

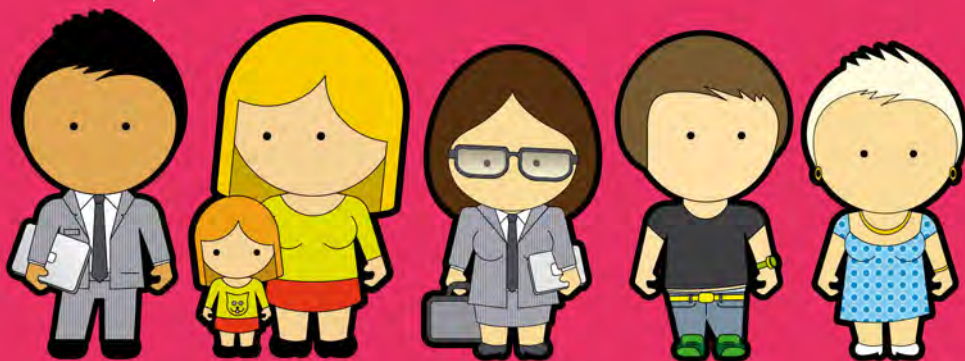
# Bisexuality

**Stonewall health briefing**

# Bisexuality

## Stonewall Health Briefing

[www.healthyives.stonewall.org.uk](http://www.healthyives.stonewall.org.uk)



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# Stonewall Health Briefings

Stonewall's pioneering research demonstrates that the specific needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual people are too often overlooked in the provision of healthcare. At the same time, many experience hostility, poor treatment or outright discrimination from healthcare professionals.

Stonewall now works with NHS organisations to improve the health of lesbian, gay and bisexual people and make sure the NHS is aware of its legal duties to provide an equal service to everyone.

This is one in a series of briefings on the health of lesbian, gay and bisexual people in Britain today.

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## Other briefings in the series:

- **Disability**
- **Domestic Abuse**
- **Ethnicity**
- **Experiences of Healthcare**
- **Mental Health**



## Bisexuality

Bisexual people are people who are attracted to more than one gender; traditionally, they have received limited attention from healthcare services. Few bisexual men and women are open about their sexual orientation to health professionals and many have had negative experiences of healthcare in the past year.

This briefing provides evidence on the health and experiences of bisexual people in Britain. Bisexual people are less likely to access health services like cervical screening and more likely to have attempted to take their own lives than people in general.

Bisexual men and women are entitled to access a health service free from discrimination that treats them as individuals and responds to their needs. Assumptions about what bisexuality is can mean many bisexual men and women receive inappropriate healthcare information, and may not access relevant health services, such as routine testing and monitoring services.

# Bisexual Women

Stonewall's research into the health needs of lesbian and bisexual women, Prescription for Change, has found clear differences in their health compared to that of women in general. Lesbian and bisexual women are more likely to have smoked and to drink heavily than women in general. Levels of attempted suicide and self-harm are much higher than in the wider population. In addition, half of lesbian and bisexual women have had a negative experience of healthcare in the past year.

Of bisexual women:

- **A quarter** currently smoke
- **More than three quarters** (77 per cent) had a drink in the last week and **over a third** (37 per cent) drink three or more days a week compared to a quarter of women in general
- **Two in five** (41 per cent) have taken drugs in the last year, six times more likely than women in general
- **More than two in five** (43 per cent) have never been screened for sexually transmitted infections
- **More than one in ten** (11 per cent) over the age of 25 have never had a cervical screen compared to seven per cent of women in general
- **One in fourteen** (seven per cent) have attempted to take their own life in the last year
- **Three in ten** (29 per cent) have deliberately harmed themselves in the last year compared to 0.4 per cent of the general population
- **Three in ten** have had an eating disorder compared to 1 in 20 of the general population who have eating disorders
- **One in four** have experienced domestic violence in a relationship the same as women in general
- **Three in four** say that they are in good health
- **Half** (51 per cent) have had negative experiences of healthcare in the past year
- **Two thirds** (66 per cent) are not out to their GP or other healthcare professionals

There are also some significant differences among lesbians and bisexual women:

- **Almost three in five** (57 per cent) bisexual women have been tested for sexually transmitted infections compared to **44 per cent** of lesbians
- **Three in ten** (29 per cent) bisexual women have deliberately harmed themselves in the last year compared to **18 per cent** of lesbians
- **Three in ten** bisexual women have had an eating disorder compared to **two in ten** lesbians
- **Two thirds** (66 per cent) of bisexual women are not out to their GP or other healthcare professionals compared to **46 per cent** of lesbians

*'Healthcare professionals should be more open to talking about sexual identity. Especially for women in their 20s who think they may be bisexual it can be a confusing/scary time.'*

**Christine, 28, London**

*'I am a bisexual woman who has been in a long-term relationship with a man, and people tend to assume I'm heterosexual.'*

**Andrea, 44, East Midlands**

*'Basic awareness of bisexuality is still very low, with immediate prejudices and assumptions about what kind of life you must lead.'*

**Pippa, 37, South West**

# Bisexual Men

Stonewall's Gay and Bisexual Men's Health Survey demonstrates that their health needs are not being met, and there are areas of significant concern – most notably in mental health and drug use - that have been overlooked by health services which too often focus solely on gay and bisexual men's sexual health.

Of bisexual men:

- **Over a quarter** (27 per cent) currently smoke compared to 22 per cent of men in general
- **More than seven in ten** (74 per cent) had a drink in the last week and **four in ten** drink on three or more days per week compared to 35 per cent of men in general
- **Half** have taken drugs in the last year compared to just 12 per cent of men in general
- **More than a quarter** (28 per cent) report being in 'fair' or 'bad' health compared to one in six men in general
- **Five per cent** have attempted to take their own life in the last year. Just 0.4 per cent of men in general attempted to take their own life in the same period
- **More than one in ten** (11 per cent) have harmed themselves in the last year compared to just 1 in 33 men in general who have ever harmed themselves
- **Fifteen per cent** have had problems with their weight or eating in the last year compared to four per cent of men in general
- **Half** (51 per cent) have experienced at least one incident of domestic abuse from a family member or partner since the age of 16 compared to 17 per cent of men in general
- **Almost two in five** (38 per cent) have never been tested for any sexually transmitted infection
- **Half** (49 per cent) have never had an HIV test
- **One in three** who have accessed healthcare services in the past year have had a negative experience related to their sexual orientation
- **Three in five** are not out to their GP or healthcare professionals

There are also some significant differences among gay and bisexual men:

- **Five per cent** of bisexual men have attempted to take their own life in the last year compared to **three per cent** of gay men
- **More than one in ten** (11 per cent) bisexual men have harmed themselves in the last year compared to **six per cent** of gay men
- **Almost two in five** (38 per cent) bisexual men have never been tested for sexually transmitted infections compared to **25 per cent** of gay men
- **Half** (49 per cent) of bisexual men have never had an HIV test compared to **29 per cent** of gay men
- **Six in ten** bisexual men are not out to their GP or healthcare professional compared to **three in ten** gay men

*'In my experience they always assume you're heterosexual.'*

**Leon, 31, Scotland**

*'My GP doesn't know that I am bisexual.'*

**Alex, 43, East of England**

*'When trying to gain access to a psychologist a psychiatric nurse compared bisexuality to paedophilia. I found these remarks deeply offensive. The experience has made me wary of disclosing my orientation.'*

**Daniel, 22, North East**



Three in ten bisexual women have deliberately harmed themselves in the last year

Half of bisexual men have never had an HIV test



## What the health service can do

A lack of understanding and knowledge of bisexuality has an impact on the health needs and experiences of bisexual people. The high incidence of attempted suicide, self-harm and eating disorders means healthcare services must actively work to address the needs of bisexual people.

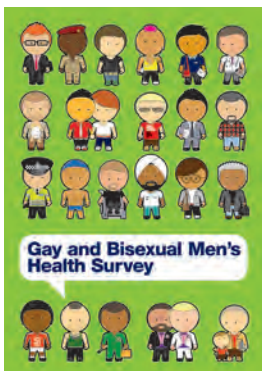
There are a number of steps health services can take to improve the health of bisexual people:

- Train staff on bisexuality awareness and the health needs of bisexual people
- Have clear policies that state people will not be discriminated against if they are bisexual
- Consult and engage with bisexual people to gather suggestions on how to improve services



# The Studies

The findings in this briefing are taken from the following Stonewall publications:



## **Gay and Bisexual Men's Health Survey**

In 2011 Stonewall and Sigma Research asked gay and bisexual men from across Britain to complete a survey about their health. 6,861 men responded making it the largest survey of its kind in the world.

92 per cent of respondents described themselves as gay, eight per cent described themselves as bisexual.

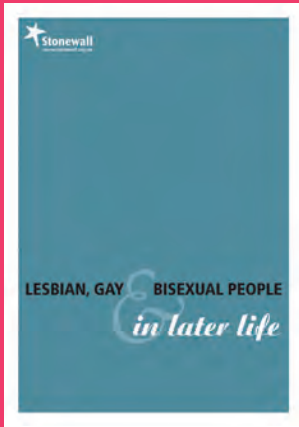


## **Prescription for Change: Lesbian and bisexual women's health check 2008**

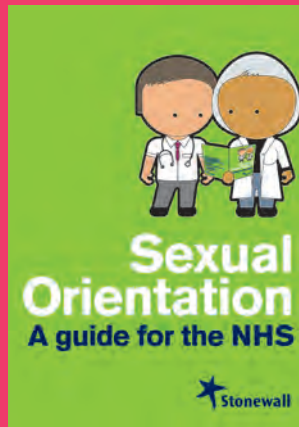
In 2007 Stonewall and De Montfort University asked lesbians and bisexual women from Britain to complete a survey about their health. 6,178 women responded making it the largest survey of its kind in Europe.

81 per cent of respondents described themselves as lesbian, 16 per cent described themselves as bisexual.

## Further Resources



**Lesbian, Gay  
and Bisexual  
People in Later  
Life**



**Sexual  
Orientation:  
A Guide for  
the NHS**

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### Healthy Lives

For more NHS specific case-studies, best practice examples and research visit [www.healthyives.stonewall.org.uk](http://www.healthyives.stonewall.org.uk)

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### Stonewall publications

All Stonewall publications cited in this briefing are free to download from [www.stonewall.org.uk/publications](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/publications)

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