



Mental health

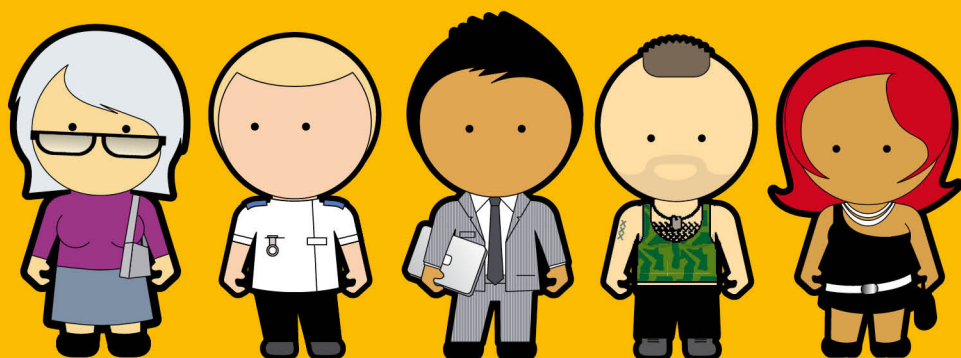
Stonewall health briefing



Mental health

Stonewall Health Briefing

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Stonewall Health Briefings

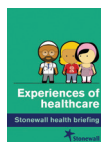
Stonewall's pioneering research demonstrates that the specific needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual people are too often overlooked in the provision of healthcare. At the same time, many experience hostility, poor treatment or outright discrimination from healthcare professionals.

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**
- **Domestic Abuse**
- **Ethnicity**
- **Experiences of Healthcare**



Mental health

Although attitudes towards gay people are improving, most lesbian, gay and bisexual people have experienced difficulties in their lives. Being gay does not, in and of itself, cause mental health problems. Instead, homophobic bullying, rejection from family, harassment at work and poor responses from healthcare professionals are still commonplace for many lesbian, gay and bisexual people.

This briefing provides evidence that lesbian, gay and bisexual people are more likely to have experienced depression or anxiety, attempted suicide or had suicidal thoughts, and self-harmed than men and women in general. For young lesbian, gay and bisexual people who have experienced homophobic bullying, levels of suicidal thoughts and depression are far higher than amongst those who have not been bullied.

Mental health services need to change their approach if they are to understand and meet the needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Assumptions of heterosexuality, a lack of visibility and patchy equality monitoring need to be overcome to improve the mental health of lesbian, gay and bisexual people throughout Britain.

Depression & Anxiety

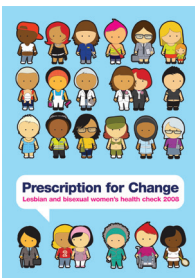


Stonewall's Gay and Bisexual Men's Health Survey asked respondents a set of questions widely used by health professionals that help determine whether someone is experiencing depression or anxiety at that time and found that:

- **One in seven** (13 per cent) gay and bisexual men are currently experiencing moderate to severe levels of mixed depression and anxiety compared to seven per cent of men in general
- A further **nine per cent** of gay and bisexual men are experiencing moderate to severe levels of depression with mild or no anxiety compared to two per cent of men in general
- Thus overall, **22 per cent** of gay and bisexual men are experiencing moderate to severe levels of depression
- Bisexual men are more likely to experience moderate to severe levels of depression (26 per cent)
- **Four per cent** of gay and bisexual men are experiencing moderate to severe anxiety with mild or no depression

'I've been suffering from depression due to bullying since I was 15. I've been on prescribed medication since then and still feel that there is little help out there.'

Charlie, 22, London



Stonewall's Prescription for Change asked respondents to report on feelings of depression and anxiety over the last year and found that:

- In the last year, **four in five** (79 per cent) lesbian and bisexual women say they have had a spell of sadness, felt miserable or felt depressed. This increases to **84 per cent** of bisexual women and **86 per cent** of black and minority ethnic women

- In the last year, **three quarters** (74 per cent) of lesbian and bisexual women say they felt anxious or nervous. This increases to **78 per cent** of bisexual women and **81 per cent** of black and minority ethnic lesbian and bisexual women



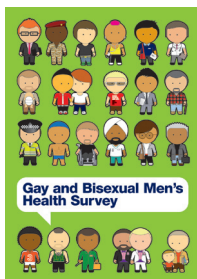
Stonewall's The School Report 2012 asked young people about their experiences at school and their current mental health. It found that:

- **More than half** (55 per cent) of lesbian, gay and bisexual young people experience homophobic bullying in Britain's schools
- **Almost half** (46 per cent) of gay pupils who experience homophobic bullying have symptoms consistent with depression. **Thirty five per cent** of gay young people who aren't bullied are also likely to be depressed compared to just five per cent of young people generally
- **Half** (49 per cent) of lesbians and bisexual girls have symptoms consistent with depression compared to **three in ten** (29 per cent) gay and bisexual boys
- **Almost half** (46 per cent) of those who experience bullying report having low self-esteem compared to **35 per cent** of gay young people who aren't bullied
- Gay pupils who don't feel they have an adult to talk to are much more likely to have symptoms of depression than gay pupils who do have an adult to talk to (54 per cent compared to 37 per cent)

'I believed everything they were saying to me.'

Adam, 16, secondary academy (West Midlands)

Suicide



Stonewall's Gay and Bisexual Men's Health Survey asked respondents about suicide and suicidal thoughts and found that:

- In the last year, **three per cent** of gay men have attempted to take their own life. This increases to **five per cent** of black and minority ethnic men, **five per cent** of bisexual men and **seven per cent** of gay and bisexual men with a disability. In the same period, 0.4 per cent of all men attempted to take their own life
- In the last year, **27 per cent** of gay men thought about taking their own life even if they would not do it. This rises to **35 per cent** of black and minority ethnic men, **38 per cent** of bisexual men and **47 per cent** of gay and bisexual men with a disability. Just four per cent of men in general thought about taking their own life in the last year
- **Half** of gay and bisexual men said they have felt life was not worth living compared to 17 per cent of men in general. **Almost half** (46 per cent) of gay and bisexual men who have felt this way did so in the last year

'I have tried to hang myself. I have also swallowed cleaning fluid.'

Gary, 25, South West



Stonewall's Prescription for Change asked respondents about suicide and suicidal thoughts and found that:

- In the last year, **five per cent** of lesbians and bisexual women say they have attempted to take their own life. This increases to **seven per cent** of bisexual women, **seven per cent** of black and minority ethnic women and **ten per cent** of lesbians and bisexual women with a disability
- In the last year, **33 per cent** of lesbians and bisexual women thought about taking their own life even if they would not do it. This increases to **39 per cent** of bisexual women, **41 per cent** of black and minority ethnic women and **52 per cent** of disabled women



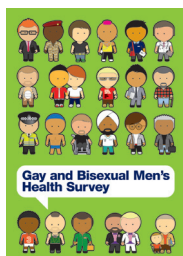
The School Report 2012 asked young people about the impact of homophobic bullying and found that:

- **Nearly one in four** (23 per cent) lesbian, gay and bisexual young people have tried to take their own life at some point. Girls are more likely to attempt this than boys (29 per cent compared to 16 per cent)
- Gay young people who experience homophobic bullying are much more likely to attempt to take their own life than gay young people who aren't bullied; **28 per cent** have attempted to take their own life compared to **17 per cent**
- **Seven in ten** (71 per cent) lesbian and bisexual girls and **almost six in ten** (57 per cent) gay and bisexual boys have thought about taking their own life, with boys who are black or minority ethnic at particular risk of suicidal thoughts at **76 per cent**
- Gay young people who experience homophobic bullying are much more likely to think about taking their own life (72 per cent compared to 56 per cent). In comparison, Samaritans says seven per cent of all young people in general have ever attempted to take their own life and 20 to 45 per cent have thought about it
- **Two in five** (41 per cent) lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils who experience homophobic bullying attempt or think about taking their own life directly because of the bullying

'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)

Self-harm



Stonewall's Gay and Bisexual Men's Health Survey asked respondents about self-harm and found that:

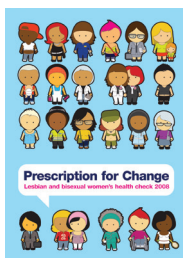
- **One in fourteen** (seven per cent) gay and bisexual men deliberately harmed themselves in the last year, which including cutting themselves or swallowing pills or objects. This increases to **11 per cent** of bisexual men and **15 per cent** of gay and bisexual men with a disability. Just 1 in 33 men in general have ever

deliberately harmed themselves

- **Three in five** gay and bisexual men who have self-harmed in the last year have cut themselves and **almost one in four** (23 per cent) have swallowed pills or objects. **One in six** (16 per cent) have burned themselves

'I've punched, bit, pinched myself and pulled my hair out.'

Ed, 16, South West



Stonewall's Prescription for Change asked respondents about self-harm and found that:

- In the last year, **one in five** lesbian and bisexual women have deliberately harmed themselves in some way. This increases to **26 per cent** of black and minority ethnic women, **29 per cent** of bisexual women and **31 per cent** of lesbians and bisexual women with a disability compared to just 0.4 per cent of the general population

- **Three quarters** of those who have self-harmed in the last year have cut themselves, and **one in five** have swallowed pills or objects



The School Report 2012 asked young people if they have ever self-harmed and the link to bullying and found that:

- **More than half** (56 per cent) of gay young people deliberately harm themselves, which can include cutting or burning themselves. Lesbians and bisexual girls are twice as likely as gay and bisexual boys to self-harm (72 per cent compared to 36 per cent), with girls who are black or minority ethnic at greatest risk at **83 per cent**

- Gay young people who experience homophobic bullying are more likely to harm themselves than those who aren't bullied (61 per cent compared to 50 per cent). In comparison, NSPCC estimates that between 1 in 15 and 1 in 10 young people in general deliberately harm themselves
- **Two in five** (41 per cent) lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils who experience homophobic bullying say they deliberately harm themselves directly because of the bullying, which is consistent with other research that links experience of bullying with increased risk of self-harm

'I have recently started to cut myself. I have had enough of being hated by so many people for just being who I am.'

Rufus, 15, secondary academy (East Midlands)

What the health service can do

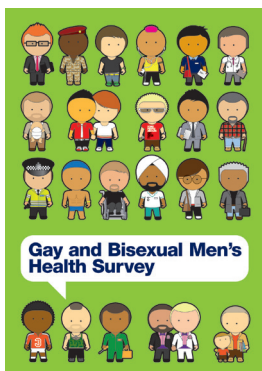
A lack of visibility of lesbian, gay and bisexual people in mental health services and poor measurement of access and outcomes for lesbian, gay and bisexual people has an impact on the mental health and experience of gay young people. The high incidence of attempted suicide, self-harm and homophobic bullying in gay young people means mental health services must actively work to improve the health of lesbian, gay and bisexual people.

There are a number of steps health services can take to improve the mental health of lesbian, gay and bisexual people:

- Identify patients who are lesbian, gay or bisexual and take proactive steps to enable them to receive the best possible care
- Work alongside schools and other education organisations to focus on early intervention and tackle homophobic bullying
- Train staff on the specific mental health needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual people

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.



Prescription for Change: Lesbian and bisexual women's health check 2008

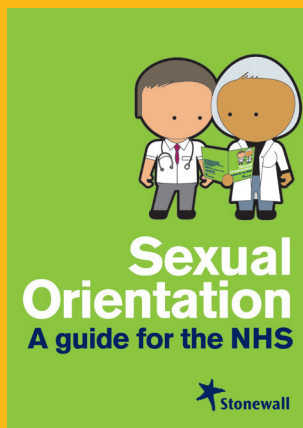
In 2007 Stonewall and De Montfort University asked lesbians and bisexual women from Britain to complete a survey about their health. 6,178 women responded making it the largest survey of its kind in Europe.



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.

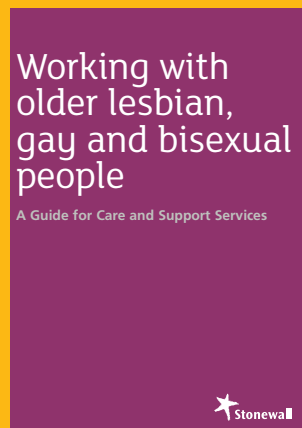
Further Resources



Sexual Orientation: A Guide for the NHS



Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People in Later Life



Working with older lesbian, gay and bisexual people: A Guide for Care and Support Services

Healthy Lives

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

Education

For support on tackling and preventing homophobic bullying in schools visit www.stonewall.org.uk/education

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/resource

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