

Health of Minority Communities Research

LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans)

Background: “Part of the Picture” research 2009-11(14) carried out by LGF (Lesbian and Gay Foundation) provided a summary picture of alcohol and substance misuse that generated closely matching results with the national data set.

Although Cheshire East data could not be extrapolated, the assumption was made that findings for Cheshire East would also closely resemble the national sample. The report estimates 18,500 LGBT people live in Cheshire East.

Data highlighted four areas of concern:

1. Use of drugs compared to the general population – research suggested that drug use by LGB people is 7 times higher than in the general population

2. Problematic drinking patterns – available data suggested that binge drinking is about twice as common in gay and bisexual males and almost twice as common in lesbian gay and bisexual females when compared to the wider population

3. Substance dependency - research suggests that LGB people are not only more likely to take drugs or binge drink but are more likely to be dependent on these substances

4. Barriers to information, advice and help – Analysis of “Part of the Picture” research also indicated that LGB people are:

- Having difficulties accessing service where they feel comfortable and confident in the services provided
- Reporting both perceptual and structural barriers to accessing information, advice or help on substance use

The report concluded:

*“The current relative lack of evidence reinforces LGB&T needs and experiences as being a low priority, which in turn further re-enforces the lack of LGB&T specific evidence. Therefore, it is essential that evidence is proactively sought out or produced in the development of JSNAs and Health and Wellbeing Strategies. **This should be done in partnership with local LGB&T people, groups and organisations.**”*

As part of the JSNA Project, staff at CVS Cheshire East surveyed LGBT people and VCFS support agencies in Cheshire East, to check out the findings against local experiences, and in particular real and perceived barriers to accessing information, advice and help.



Methodology:

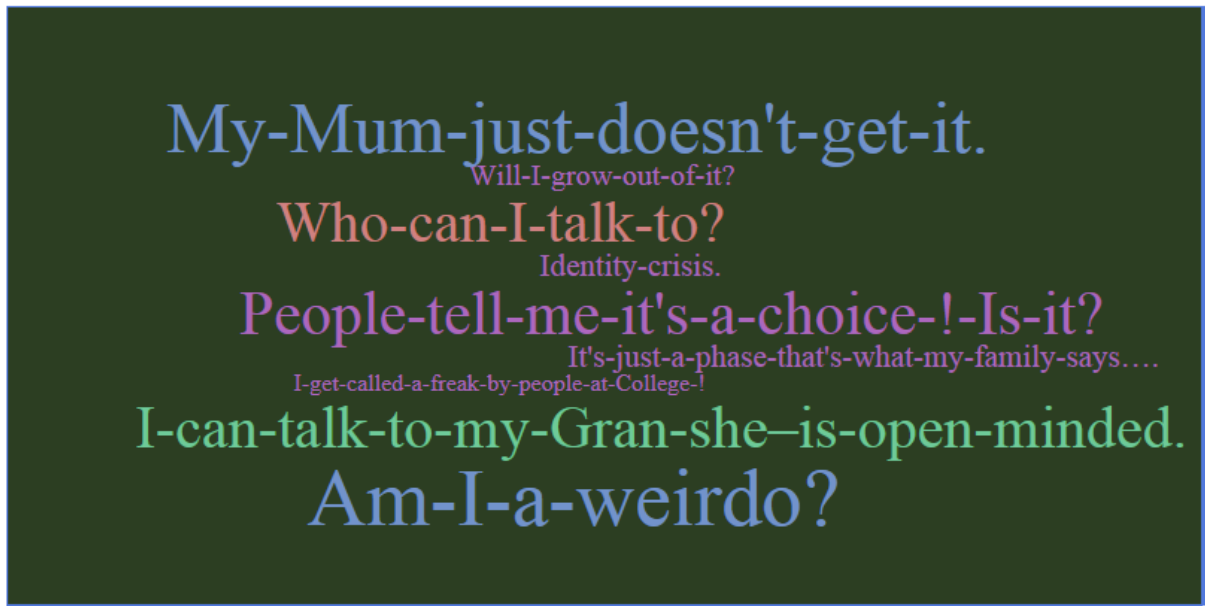
Individuals' questionnaires were distributed via VCFS organisations Body Positive (Cheshire Cheese), Gay Farmers, Lesbian and Gay Foundation and Utopia.

Organisations' questionnaires were sent out to VCFS organisations that support LGBT people

The research included work with focus groups to gather anecdotal evidence about:

- Real/perceived attitude of health providers
- Real/perceived barriers when accessing services
- Stigma, awareness, and changes over recent years
- Service provision for young people and LGBT people over 18
- Perceptions about health treatment/s
- Success stories about when things have gone well
- Difficult or negative experiences and how it could have been done better
- Assumptions/language/a safe space - LGB and T inclusion – how do we make it a reality?

- Three focus groups were delivered



- Focus Group at Macclesfield Utopia- this was attended by approximately 16 young people under the age of 18 and two youth workers. Uptake on completing questionnaires was minimal but most young people talked with the research team regarding the questions raised and reported health and wellbeing issues they faced.
- Focus Group at Congleton Utopia, (Vision) - 3 attendees under the age of 18 and one youth worker, this session was run as a workshop where attendees wrote answers to the questionnaire on sheets and discussed issues as a group with the research team. The individuals also took their work to share with the Crewe group and reported back any additional insight.
- Focus Group for those over the age of 18. This was held at The Chappel Centre in Congleton with 3 attendees. Again, this session was run as a workshop where attendees wrote answers to the questionnaire on sheets and discussed issues as a group with the research team.
- The service managers from Body Positive and Agricultural Chaplaincy completed the 'organisational questionnaire'.
- We received 13 questionnaires that had been completed by service users.

The total number of service- users consulted from the LGBT community in Cheshire East was 35 in addition to 3 Youth Workers and a service manager from Body Positive.

The Utopia groups are Youth Groups for LGBT people, the Macclesfield group is for those up to the age of 25, the Congleton group is for those up to the age of 19 and the Crewe group up to the age of 19.

Body Positive is based in Crewe and is a Health and Wellbeing service for LGBT people, young people and the general public, in particular MSM (Men who have sex

with men). The Health and Wellbeing service is largely centred on providing advice and guidance on developing healthy relationships, practicing safe sex and improving their understanding of their own sexuality. There are currently 134 registered users of the service and 1800 Cheshire Cheese newsletter recipients. This does not include MSM outreach or public outreach numbers which would increase the total to over 4000. Of the 134 registered users 69.4% are heterosexual, 23.1% LGBT and 7.4% undecided or not fully completed their registration.

Key Findings – LGBT

- Language plays a large part in how LGBT people feel in a Health & Wellbeing environment, use of the term 'partner' for example.
- In Health & Wellbeing settings LGBT people feel that there is a presence of 'heteronormativity' i.e. assumptions made that the service user is 'straight' and there can be issues when identifying a same sex partner as a next of kin.
- The presence of the LGBT rainbow/flag on a leaflet or poster in a surgery window indicating that the staff there had had some awareness training would put an LGBT person at ease.
- The needs of the non-scene community are largely ignored in research unless looking at specifically rural populations.
- Most respondents in this research did not feel alcoholism and drug abuse were their main health needs.
- Isolation and loneliness around sexual orientation is an issue, and can lead to depression and the use of substances
- Early intervention is key to breaking into the cycle of isolation, depression, self-harm and possible suicide.
- VCFS support groups and services are clearly needed in Cheshire East where the social 'scene' for LGBT people is very limited.
- Gay farmers are a particularly vulnerable group in rural Cheshire East

Recommendations

- As part of Health Professionals 'Diversity' training there should be a particular section focused on raising professional's awareness particularly in terms of language and 'heteronormativity'.
- Health & Wellbeing services should consider adopting a quality mark and include the rainbow flag on their marketing material/ websites and other service- facing material.
- Service-design for LGBT people should be based around providing healthy forms of exploring sexuality and not on the assumption that alcoholism and drug abuse is inevitable.
- Service-design should consider mental health provision for LGBT people and take into account how important VCFS groups are for the health and wellbeing of this minority community.
- Service-design should take into account the increased risk of suicide amongst gay farmers and continue to provide specific support



Barriers – Real or Perceived?

Research to date with the LGBT community has highlighted that there are still real barriers, in addition to perceived ones, in the health care environment. One of these highlighted was LGBT people feel that there is a presence of 'heteronormativity' i.e. assumptions made that the service user is 'straight'. Some service users have reported that they have to 'come out' repeatedly and have been made feel uncomfortable about identifying their partner as next of kin.

In all of the focus groups, and some of the responses via questionnaire, education and training of Health Professionals was raised as something that should be further developed to benefit the needs of the LGBT Community. It has been suggested that the presence of the rainbow flag/mark in surgeries, leaflets would put service users at ease in addition to raised awareness in staff. Focus groups have highlighted that language used by professionals (other than those running LGBT groups) impacts greatly on the quality of service provided difference and how service- users react.

When respondents were asked "What Stops You Getting Advice or Support?" the responses were as follows:

- Worried about repercussions
- Don't know other LGBT people
- Bad experiences

- Scared
- Not being out
- Isolation
- Getting that extra help with mental health and drug misuse
- The need for more accessible counselling

When respondents and focus groups were asked what was hard to talk about the following were reported by a large proportion of respondents;

- Mental Health Issues ,
- Sexual Health and STI's ,
- 'Hate Crime' verbal abuse /Homophobia and Transphobia

The following were reported by minimal respondents;

- Correctional rape and same sex rape.
- Suicide and the early prevention of such.

When respondents were asked what needs to happen to make things easier for you, responses included;

- "Doctors to know more about where to direct you to"
- "Have an LGBT support/health worker at doctors"
- "Accessible counselling"
- "Support worker at College" *
- "More advertised help groups and drop ins especially for under 18's"
- "Access to Sexual Health services at different times and at College"
- "Much education in schools and youth clubs"
- "I find it difficult having to correct health workers when they assume I am heterosexual. Once that barrier is overcome things generally get easier."
- Lesbians are unlikely to join or benefit from group work sessions with men, or to open up fully if it's mixture of women who are heterosexual – if cost is an issue should consider assistance with travel/child-care costs to allow LGBT people access to areas that can provide specific services."

**Body Positive provide drop-in services at South Cheshire College and Ellesmere Port and Hanbridge that include in-depth interventions to support LGBT people alongside general health services but are not available throughout Cheshire East*



Mental Health - Substance Misuse - the Scene

As part of the focus groups with young LGBT people, reference was made to some of the findings of the LGF (Lesbian and Gay foundation) research conducted in 'The Village' in Manchester between 2010 and 2012. During discussion around substance misuse amongst the LGBT community, the general consensus was that the issues highlighted in the study in 'The Village' in Manchester was not representative of the LGBT population in East Cheshire.

Respondents reported that meeting places for LGBT people tend to be places that encourage drinking alcohol and that for those not interested in the 'Scene' it is difficult to find other LGBT people to socialise with. Many of those completing the questionnaires said that there is not much of a 'scene' in East Cheshire, therefore the VCFS groups that are available are even more important for social interaction with other members of this community.

The LGF report stated that majority of respondents were not involved in any formal groups or support activities but would like to be.

One respondent referred to a VCFS group as a 'Safe Haven'. Service users have commented:

"I think there should be more support groups for people in my community to use to that they can air their views and off load"

"Nowhere near enough groups and not fully advertised in public places"

"We need non-scene/non-bar ways of socialising"

"Isolation is often a problem in rural, small towns. This caused strain on relationships and emotional health"

"Need more diverse social groups, networking occasions"

"What worked well? - Body Positive support workers when coming out about my status and when there was a youth group, not being so alone, incredible"

"What worked well? "Approaching Body Positive for general support, the very warm welcome and non-judgmental attitude I experienced"

Isolation and loneliness amongst this community has already been reported as an issue in terms of social activities, however Body Positive also reported that *"Isolation and loneliness around sexual orientation continues to be an issue whereby service users may take risks with their sexual health to secure emotional comfort."*

One respondent stated;

"No problem with the NHS apart from Mental Health"

Body Positive also reported that;

“We reduce the isolation of MSMs (men who have sex with men) and by doing so improve their mental health and empowerment to act to protect their own health (Body Positive, Client Focus Group)”

Body Positive also described an emerging health priority,

“The needs of the ‘non-scene’ community are largely ignored in research unless looking at specifically rural populations”. Much more attention needs to be given in service-design to provide alternative healthier forms of exploring sexuality”

It was noted that current health models seem to be based on the assumption that alcohol and drug abuse is inevitable. Body Positive reiterated that many of their service users/client groups are not representative of this, and that services—design needs to be based on local needs of LGBT people. This was also corroborated by many of the young people the research team spoke to at the focus groups.

There were only 2 respondents that felt the LGF research and findings reflected their own use of substances and binge drinking. One respondent cited a link between the use of substances and isolation, mental ill-health and poverty.

Staff at Body Positive found from one of their focus groups that receiving the ‘Cheshire Cheese’ led to feeling more empowered;

“The Cheshire Cheese has allowed recipients to make their first steps in coming-out and accessing service local to them as well as allowing them to feel they can be heard (Body Positive, Service User Feedback, Chester Pride 2013)”

Additional information

Agricultural Chaplaincy supports the farming community, including a service for gay farmers. They report on evidence that farmers and farm managers are the occupational group with the **fourth** highest risk of suicide in England and Wales, and say that there is evidence to suggest this figure is much higher. Added to this is the statistic that one in four gay men will attempt suicide at some stage in their lives. This highlights **gay farmers to be a particularly vulnerable group.**

Agricultural Chaplaincy provides a specialist support service via www.gayfarmer.co.uk and provides a 24 hour helpline – this is thought to be the only one of its kind in the country.

Keith Ineson who manages Agricultural Chaplaincy says,

“Although the most significant impact of a suicide death remains the loss of a human life, there is evidence to suggest that the economic cost of this public health tragedy is also great. The Oxford Centre for Suicide studies estimates the average suicide costs £1,400,000 approximately to the economy. None of the clients with whom our service has worked have in fact been among these statistics.

Sexual Health

Body Positive reported that they,

“Increase the awareness, skills and access to resources around sexual health and provide opportunities for peer learning and support to normalise health-promotion practices (Body Positive, Student Evaluation Data).”

Body Positive report on the need for the development and broader spread of targeted services for LGBT people. For example they deliver a drop-in service at South Cheshire college that includes sexual health, safe-sex and STI testing. Project workers have found that there is no equivalent service provided at Macclesfield college, so that although LGBT people needing pastoral care can access tutors and student counsellors they cannot access LGBT specific services on site.

Body Positive also report on the need for more innovative health promotion programmes. They say that sexual health maintenance remains patchy and that there is a need for more support groups and enhanced outreach and testing services. The need for ‘LGBT friendly’ testing services is backed up by responses from individuals taking part in this research.

Positive Outcomes :

JSNA Consultation with the Third Sector Project staff are responding to a need expressed through one of the focus groups in Congleton, and are facilitating the setting up of a new support group for lesbian and bisexual women in Congleton. Staff are liaising with Body Positive to provide ongoing support for the group and will provide governance, funding support and mentoring as required. One respondent said....

*“I’m absolutely delighted at the news of a LGBT social group in Congleton.....
this is the BEST News that I’ve had in ages....”*



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