



Survey on young lesbian and bisexual women's coming out experience related to education, health organisations and services

LIK:T carried out a survey on a 100 young lesbian and bisexual women in the Manchester area on their experiences in education and health organisations. The respondents' age ranged from 17 to 44. The majority of the women were white, British and did not have any disabilities.

The survey found that whilst 87% of these women had received some sort of sex education at school, only 2% had been informed about sexual health issues relevant to lesbian and bisexual women. This is in spite of the fact that 97% of the surveyed group believed that people in school should get sexual health education that includes information for lesbian and bisexual women. Alongside this, only 75% felt that homophobia was challenged in schools. The survey indicated that this homophobia included: homophobic bullying, which was experienced by 1 in 4 of the respondents; a lack of access to reading material on issues related to lesbian and bisexual women, with only 3% could access such material at school; and negative responses to lesbian and bisexual women by teachers, experienced by 18% of these women.

Overall the respondents were unhappy with the health system in general. Within the health system, only half of the women surveyed would ask their doctor about issues to do with lesbian or bisexual sexual health. This is worrying when considering the fact that 71% of the respondents has experienced a doctor or other medical professionals assuming they were straight, in the context of insisting they should be on a contraception pill as they were sexually active, talking about the women's sexual partner as a 'he' and not believing them when they say they are definitely not pregnant. As well as this, there was only two accounts of doctor and other medical professionals proactively discussing issues relevant to lesbian and bisexual women's without the women asking about it first. Moreover, just under 10% of the women had been 'outed' by someone in the medical professional to friends or family.

The majority of these women use informal networks of friends to find out information relevant to being a lesbian and bisexual woman. This was seen as beneficial as it is seen as easier to talk about such things in an informal way. However, 12% of these women used this informal information as their main route of gaining information.



When asked what they would do as the head of a school to challenge homophobia and make lesbian and bisexual women feel accepted, welcome and able to come, the respondents gave the following tips:

1. Supply better and more accessible sources of information on issues effecting lesbian and bisexual women,
2. Provide someone for these young women to talk to, such as a counsellor,
3. Provide sexual health education, which includes issues effecting lesbian and bisexual women as well as education on sexuality,
4. Have clear homophobic bullying policies,
5. Don't assume everyone is heterosexual,
6. Promote positive images of homosexuality, bisexuality and diversity in general,
7. Enable gay teachers to feel comfortable in being out as gay,
8. Include lesbian and bisexual issues on the curriculum,
9. Set up support groups and social groups for lesbian and bisexual women and
10. Provide training for staff on issues relevant to lesbian and bisexual women.