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Coming out in the workplace and its impact on Mental Health: Experiences of staff working in HEIs

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Homosexuality and Mental Health

• Homosexuality is not a mental illness (DSM - 1974)
• Higher risk of certain mental health problems among LGB and T people
  • Anxiety 18% vs 5%
  • Depression 28-40% vs 6%
  • Suicide attempts 20%-40% vs 4.4%
• LGB people are 50% more likely to develop long term mental health problems.
• LGB people are twice as likely to attempt suicide than straight people, 4 times as likely in bisexual people. (Stonewall, 2015)
• 88% of trans* people have experienced depression compared to 1 in 4 of the wider population.
• More than 60% of trans* people have attempted suicide.
Homosexuality and Mental Health

Hostile Social Environment

- Prejudice
- Stigma
- Discrimination
Be on guard! Make choices!

Increased chance of mental health problems!
Aims of the study

• Experience of LGBT staff
• What is the current status of LGBT staff (open or not)
• Barriers and Benefits of “coming out”
• Impact on mental health and wellbeing
Method/Procedure

A mixed methods approach

Online anonymous survey
• 40 people completed the online survey
• 8 of those were happy to leave their contact details
• 10 stated they did not want to leave their details – why?

One-to-one Interviews (using the snowball technique)
• 15 in total took part

Thematic Analysis
• Data was analysed and coded into themes
Findings: Barriers

- Fear of discrimination
- Perceived heterosexism and lack of understanding about bisexuality
- Fear of stereotyping
- Fear of religion-oriented bullying
- Office gossip, promotion potential
- Fear of students' reactions
- General fear of being joked about
Findings: Benefits

• Feeling able to be who you are
• Talking to colleagues freely about your personal life/partner
• Enjoying social gatherings
• A general sense of wellbeing as “you don’t have to watch what you say to colleagues”
Themes from the interviews

- Senior Management Support
- Teaching and Learning
- Pastoral Support
- LGBT Awareness
- Family support
- LGBT Support
- Staff Support
- Students’ Priorities
- Inoculation
Inoculation

• Medical Term
• Used in Sociology to explain the change in attitudes and beliefs

I have been out since I was very young, my whole life and have experienced all sorts of discrimination.

Now I just don’t care anymore. They don’t bother me anymore.
### How does “coming out” affect mental health?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Out to colleagues</th>
<th>Not out to colleagues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reported they felt free and could have a more genuine relationship with colleagues</td>
<td>Reported that they constantly had to “watch” when talking to colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could talk freely when discussing personal stuff, like spending weekends or holidays</td>
<td>Impacted on their wellbeing by keeping the secret</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexuality not being an issue with their group of people – “normalisation”</td>
<td>Bisexuality – not understood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being able to be oneself, at work and in personal life</td>
<td>Not being able to be 100% genuine in discussing personal stuff with colleagues (i.e. holidays and weekends)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generally out in personal life as well</td>
<td>Being able to be oneself in personal life, but not at work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Some cases – not happy when going to work (impact on Physical)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How does not being yourself affect mental health?

• To come out, or not to come out?
• Relationship with self
• Relationships with others
• Not being able to be oneself
• Isolation
• …and more
How does it affect your mental health?

- Society imposes a mask on us
For better mental health

• Stop wearing that mask
• Be your true self
• Bring your true self to work and everywhere you go
• Be proud!
Thank you for listening!

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