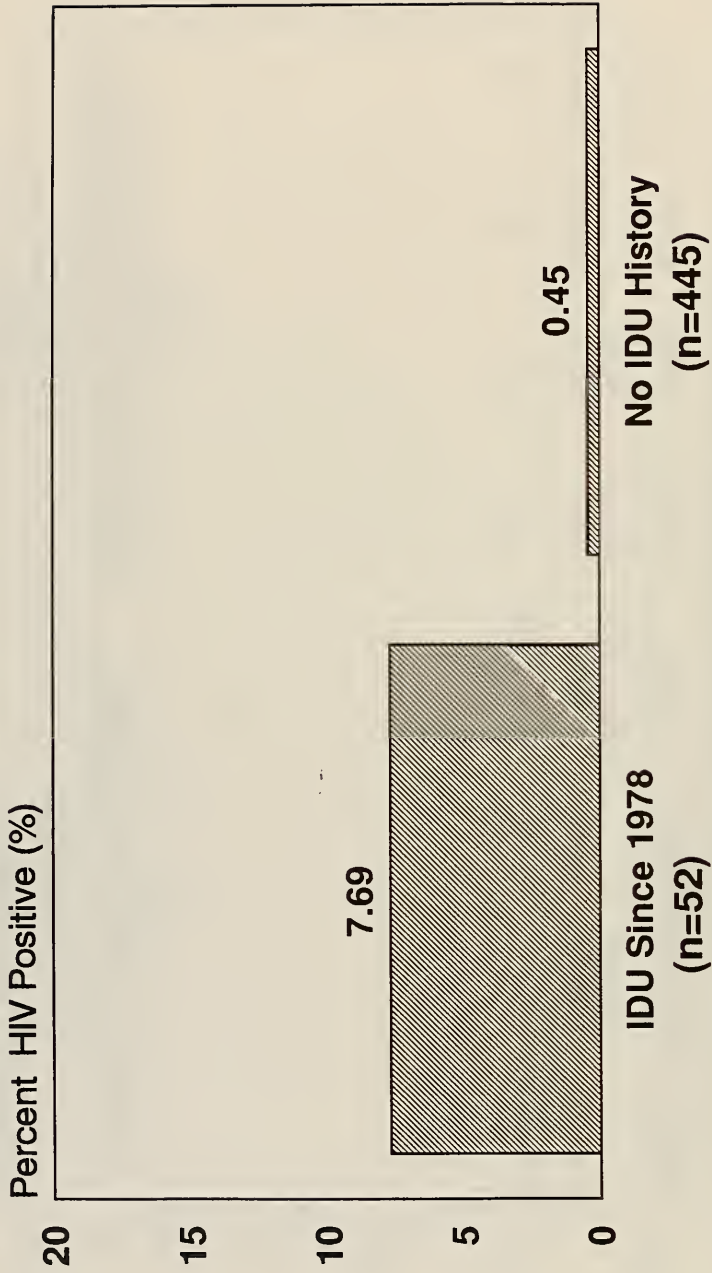


# Seroprevalence of HIV by City of Venue Among Lesbians and Bisexual Women

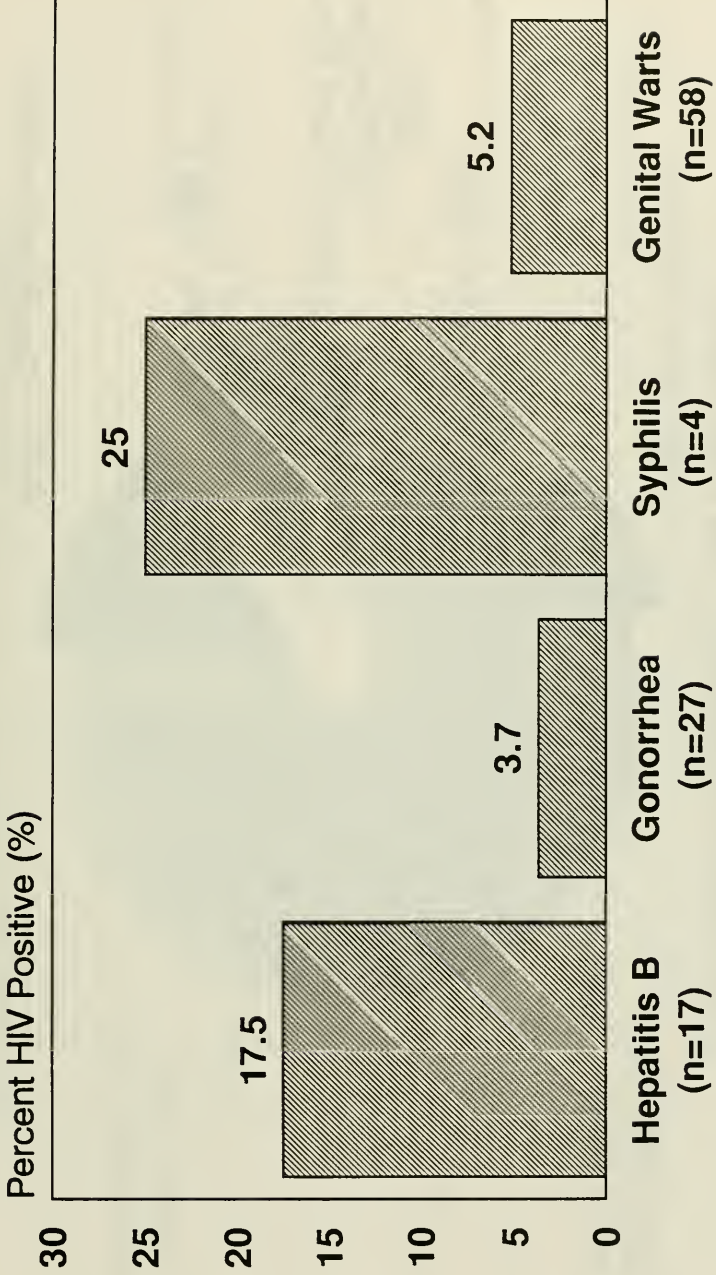


WS: 1993 San Francisco/Berkeley Women's Survey

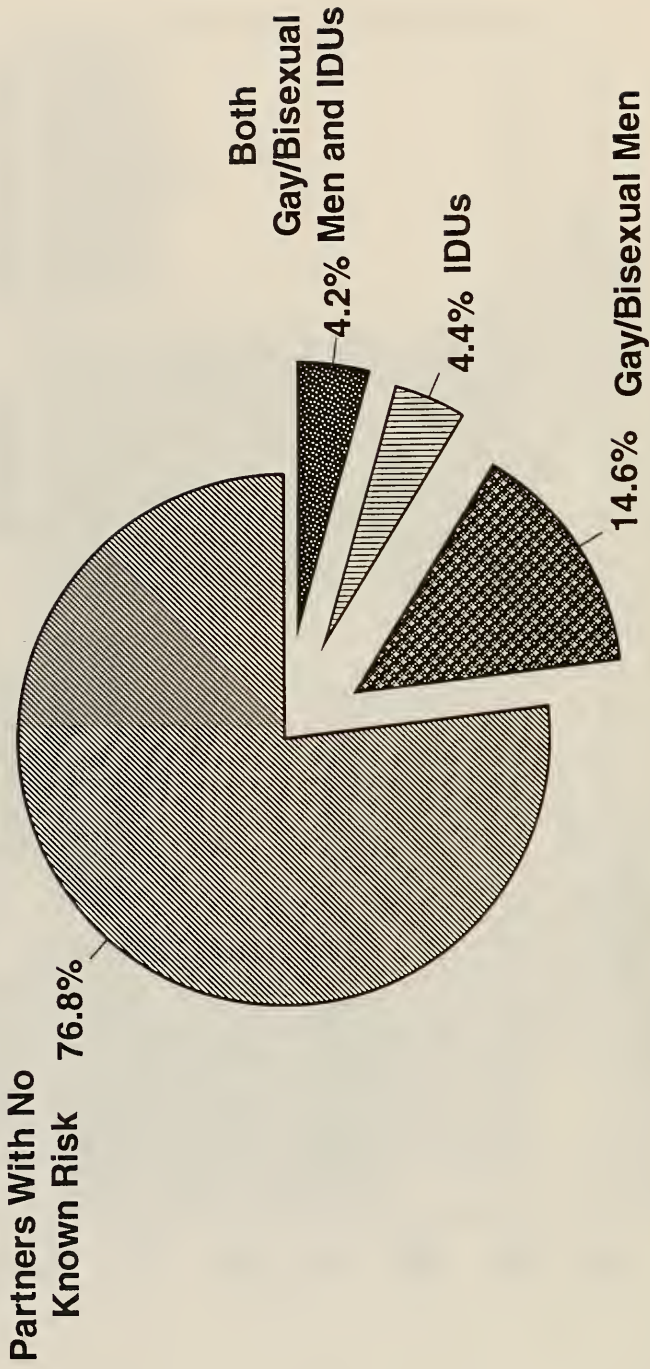
# Seroprevalence of HIV by Injection Drug Use (IDU) Among Lesbians and Bisexual Women



# Seroprevalence of HIV by STD History Among Lesbians and Bisexual Women

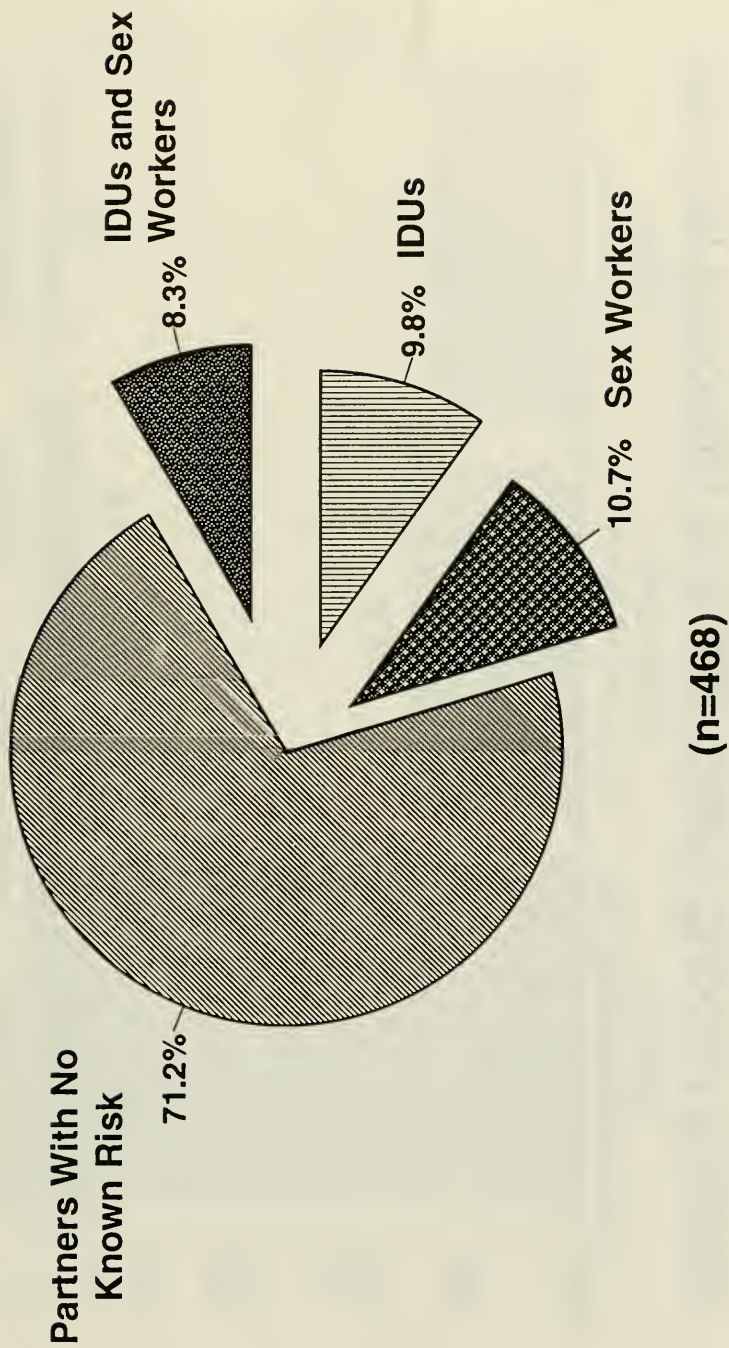


# Percent of Participants with Male Sex Partners at Risk for HIV (for women reporting sex with men)

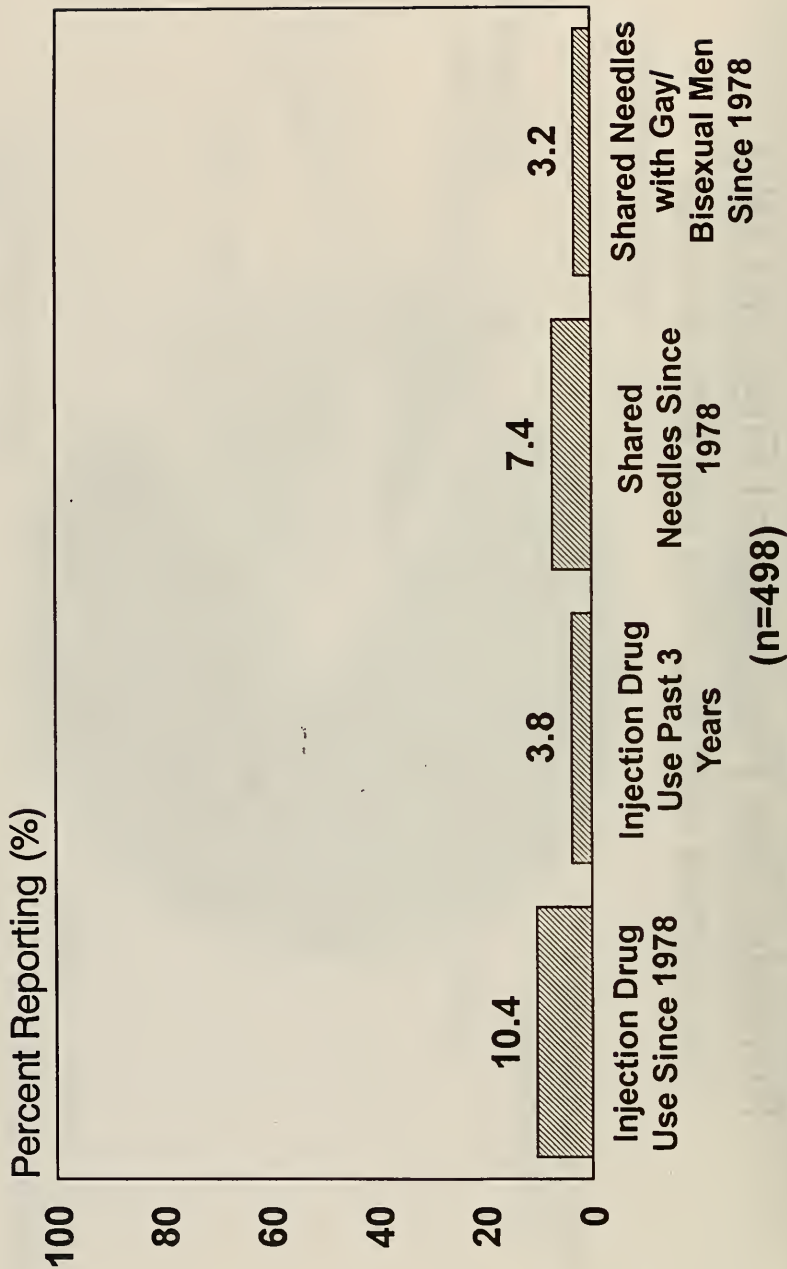


(n=405)

# Percent of Participants with Female Sex Partners at Risk for HIV (for women who reported sex with women)

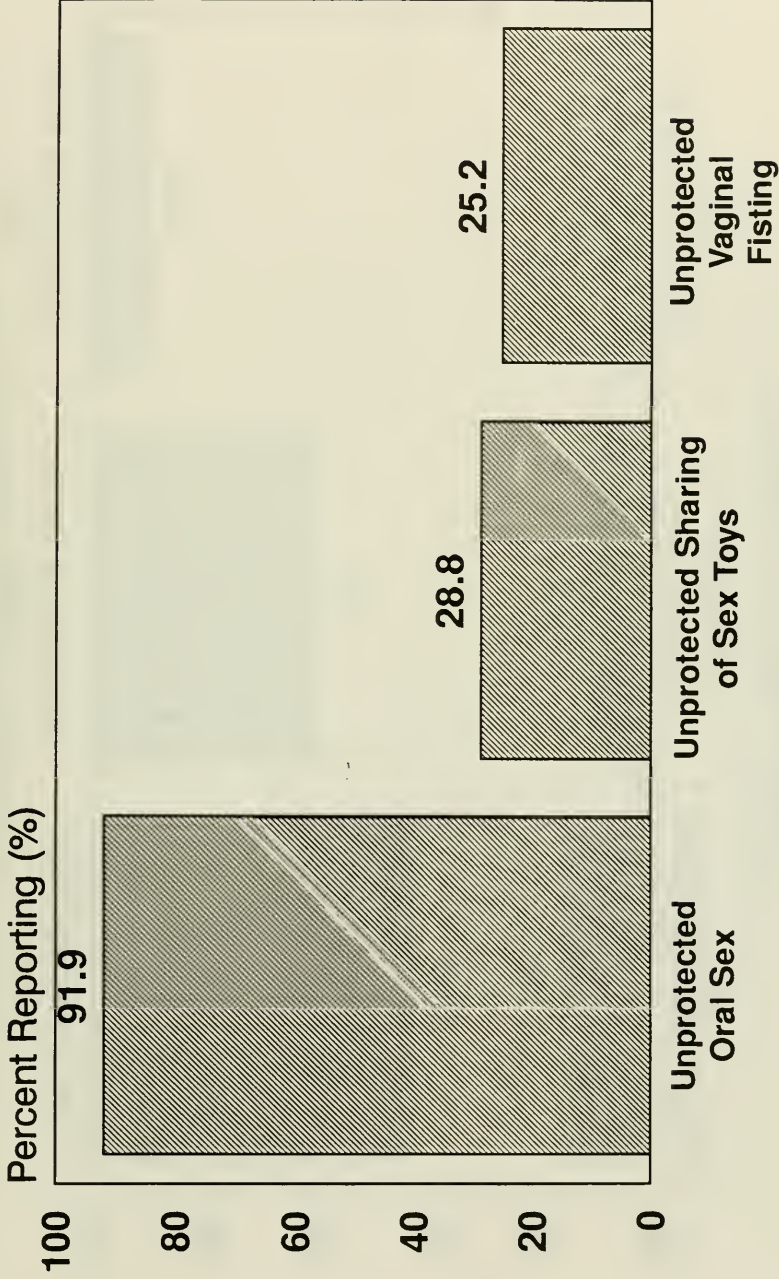


# Prevalence of Injection Drug Use and Needle Sharing Among Lesbians and Bisexual Women



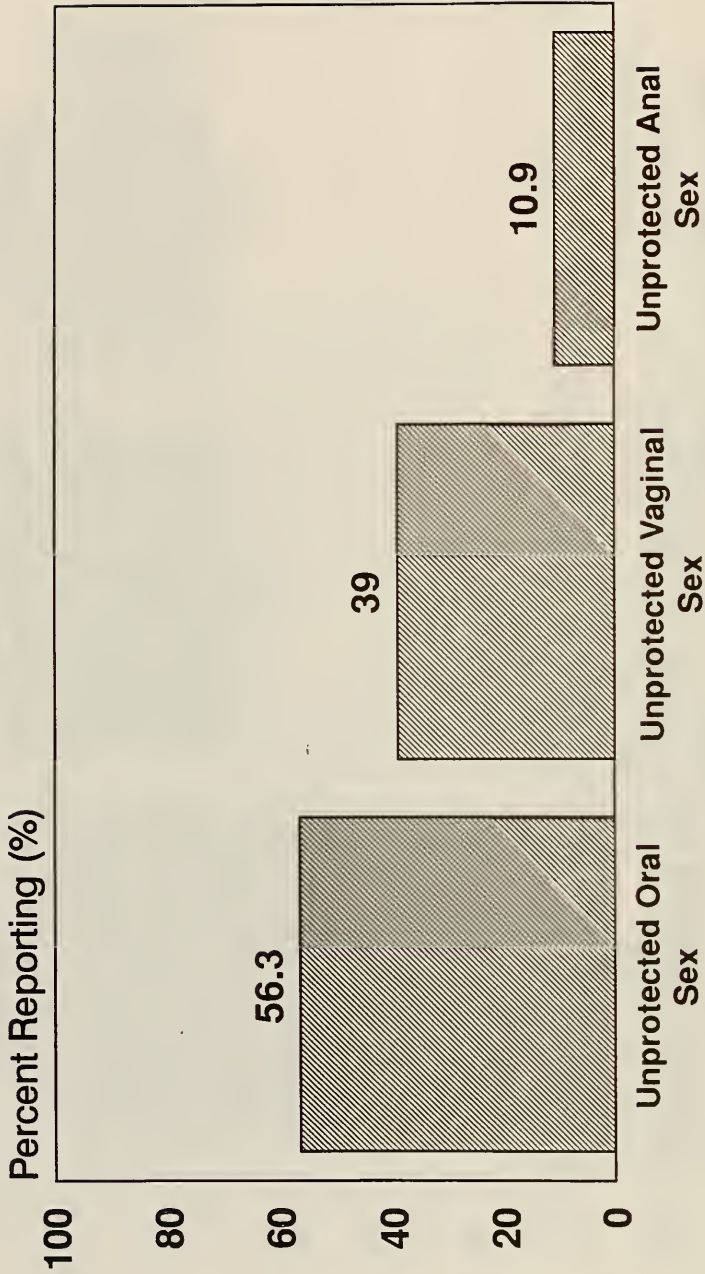


# Prevalence of Unprotected Sex with Women During the Past 3 Years



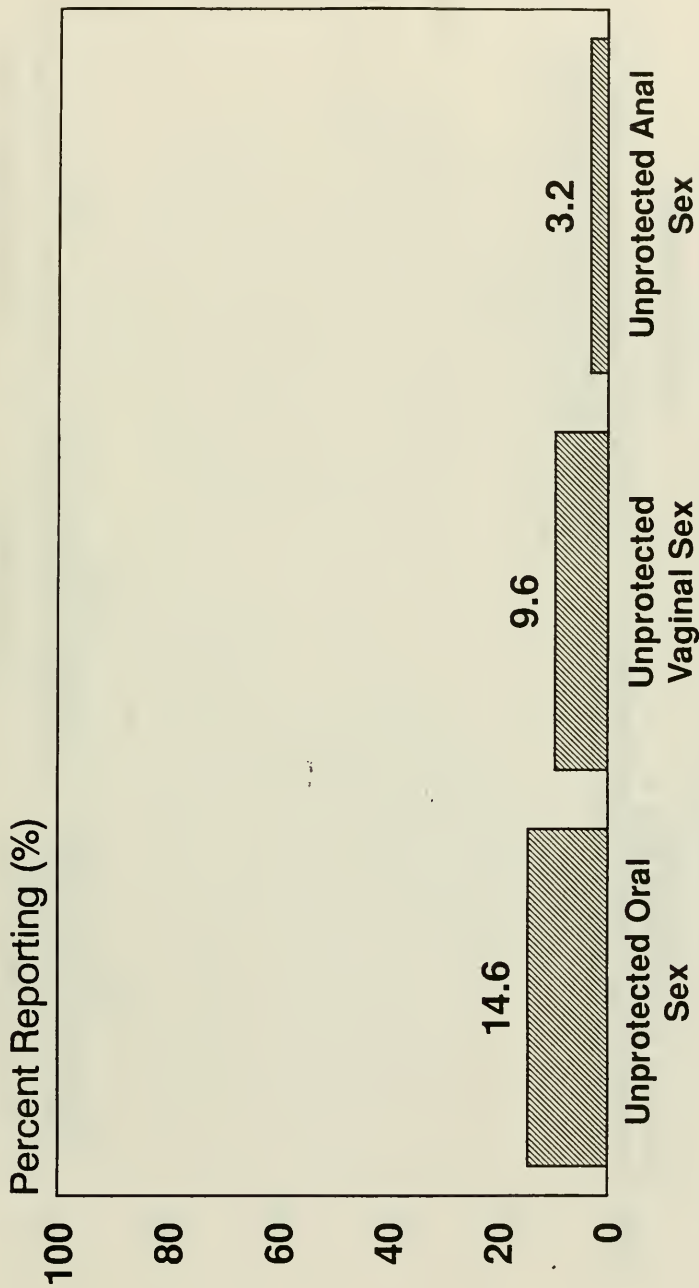
(n=468)

# Prevalence of Unprotected Sex with Men During the Past 3 Years



(n=405)

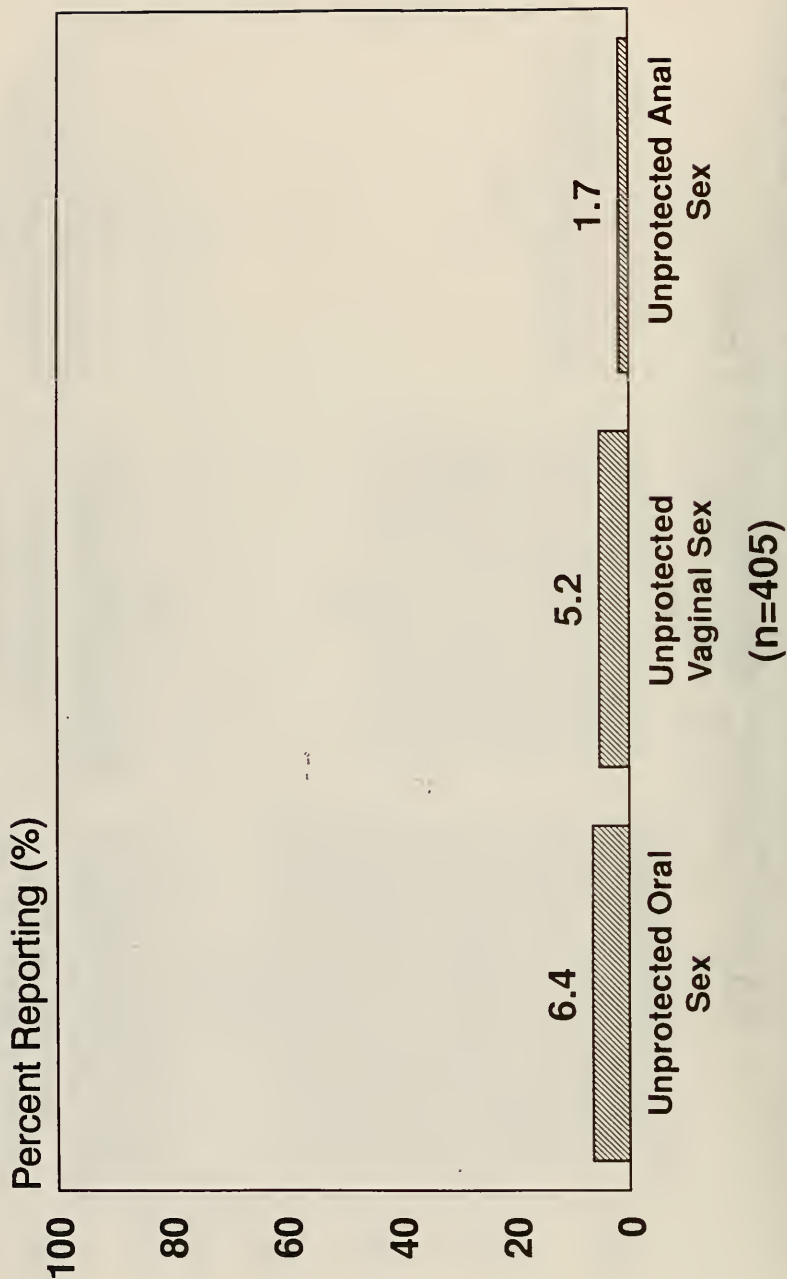
# Prevalence of Unprotected Sex with Gay/Bisexual Men During the Past 3 Years



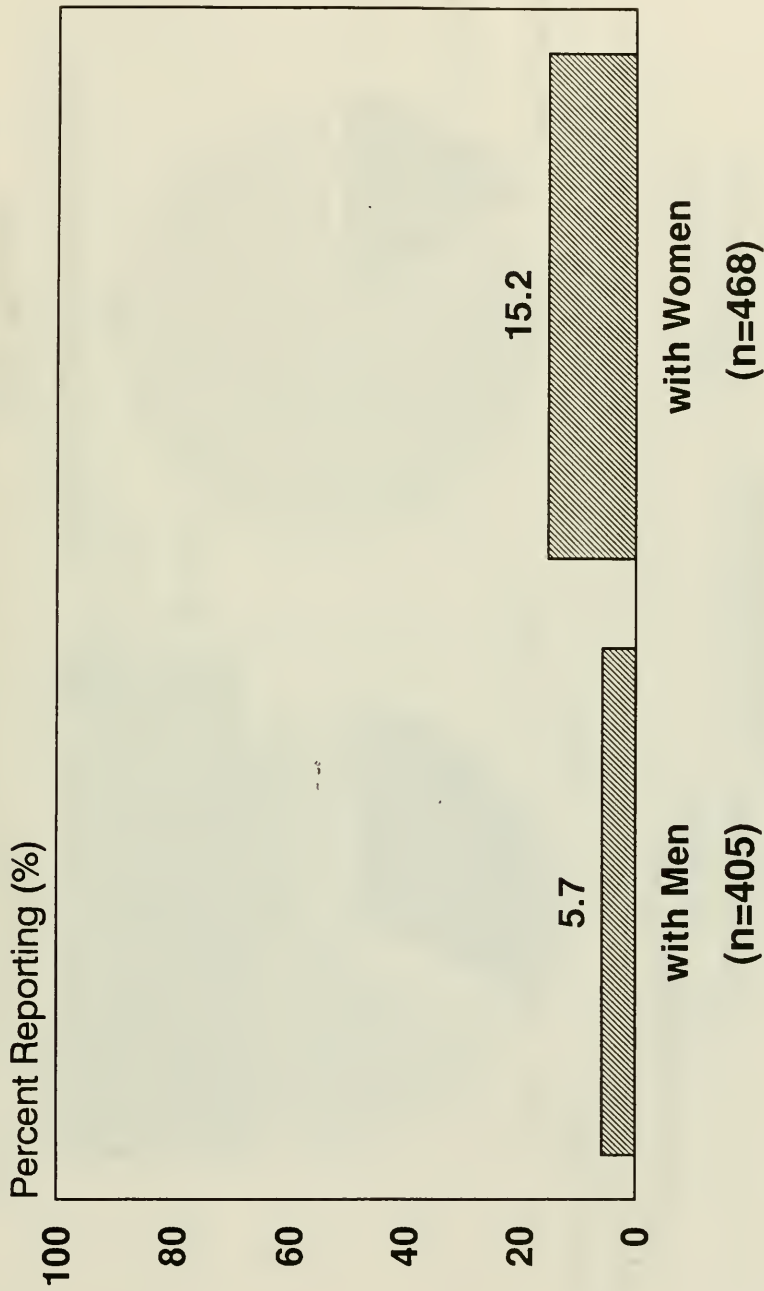
(n=405)

WS: 1993 San Francisco/Berkeley Women's Survey

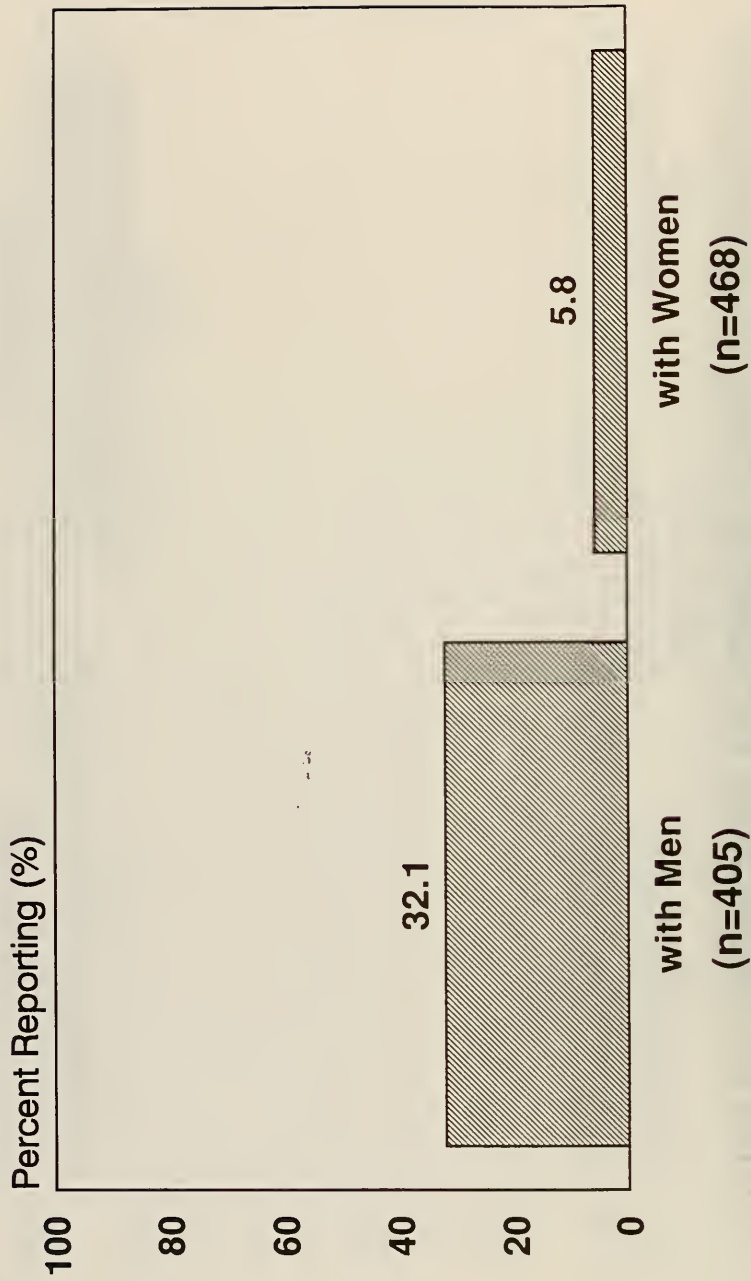
# Prevalence of Unprotected Sex with Male IDUs During the Past 3 Years



# Prevalence of Piercing, Cutting, or Whipping to the Point of Bleeding Among Survey Participants



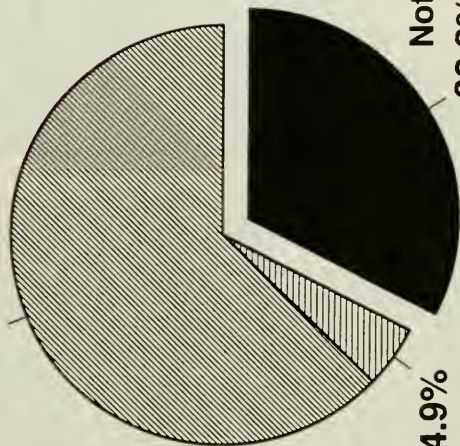
# Prevalence of Non-Consensual Sex Among Survey Participants



# HIV Antibody Testing History Among Lesbians and Bisexual Women

**Tested, Know Results**

**62.8%**



**Tested, Did Not Receive Results**

**4.9%**

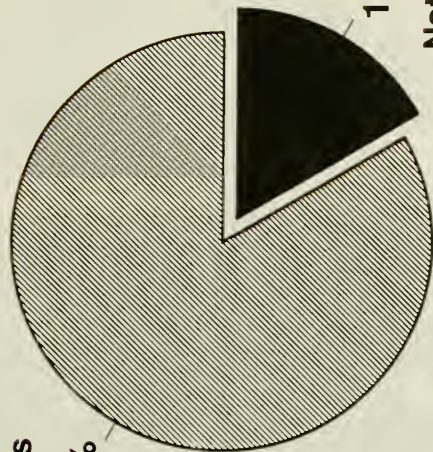
**Not Tested**

**32.3%**

**HIV Negative Participants (n=492)**

**Tested, Know Results**

**83.3%**

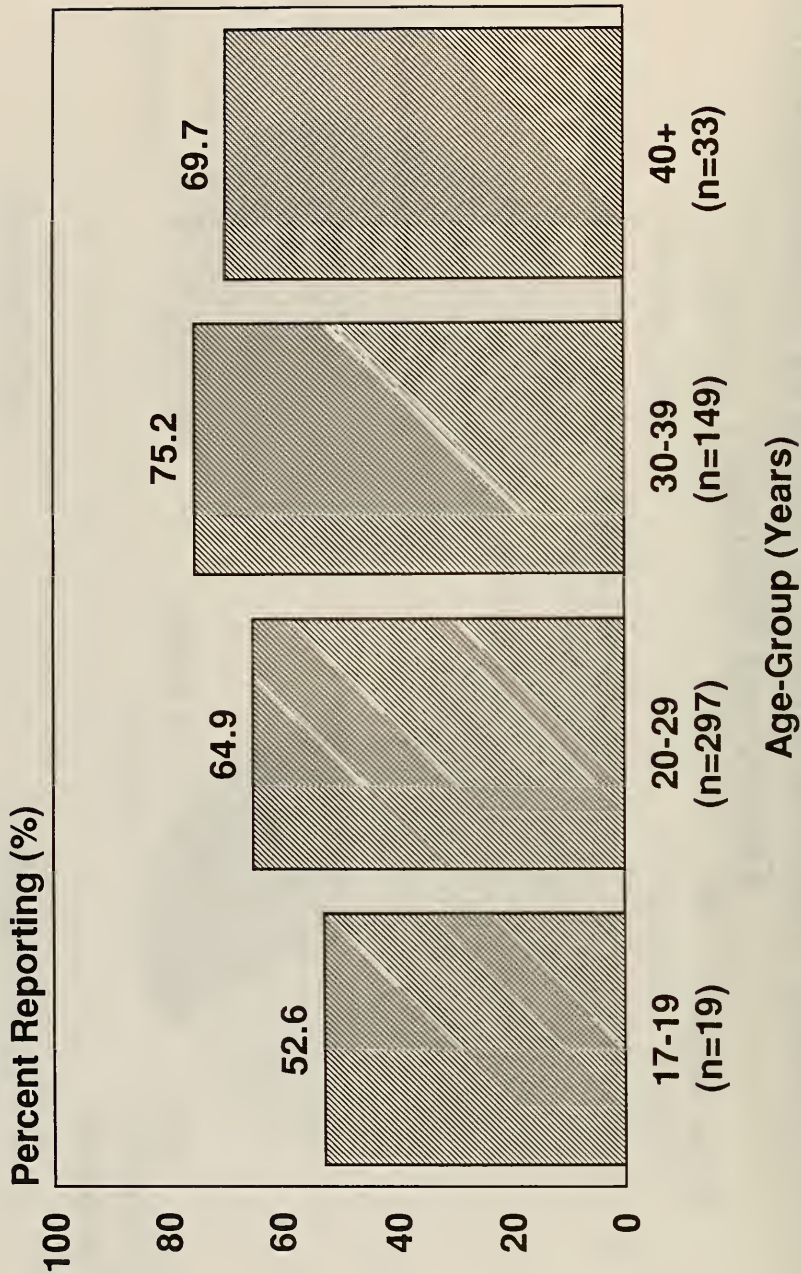


**16.7%**

**Not Tested**

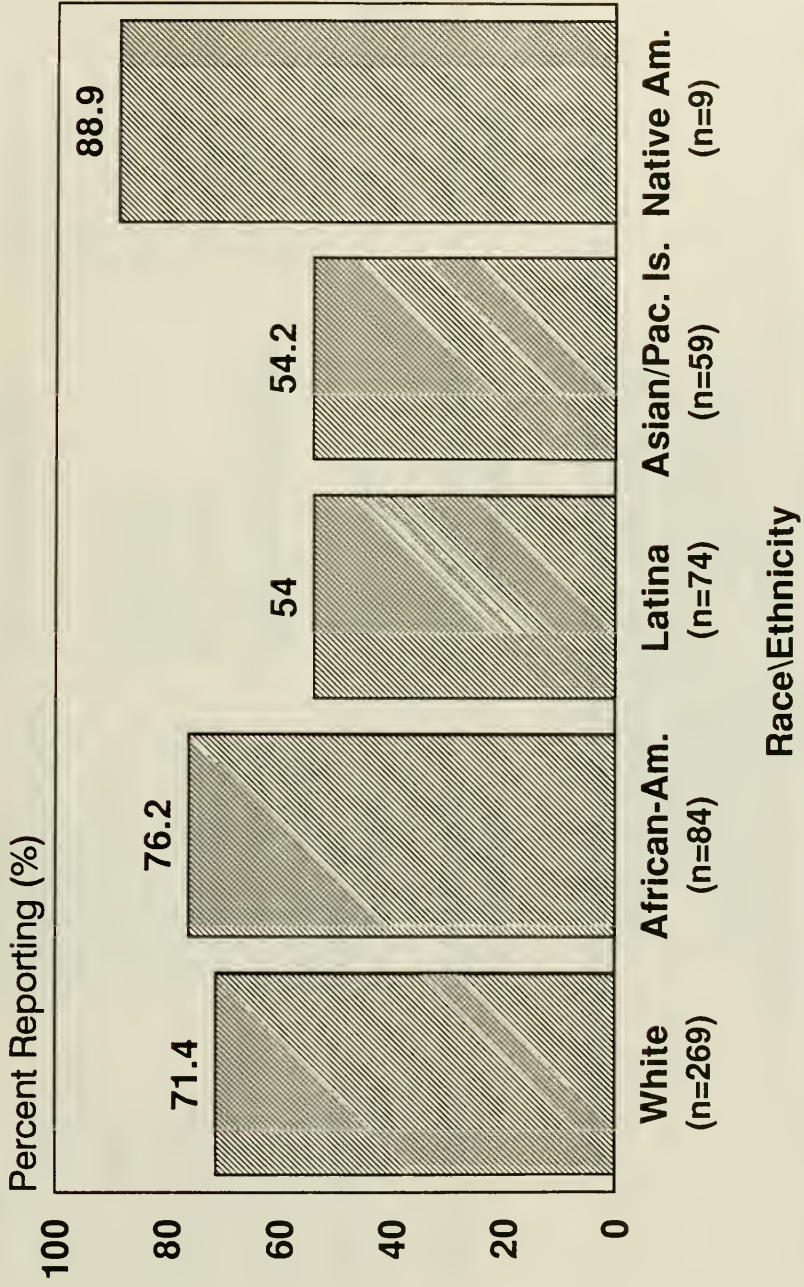
**HIV Positive Participants (n=6)**

# Percent of Participants Who Have Been Tested for HIV by Age-Group





# Percent of Participants Who Have Been Tested for HIV by Race/Ethnicity



# THE WOMEN'S SURVEY TEAM AND COLLABORATORS

Principal Investigator: George Lemp, Dr. P.H.

Study Coordinator: Melissa Jones

Epidemiologist: Tim Kellogg

Operations Manager: Giuliano Nieri

Research Associates: Tia Martinez, Peou Lakhana, Sheri Storey

AIDS Office	Advisory Committee	Volunteer Research Assistant	Special Thanks To:
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Yesenia Aguirre	Carol Dawson	Noemi Barreto	Berkeley Free Clinic
Marsha Amador	Alina Ever		Irene Carmona
Jason Bishop	Bonnie Faigeles		John Day
Susan Black	Lani Kaahumanu		Diane Haas
Susan Buchbinder	Valerie Kegebein	<b>SFDPH Laboratory</b>	Lyon-Martin Clinic
Vincent Fuqua	Caroline Jean Lee	Dr. Art Back	Kevin McKinney
Delia Garcia	Lori Lee	Brian Louie	Maree Kay Parisi
Danny Givertz	Yvonne Littleton	Ernie Wong	Naomi Prochovnick
Sandra Hernandez	Steve Mills		Lea Sanchez
Laura Hormel	Amanda Newstetter		Rita Shimmin
Harry Mar	Marj Plumb	<b>City of Berkeley</b>	Ivy Wagner
Mitch Katz	Lisa Stanley	<b>Health Department</b>	
Bob Kono	Pat Stevens		
Sean Nguyen	Carmen Vasquez		
Henry Padilla	Katie Young		
Rufina San Juan			
		Laura Anderson	
		Carolyn Ramey	



