

Gay, Lesbian & Bisexual People: A Good Practice Guide for Mental Health Nurses

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OVERVIEW

- LGB people
- Findings from the *Supporting LGBT Lives* study
- Good practice guidelines for MH nurses
- Questions and answers



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LGB People

- **Sexual orientation** - emotional, romantic, sexual or affectionate attraction to individuals of a particular sex
- Heterosexual, lesbian, gay and bisexual
- **6% are LGB** = 250,000 people in ROI



Brief history of homosexuality

- Term *homosexuality* first used in 1869
- **Illness** - Declassified as mental disorder by APA in 1973 and WHO in 1992
- **Crime** – Homosexual acts decriminalised in Ireland in 1993
- **Sin** - “intrinsic moral evil” “objectively disordered” – Pope Benedict in 2008
- **Now** – ‘normal’ but stigma, inequality and discrimination remain with consequences



Minority Stress

- The effects of stigma, marginalisation, discrimination and harassment on mental health of minorities such as LGB people
- Can increase LGB people's vulnerability to developing mental health problems
- ↓ inclusion/equality/support = ↑ risk of minority stress
- ↑ minority stress = ↑ risk to mental health

SUPPORTING LGBT LIVES

A STUDY OF THE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER PEOPLE

Coming Out

REALISING LGBT IDENTITY:

- Most common age = 12 years of age

DISCLOSING LGBT IDENTITY:

- Most common age = 17 years of age
- A time of critical social and emotional development



Coming Out

Coming out is probably one of the most extreme and difficult things you can do. Before you come out you have to deal with it all yourself and it took me six years to. And I couldn't be myself for those six years and it is, again, it's called in the closet because you are in the closet. No one can see you; they see this door because no one's ever opened up the closet to look inside (Gay, Male, 17)



Experiences in School

- 50% reported homophobic bullying in their schools
- 40% verbally threatened by fellow students
- 25% physically threatened by fellow students
- 20% missed or skipped school because they felt threatened or were afraid of getting hurt at school
- 34% reported homophobic comments by teachers
- 8% were called homophobic names by teachers
- 5% left school early because of homophobic bullying



- *I'm sure people knew I was gay you know, I did walk up through (rural village) and people would be calling faggot and stuff like that. It did kill me a lot hearing you know the words and stuff and I was afraid as well, I felt very alone inside and the drink was my best friend (Gay, Male, 24).*



Experiences in School

I left school because of the hurt and suffering I got in school, and the teachers didn't care, as I think it was a case of "well they call him gay and he probably is gay, so why should we step in, cos they aren't saying anything wrong" attitude towards gay people... even though I wasn't out at school. I was forced to leave at my junior cert, due to the abuse I got ... jumped on, called puff, queer etc.

(Gay, Male, 23, Survey Respondent).

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RESPECT
PARTNERSHIP

Experience of Harassment

- 80% had been verbally abused because of their LGBT identity
- 40% were threatened with physical violence
- 25% had been punched, kicked or beaten

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Experiences in Work

- Over 70% were out to some or all of their work colleagues.
- 15% experienced verbal threats because they were, or were believed to be, LGBT, and 7% were physically threatened by a work colleague.
- Almost 10% admitted to having missed work because they were afraid of being hurt or felt threatened because of the LGBT identity



Experiences in Work

There was a sense of tolerance of my sexual orientation in [my] job, but no sense that my relationship with my partner of eleven years deserved parity of esteem with my two bosses' heterosexual marriages. My partner was referred to repeatedly as my "friend", despite my repeated correction of the term. This was not bullying per se, but it was blatant inequality. I don't know precisely how it can be addressed"

(Female, Lesbian, 35, Survey Participant)



Self-harm

- 27% of participants had self-harmed at least once
- Almost 50% of these reported 6 or more acts of self-harm
- Cutting, scratching and self-hitting - the most common forms of self-harm behaviour (80% of those who self-harmed).
- Average age of onset = 16 years



Self harm

- Onset typically coincided with particularly difficult or painful periods linked to the struggle of coming to terms with one's LGBT identity.
- Female respondents were almost twice as likely to have self-harmed as males.
- Just over 50% of those who had self-harmed sought no form of help for their self-harm, through either formal or informal means.
- Self-harm strongly linked to LGBT-related stresses



Suicidality

- Majority (3/4) *rarely* or *never* seriously contemplated taking their own lives.
- However, 18% had attempted suicide at least once.
- Over 1/3 of those aged 25 years and under *had thought seriously* about ending their lives within the past year.
- Average age of first suicide attempt was 17 years.
- Suicidality strongly linked to LGBT-related stresses

LGBT Suicidality

History of Suicidality was strongly linked to:

- Younger age
- Victimization experiences
- Fear of rejection (or actual rejection) by family & friends
- Homophobic bullying in school
- Higher alcohol consumption

Mental Health Resilience

- The majority (81%) of LGBT people are *now* comfortable with their identity, with over two thirds of respondents disclosing their identity (coming out) to all their immediate family
- Mental health resilience came from social support and developing a positive LGBT identity
- Support of friends and family, and positive experiences in communities, schools or workplaces are critical
- Most LGBT people develop resilience to the stress caused by stigmatisation, harassment and discrimination, and live happy and satisfying lives.

Resilience

"I am happy to conclude by saying that I am now a very content, confident, well-adjusted gay man, fully out and very happy to be gay. I have grown and thrived with the love and support of my friends and two of my sisters ... being gay was never my problem but how people reacted to me being gay was certainly part of what made life very hard in the past"

(Gay, Male, 35, Survey Participant)

"I am proud to be a lesbian but it took me a long time to accept my sexuality and it would have been easier to accept if society was a little more understanding"

(Lesbian, Female, 26)

Good Practice Guidelines

1. Be aware of LGB mental health issues and gay-specific stressors
2. Don't assume all service users are heterosexual
3. Respond supportively when service users disclose that they are LGB
4. Challenge anti-gay bias and take a gay-affirmative approach
5. Demonstrate that your practice is inclusive of LGB

Thank you

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