

Sexual orientation Evidence of health inequalities affecting lesbian, gay and bisexual people

Demographics

There is an absence of reliable, statistical data on sexual orientation. However, there is an increasing recognition of the rights of lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) people, the discrimination and harassment they face and the negative impact that these can have on health and wellbeing.

The government estimates that the lesbian, gay men and bisexual population is between 5% and 7% of the total population. Based on this estimate, there are between 33,446 and 47,780 people in Bradford and Airedale who identify as LGB.

National data

42% of **gay men**, 43% of **lesbians** and 49% of **bisexual men and women** have clinically recognised mental health problems compared with rates of 12% and 20% for predominantly heterosexual men and women ¹ Lesbian, gay and bisexual people may, for example, be reluctant to disclose their sexual orientation to their GP, because they anticipate discrimination, and then fail to receive appropriate health care.²

A report by MIND found up to 36% of gay men, 26% of bisexual men, 42% of lesbians and 61% of bisexual women recounted negative or mixed reaction from mental health professionals when being open about their **sexual orientation**.³

Some health care professionals think that lesbians do not require cervical smear tests,⁴ yet 10% of lesbians have abnormal smears – this includes 5% of lesbians who have never had penetrative sex with a man.⁵ **Lesbian and bisexual women** were up to 10 times less likely to have had a test in the past

¹ Warner J., McKeown E., Griffin M., Johnson K., Ramsey A., Cort C., and King M., *Rates and predictors of mental illness in gay men, lesbians and bisexual men and women*, 2004, British Journal of Psychiatry

² Hunt R. and Minsky A., [Reducing health inequalities for Lesbian Gay and Bisexual people: Evidence of health care needs](#), 2006, Stonewall and DH.

³ King M. and McKeown E., [Mental health and social wellbeing of gay men, lesbians and bisexuals in England and Wales](#), 2003, MIND.

⁴ Hunt R. and Minsky A., [Reducing health inequalities for Lesbian Gay and Bisexual people: Evidence of health care needs](#), 2006, Stonewall and DH.

⁵ In the Pink Providing Excellent Care for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People: A practical guide for GPs and Other Health Practitioners, 2010 NHS Sheffield citing Stonewall/ Cancerbackup

three years but lesbians and bisexual women have often been invisible patients within health services and their needs are poorly understood.⁶

Local data

“The Challenge for Change, Health Needs of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People in Bradford and District 2010” built on the work of a previous health needs assessment carried out in Bradford in 2007 and shows the following health inequalities experienced by local LGB people:

- Over half of respondents were ‘out’ to their GP; **10%** more than in 2007. However, the majority of LGB people were not ‘out’ when accessing specific services in the last 5 years. *The exception to this was sexual health services*
- Over a third of respondents were **smokers**; higher than the general smoking prevalence rate for Bradford, and **13%** more than in 2007
- **6%** of women had been inappropriately **refused cervical screening** or been advised that it was not necessary because of their sexual orientation
- **20%** of women were **not having regular cervical or breast screening** nor examining themselves for breast lumps (higher than for women in general)
- **57%** found screening staff to be helpful but lacking understanding of lesbian and bi-sexual women
- **55%** had experienced **mental ill health**; a higher proportion than for the general population
- **28%** of respondents had experienced **domestic violence** in a previous or current same sex relationship
- **34%** respondents had experienced **abuse in the workplace**. More than half (**57%**) did not report it⁷

Staff

Some local NHS trusts have completed the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index and achieved the following scores:

	2009	2010	2011
NHS Bradford and Airedale	-----	93/200	123/200
Bradford District Care Trust	-----	107/200	124/200
Bradford Teaching Hospitals	36/200	83/200	-----
Airedale General Hospital	-----	-----	-----

NHS Bradford and Airedale, Bradford District Care Trust and Bradford Teaching Hospitals have LGB staff networks.

⁶ Fish J., [Cervical screening in lesbian and bisexual women: a review of the worldwide literature using systematic methods](#), 2009, De Montford University.

⁷ Equity Partnership (2010) *The Challenge for Change, Health Needs of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People in Bradford and District*

http://www.equitypartnership.org.uk/files/bradfordLGB/TheChallengeforChangeHNA2010_1.pdf