

Lesbian, Gay & Bisexual Awareness

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Outline of Workshop

- Group Agreement
- Homophobia, Heterosexism & Discrimination
- Overview of Research
- 'Coming Out'
- Challenging Myths & Stereotypes

Group Agreement

- Respect each other's right to have opinions
- It's ok to disagree
- Challenge the comment, not the person
- Own your own values – use “I” statements
- No such thing as a stupid question or comment
- Use appropriate language (lesbian, gay)
- Don't make assumptions about group members' sexual orientation
- Share the learning – not the person
- Switch off mobile phones

Definitions

- Homophobia + examples
- Heterosexism + examples
 - Discrimination

Definitions

- Lesbian – A woman whose primary sexual and romantic attraction is to other women
- Gay – A man whose primary sexual and romantic attraction is to other men
- Bisexual – A person who has sexual and romantic attraction to both men and women
- Heterosexual – A person whose primary sexual and romantic attraction is to the opposite gender

Definitions

Homophobia

Homophobia means the active targeting of lesbian, gay and bisexual people, based on ignorance, fear and prejudice. It is rooted in simplistic and stereotypical views of what lesbians, gay men and bisexuals are. It can take the form of verbal abuse, physical violence or vitriolic attacks in the media.

Definitions

Heterosexism

Heterosexism is the way in which everyone is assumed to be heterosexual unless otherwise stated. It leads to privilege for heterosexuals and the neglect of issues facing lesbian, gay and bisexual people.

Definitions

Discrimination

Discrimination is the deprivation of resources, services or opportunities for an individual or group, and can occur when a person (or institution, or culture) holds negative attitudes, i.e. assumptions, stereotypes, prejudices or values, AND has the power to take action.

Overview of Research

- Approximately 5% of the British population is predominantly or exclusively gay or lesbian

Source: Johnson 2001, A. M., Mercer, C. H., Erens, B., et al (2001) Sexual behaviour in Britain partnerships, practices and HIV risk behaviours. *Lancet*, **358**, 1835-1842

Overview of Research

- 37% of lesbian, gay and bisexual young people are bullied at school
- Average duration of homophobic bullying is five years
- Only 22% of those bullied told a teacher
- Only 39% of those bullied told a parent or family member

Source: River, I, (2001) The bullying of sexual minorities at schools: Its nature and long-term correlates, *Education and Child Psychology*, 18 (1), pp. 33-46.

Overview of Research

- 4% of gay men said that they had experienced discrimination from a health professional

Source: Vital Statistics 2002: The National Gay Men's Sex Survey

- 92.0% of all gay and bisexual men were currently registered with a GP
- Three quarters (78.8%) of all gay and bisexual men had visited a GP surgery in the last year

Overview of Research

- Only a quarter (27.5%) of all men registered with a GP stated that the staff at that surgery knew they had sex with men
- Over half (54.7%) stated that the staff at their surgery did not know they had sex with men
- A third (33.3%) of all gay and bisexual men who were registered with a GP said the staff at that GP surgery did not know they had sex with men AND they would be unhappy if they did know

Source: Keogh, P., Weatherburn, P., Henderson, L., Reid, D. Dodds, C., Hickson, F. (2004) Doctoring Gay Men. *Exploring the contribution of General Practice*

Overview of Research

Studies have repeatedly concluded that homophobic attitudes are present among a significant proportion of health professionals (see Malley & Tasker 1999, Bridget 2001 for comprehensive reviews)

- It has been estimated that homophobic attitudes are prevalent among 20% of UK medical providers

Source: GLADD (2004) *Dignity at work for Lesbian and Gay doctors and dentists, medical and dental students*. London, The Gay and Lesbian Association of Doctors and Dentists. Cited in Dodds, C., Keogh, P., Hickson, P. (2005) *It makes me sick Heterosexism, homophobia and the health of Gay men and Bisexual men*

Overview of Research

One outcome of such attitudes can be either a negative overall reaction to a disclosure, or more commonly a clinical overemphasis on patients' sexual health at the expense of their health needs more generally (Taylor & Robertson 1994). In addition, health care professionals may be likely to attribute a presenting problem to a patient's sexuality, rather than taking diagnostic steps to establish causation.

Overview of Research

- Between one third and one fifth of mental health care professionals whose LGB clients had disclosed their sexuality had immediately jumped to the conclusion that the individuals' mental health morbidity must stem from their sexuality. (King *et al.* 2003a)

Source: King M, McKeown E, Warner J, Ramsay A, Johnson K, Cort C, Wright L, Blizard R, Davidson O (2003b) Mental health and quality of life of Gay men and Lesbians in England and Wales – controlled, cross-sectional study. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 183: 552-558 cited in Dodds, C., Keogh. P., Hickson, P. (2005) It makes me sick *Heterosexism, homophobia and the health of Gay men and Bisexual men*

What are the implications for Young Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People?

- 53% contemplate suicide
- 40% attempt suicide once
- 30% attempt suicide more than once
- 17% go on to have long-term mental health problems

Source: River, I, (2001) The bullying of sexual minorities at schools: Its nature and long-term correlates, *Education and Child Psychology*, 18 (1), pp. 33-46.

Bullying

- 72% of lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) adults reported a regular history of absenteeism at school due to homophobic harassment.
- 50% who had been bullied at school had contemplated self-harm or suicide – 40% had made at least one attempt to self harm.

Source: In *Social exclusion, absenteeism and sexual minority youth* (Rivers, I. 2000)

Bullying

- Research carried out in 2003 found that 51% of gay men and 30% of lesbians reported being bullied physically at school, compared with 47% of heterosexual men and 20% of heterosexual women.

Source: *Mental health and social wellbeing of gay men, lesbians and bisexuals in England and Wales*, Royal Free College and University College Medical School, 2003

Bullying

The Bullying of sexual minorities at school: its nature and long-term correlates (Rivers, 2001) studied the types of bullying experienced by 190 LGB adults, and found that:

- 82% of respondents had been subject to name-calling
- 71% had been ridiculed in front of others
- 60% had reported being hit or kicked
- 59% had rumours spread about them
- 58% had been teased
- 49% had their belongings stolen
- 27% had been isolated by their peers
- 11% had been sexually assaulted by either peers or teachers, whilst at school

Violence

In the Stonewall survey *Queer Bashing* (1996), almost half of respondents aged under 18 had experienced violence.

- 61% of young LGB people had been harassed (compared with 32% of all respondents)
- 18% of young LGB people had been to the police (compared with 31% overall)
- 40% of violent attacks on under 18s had taken place in school, and in 50% of attacks, the perpetrators were fellow students
- A GALOP survey (*Telling it like it is – LGB youth speak out on homophobic violence*, 1998) found that over a third of 202 respondents had experienced harassment, including verbal, physical and sexual abuse.
- *Understanding homophobic bullying in schools: building a safe learning environment for all pupils* described one young man who had been banned from physical education lessons because of fears for his personal safety.

Source: Stonewall survey *Queer Bashing* (1996)

Mental Health

- 72% of LGB adults surveyed in *Social exclusion, absenteeism and sexual minority youth* (Rivers, I. 2000) reported a regular history of absenteeism at school due to homophobic harassment
- 50% who had been bullied at school contemplated self-harm or suicide - 40% had made at least one attempt to self harm.

Mental Health

Research published in the British Journal of Psychiatry in 2003 (*Mental health and quality of life of gay men and lesbians in England and Wales*) compared the mental health of gay people and their straight counterparts. It found that discrimination and intolerance led to a higher rate of mental anxiety, substance use disorders and suicidal behaviour among gay people. Over 1000 lesbians and gay people took part in the research and a significant proportion had experienced verbal and physical bullying in school on account of their sexual orientation.

In Conclusion...

Thus, studies have concluded that in settings where professionals have little understanding of Gay men's specific health needs, or little desire to better comprehend their social and sexual lives, the standard of care will be low (Taylor & Robertson 1994).

The benefits to improving Gay and Bisexual men's ability to talk about sexuality with their health care providers are clear. Improved openness and honesty, where men are assured of a non-prejudicial response in advance of disclosure, will increase professional capacity to understand and support the whole patient and make a correct diagnosis when one is required.

In Conclusion...

It is only through an awareness of the diversity of sexual identities that the compromised health care of marginal groups can be reversed in all spheres of health provision.

Albarran & Salmon 2000: 450 cited in Dodds, C., Keogh, P., Hickson, P. (2005) *It makes me sick Heterosexism, homophobia and the health of Gay men and Bisexual men*