

LGBTI Seniors Staying Connected: Loneliness and support among lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex people aged 50 and over in Australia

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Background and purpose:

While loneliness continues to be identified as a concern for some lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) older people, there is also substantial evidence of the diverse sources of support that many LGBTI people access from both biological families and 'families of choice'. This presentation reports on research that examined LGBTI seniors' experiences of loneliness, and their reflection on support gained from both family members and friends, including their perception of who would be there for them in a crisis.

Methods:

The research involved delivery of an online and paper-based survey, which comprised both closed and open-ended questions. A series of standardised instruments were also employed, including the Three-Item Loneliness Scale, reported on in this presentation. As of October 2013, the study had recruited 309 self-identifying LGBTI people, aged 50 years or over, who resided in the state of New South Wales, Australia. Data were analysed via quantitative statistics and thematic qualitative analysis.

Results:

As of October 2013, approximately 48% of respondents said that they lacked companionship some of the time or often, 49% that they felt left out some of the time or often, and 53% that they felt isolated from others some of the time or often. Respondents identified a wide range of supports that they felt they could draw upon in times of crisis, including partners, biological family members and both LGBTI and non-LGBTI friends. They also identified a series of formal and informal social groups and activities of which they make use.

Conclusions:

Effective social work practice with LGBTI seniors requires a good understanding of the diverse sources of support that people draw upon, as well as of experiences of isolation and loneliness. Barriers to support are considered, along with strategies to address these barriers.