Stonewall Health Briefings

Stonewall’s pioneering research demonstrates that the specific needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual people are too often overlooked in the provision of healthcare. At the same time, many experience hostility, poor treatment or outright discrimination from healthcare professionals.

Stonewall now works with NHS organisations to improve the health of lesbian, gay and bisexual people and make sure the NHS is aware of its legal duties to provide an equal service to everyone.

This is one in a series of briefings on the health of lesbian, gay and bisexual people in Britain today.

Other briefings in the series:
- Bisexuality
- Disability
- Mental Health
- Domestic Abuse
- Experiences of Healthcare

Ethnicity

The lesbian, gay and bisexual population is ethnically diverse, yet many black and minority ethnic gay people report it’s only the colour of their skin that doctors see. Black and minority ethnic lesbian, gay and bisexual people have health needs that are not being met by the health service, most notably drug use, mental health and domestic abuse. Worryingly, young black and minority ethnic gay pupils report high levels of self-harm and suicidal thoughts alongside significant levels of homophobic bullying at school.

This briefing provides evidence that black and minority ethnic lesbian, gay and bisexual people are more likely to have self-harmed, attempted suicide and taken drugs than men and women in general. A large number of black and minority ethnic lesbian, gay and bisexual people also report negative experiences when accessing healthcare in the last year.

Healthcare services need to recognise that people can be both black and gay. By neglecting a part of who someone is, patients are less likely to be at ease, less likely to put trust in healthcare professionals, and less likely to get the help they need.
Lesbian and Bisexual Women

Stonewall’s research into the health needs of lesbian and bisexual women, Prescription for Change, has found clear differences in their health compared to that of women in general. Lesbian and bisexual women are more likely to have smoked and to drink heavily than women in general. Levels of attempted suicide and self-harm are much higher than in the wider population. In addition, half of lesbian and bisexual women have had a negative experience of healthcare in the past year.

Of black and minority ethnic lesbian and bisexual women:

- A third currently smoke
- 70 per cent had a drink in the last week and a third drink three or more days a week compared to a quarter of women in general
- More than two in five (44 per cent) have taken drugs in the last year, six times more likely than women in general
- Over half (55 per cent) have been screened for sexually transmitted infections
- One in five (19 per cent) over the age of 25 have never had a cervical screen compared to seven per cent of women in general
- Seven per cent have attempted to take their own life in the last year
- A quarter (26 per cent) have deliberately harmed themselves in the last year compared to 0.4 per cent of the general population
- One in five (21 per cent) have an eating disorder compared to 1 in 20 of the general population
- More than one in four (27 per cent) have experienced domestic violence in a relationship compared to one in four women in general
- More than three quarters (76 per cent) say that they are in good health
- More than half (54 per cent) have had negative experiences of healthcare in the past year
- More than half (55 per cent) are not out to their GP or other healthcare professionals
There are also some significant differences among lesbian and bisexual women from different ethnic backgrounds:

- **Only one in eight** (12 per cent) black lesbian and bisexual women said their healthcare professional acknowledged they were lesbian or bisexual after they had come out. **One in four** (26 per cent) white lesbian and bisexual women have received this acknowledgement.

- **More than one in four** (28 per cent) lesbian and bisexual women of mixed or other ethnicity deliberately harmed themselves in the last year compared to **21 per cent** of black women, **20 per cent** of white women and **17 per cent** of Asian women.

- **Almost half** (46 per cent) of mixed and other ethnicity lesbian and bisexual women have taken drugs in the last year compared to a **third** (34 per cent) of white women. **37 per cent** of black women and **35 per cent** of Asian women have taken drugs in the last year.

There are also differences in how women describe their sexual orientation:

- **Asian women** (23 per cent) are more likely to describe themselves as bisexual compared to white women (16 per cent) and black women (eight per cent).

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'I am mixed-race and have a white girlfriend and have experienced negative comments'

_Ailisa, 26, West Midlands_

'I’m isolated because of the different levels of discrimination due to my race, sexuality, mental health problems and single mother status. My own family believe homosexuality is a result of mental illness’

_Anne-Marie, 32, London_

'People have different perceptions of you when you are a person of colour and gay. People are still shocked because “you don’t look gay”!

_Sasha, 39, South East_
Gay and Bisexual Men

Stonewall’s Gay and Bisexual Men’s Health Survey demonstrates that their health needs are not being met, and there are areas of significant concern – most notably in mental health and drug use - that have been overlooked by health services which too often focus solely on gay men’s sexual health.

Of black and minority ethnic gay and bisexual men:

- **More than a quarter** (27 per cent) currently smoke compared to 22 per cent of men in general.
- **Seven in ten** (69 per cent) had a drink in the last week and **three in ten** drink on three or more days per week compared to 35 per cent of men in general.
- **More than half** (53 per cent) have taken drugs in the last year compared to just 12 per cent of men in general.
- **One in four** (26 per cent) report being in ‘fair’ or ‘bad’ health compared to one in six men in general.
- **Five per cent** have attempted to take their own life in the last year. Just 0.4 per cent of men in general attempted to take their own life in the same period.
- **One in twelve** (eight per cent) have harmed themselves in the last year compared to just 1 in 33 men in general who have ever harmed themselves.
- **One in six** (15 per cent) have had problems with their weight or eating in the last year compared to four per cent of men in general.
- **More than half** (55 per cent) have experienced at least one incident of domestic abuse from a family member or partner since the age of 16 compared to 17 per cent of men in general.
- **More than one in five** (22 per cent) have never been tested for any sexually transmitted infection.
- **A quarter** (24 per cent) have never had an HIV test.
- **More than a third** (37 per cent) who have accessed healthcare services in the past year have had a negative experience related to their sexual orientation.
- **One in three** (36 per cent) are not out to their GP or healthcare professionals.
There are some significant differences among gay and bisexual men from different ethnic backgrounds:

- **More than two in five** (43 per cent) black gay and bisexual men have experienced at least one incident of domestic abuse from a family member since the age of 16 compared to **one in five** (22 per cent) white gay and bisexual men. A **third** of Asian men (32 per cent) and mixed and other ethnicity men (34 per cent) have experienced domestic abuse from a family member since 16.

- More white gay and bisexual men check their testicles monthly (34 per cent) than Asian men (21 per cent), black men (24 per cent) and men of mixed or other ethnic background (28 per cent).

- **Seven per cent** of black gay and bisexual men have never been tested for any sexually transmitted infection compared to **three in ten** (30 per cent) Asian men, **one in four** (26 per cent) white men and **24 per cent** of mixed and other ethnicity men.

There are also differences in how men describe their sexual orientation:

- Black men are **twice as likely** to describe themselves as bisexual (13 per cent) compared to white men (seven per cent). **Ten per cent** of Asian men describe themselves as bisexual as do **ten per cent** of mixed and other ethnicity men.

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‘**Homophobia is rife amongst non-white communities**’

**Sean, 28, London**

‘**My health problems are more psychological due to coming from a black family and being gay and being rejected**’

**Mo, 19, North West**

‘**My GP is my father... And he’s black African... So he’s not really pleased with my sexual choice**’

**Ade, 36, East Midlands**
Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Young People

Stonewall research highlights the high levels of homophobic bullying in Britain’s schools today. The impact of bullying on the mental health of gay young people is severe – with many gay young people attempting suicide, self-harming and experiencing depression.

- **More than three in four** (76 per cent) black and minority ethnic gay and bisexual boys have thought about taking their own life compared to 56 per cent of white gay and bisexual boys. 71 per cent of lesbians and bisexual girls thought the same with no significant difference across ethnic background.

- **Over eight in ten** (83 per cent) black and minority ethnic lesbian and bisexual girls deliberately harm themselves compared to 71 per cent of white lesbians and bisexual girls. 36 per cent of gay and bisexual boys have self-harmed with no significant difference across ethnic background.

‘The bullying went on for the whole five years of secondary school. From when I started to when I finished. I tried to fight back. I was depressed, I cut, and I was on the verge of suicide. For one year, I came home everyday crying into my mum’s arms, saying I wanted to leave the school’

Rabi, 15, sixth form college (Greater London)
What the health service can do

The Equality Act 2010 says that all public bodies – including NHS organisations – are required by law to take steps proactively to promote equality for lesbian, gay and bisexual people. This includes black and minority ethnic gay people.

There are a number of steps health services can take to begin to improve the health and experience of black and minority ethnic lesbian, gay and bisexual people:

- Train staff on the specific health needs of black and minority ethnic lesbian, gay and bisexual people
- Engage and involve local groups (see Stonewall's ‘Whats in My Area?’ database) to identify areas of unmet need – for example suicide prevention and mental health services
- Display gay-friendly images in a range of healthcare settings that reflect black and minority ethnic communities

‘I think it’s important to create health campaigns that target black and minority ethnic people’

Simon, 46, London
The Studies

The findings in this briefing are taken from a number of Stonewall publications:

**Gay and Bisexual Men’s Health Survey**
In 2011 Stonewall and Sigma Research asked gay and bisexual men from across Britain to complete a survey about their health. 6,861 men responded making it the largest survey of its kind in the world.

Ninety five per cent of respondents were white and five per cent were black or minority ethnic.

**Prescription for Change: Lesbian and bisexual women’s health check 2008**
In 2007 Stonewall and De Montfort University asked lesbians and bisexual women from Britain to complete a survey about their health. 6,178 women responded making it the largest survey of its kind in Europe.

Ninety four per cent of respondents were white and six per cent were black or minority ethnic.

**The School Report**
Between November 2011 and February 2012, Stonewall and the Centre for Family Research, University of Cambridge asked 1,614 lesbian, gay and bisexual young people aged between 11 and 19 to complete a survey about their experiences in school or college.

Ninety two per cent of respondents were white and eight per cent were black or minority ethnic.
Further Resources

Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People in Later Life

One minority at a time: Being black and gay

Sexual Orientation: A guide for the NHS

Healthy Lives

For more NHS specific case-studies, best practice examples and research visit www.healthylives.stonewall.org.uk

Stonewall publications

All Stonewall publications cited in this briefing are free to download from www.stonewall.org.uk/publications

For hard copies of any of these publications visit www.stonewall.org.uk/resources
Ethnicity
Stonewall Health Briefing
www.healthylives.stonewall.org.uk