



## Introduction

Recent professional standards in social work have an explicit stance on sexual diversity. The aim of this paper is to describe the situation of sexual minorities with a focus on Japan and to compare related standards.

To achieve this, the paper consists of a preliminary discussion on understanding sexual diversity in a social work framework, a secondary analysis of international and domestic existing data with regard to social indicators on LGBT issues, an examination of LGBT related social work standards in international and national professional documents, and a discussion of literature on practice principles with LGBT clients.

### I. Sexual diversity framework

While social work has a tradition of bio-psycho-social assessment for client understanding, Lum stresses the need to add a cultural and a spiritual dimension in case of diverse minority clients (Lum, 2011). When this bio-psycho-socio-cultural-spiritual framework is applied specifically to human sexuality, the dimensions show the following.

- The **biological dimension** refers to biological sex (physical and physiological primary and secondary characteristics).
- The **psychological dimension** refers to gender identity.
- The **social dimension** refers to sexual behavior in terms of sexual partners.
- The **cultural dimension** refers to gender expression.
- The **spiritual dimension** refers to sexual orientation in terms of romantic interest.

All of these dimensions are dynamic and

can change over the lifetime. Also, a person's location in any given dimension is determined on a spectrum rather than determined by a simple binary. Hence, Table 1 describes sexual diversity along the framework in general terms.

Cisgender heterosexual females and males are considered to be the sexual majority. The psychological (gender identity) and cultural dimensions (gender expression) of their sexuality match the biological dimension (biological sex) and both the social (sexual behavior) and spiritual dimensions (sexual orientation) point towards the opposite sex meaning that both their sexual partners and the targets of their romantic interest belong to the opposite sex.

Other sexualities belong to the sexual minority. Those who identify as *lesbian* (*L*) or *gay* (*G*) are biologically, psychologically and culturally female or male respectively, but they are attracted to the same sex both socially and spiritually<sup>1)</sup>. Similarly, the characteristic of a *bisexual* (*B*) identity is attraction towards both sexes.

As the table shows, *transgender* (*T*) persons are transitioning between or beyond genders. This refers to transition in the psychological and social dimensions (gender identity and expression) from *female to male* (*FtM*), from *male to female* (*MtF*), and from *female or male to gender neutral* (*FtX* and *MtX*). In *transsexual* (*T*) persons, transition additionally includes physiological change of sex on the biological level too (through operation or hormone treatment). This transition is not necessarily linked to the social and spiritual dimensions (sexual behavior and orientation).

Someone identifying as *questioning* (*Q*) can be either male or female biologically and

Table 1 Sexual diversity in a social work framework

Type of sexuality	Social work dimension and aspect of sexuality				
	BIO	PSYCHO	SOCIAL	CULTURAL	SPIRITUAL
	Biological sex	Gender identity	Sexual behavior (with partners)	Gender expression	Sexual orientation (interest towards)
Heterosexual female	F	F	M	F	M
Heterosexual male	M	M	F	M	F
Lesbian	F	F	F	F	F
Gay	M	M	M	M	M
Bisexual female	F	F	F & M	F	F & M
Bisexual male	M	M	F & M	M	F & M
Transgender FtM	F	(F→) M	?	(F→) M	?
Transgender MtF	M	(M→) F	?	(M→) F	?
Transgender FtX	F	(F→) X	?	(F→) X	?
Transgender MtX	M	(M→) X	?	(M→) X	?
Transsexual FtM	(F→) M	(F→) M	?	(F→) M	?
Transsexual MtF	(M→) F	(M→) F	?	(M→) F	?
Questioning female	M	?	?	?	?
Questioning male	F	?	?	?	?
Intersex	F & M	?	?	?	?
Asexual female	F	F	—	F	?
Asexual male	M	M	—	M	?
Aromantic female	F	F	?	F	—
Aromantic male	M	M	?	M	—
Pansexual female	F	F	F & M & X	F	?
Pansexual male	M	M	F & M & X	M	?

Note:

- F predominantly male
- M predominantly female
- X neither male, nor female
- ? not determinable
- none

Source: prepared by the author

have an undecided sexuality in formation in the other dimensions. Also, *intersex* (*I*) persons are born with both male and female biological characteristics, but this does not necessarily determine the psychological, social, cultural, or spiritual dimensions of their sexuality in any specific way.

The major characteristic of *asexual* (*A*)

and *aromantic* (*A*) identities is a lack of interest in the social and spiritual dimensions of sexuality (sexual and romantic attraction respectively). In contrast, for *pansexual* (*P*) persons, their partner's sexuality is not a determinant factor when engaging in sexual behavior on the social level (this may be reflected on the spiritual level too, however

not necessarily).

While the table provides a general overview of human sexuality, it is not an exhaustive list. Various types of sexuality mentioned are not always mutually exclusive and can appear in gradations or combinations.

## II. LGBT issues

This chapter focuses on available quantitative data showing social needs in the LGBT community both globally and in Japan specifically.

### 1. International data

In 2013, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) launched a global campaign to promote LGBT human rights. Regarding the need for such a campaign, the United Nations makes the following assessment of LGBT related global trends (OHCHR, 2013).

*More than a third of the world's countries criminalize consensual, loving same-sex relationships, entrenching prejudice and putting millions of people at risk of blackmail, arrest and imprisonment. Many countries force transgender people to undergo medical treatment, sterilization or meet other onerous preconditions before they can obtain legal recognition of their gender identity. Intersex children are often subjected to unnecessary surgery, causing physical and psychological pain and suffering. In many cases, a lack of adequate legal protections combined with hostile public attitudes leads to widespread discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people - including workers being fired from jobs, students bullied and expelled from schools, and patients denied essential healthcare.*

Although LGBT related quantitative data is scarce, the above assessment is based on available social indicators from around the world including the following (OHCHR, 2015; OHCHR, 2019).

- As of 2014, at least 76 countries criminalize people on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity or expression (including consensual, adult same-sex relationships), while the death penalty is applicable in 5 countries.
- 310 murders in which homophobia or transphobia was a motive were reported in Brazil in 2012.
- 594 hate-related killings of LGBT persons were reported in member countries of the Organization of American States between January 2013 and March 2014.
- More than 2,000 homicides of transgender persons in 66 countries were reported between 2008 and 2016 (equivalent to a killing every 2 days).
- 18 hate violence homicides and 2,001 incidents of anti-LGBT violence were reported in the United States in 2013.
- 1 in 2 LGBT persons have been attacked or threatened with violence in the previous 5 years (European Union).
- Almost 1 in 2 bisexual women have experienced rape, which is 3 times higher than the rate for heterosexual and lesbian women, and 75% of them have experienced other forms of sexual violence (United States).
- Almost half of bisexual men have experienced some form of sexual violence in their lifetime, double the rate of heterosexual men (United States).

- 1 in 6 LGBT persons have experienced a hate crime or incident in the previous 3 years (United Kingdom).
- 48% of bisexual persons have experienced biphobic comments and 38% have experienced unwanted sexual comments (Scotland).
- 60% of bisexual people report hearing discriminatory comments at work (United States).
- 80% of school-age children have heard negative comments or had seen negative conduct directed at schoolmates perceived as LGBT (European Union).
- More than half of LGBT persons have been bullied in the previous month, more than 30% experiencing physical abuse (Thailand).
- Lesbian, gay and bisexual students are 3 times more likely to be bullied than their heterosexual peers, while transgender students are 5 times more likely to be bullied than non-transgender students (New Zealand).
- 70% of LGBT students feel unsafe at school (United States).
- 59% of LGBT persons report that bullying has negatively affected their academic performance (China).
- 45% of transgender students report that they have dropped out of school either due to transphobic bullying by their peers or being excluded by school authorities (Argentina).
- 18% of intersex people had not completed secondary education compared to only 2% of the general population (Australia).
- More than half of LGBT youth report that biphobia or homophobia has

negatively impacted their education and a third report that it has negatively impacted their employment opportunities in the long run (Scotland).

- 40% of homeless youth identify as LGBT, with family rejection as the leading cause for homelessness (United States).

Under such circumstances, LGBT persons face deprivation of access to employment, health, education and housing due to discrimination and face poverty. In fact, such available data suggests that there is a tendency for higher than average rates of poverty, homelessness and the incidence of other issues in LGBT communities on a global scale.

## 2. National data

According to a recent study, 4.9% of men and 7.1% of women consider themselves homosexual in Japan (Sagami Rubber Industries, 2013). In another survey, 7.6% of the Japanese population consider themselves LGBT (Dentsu Diversity Laboratory, 2015).

With regard to the social needs of the LGBT population in Japan, the following quantitative data is available. 65.9% of gay or bisexual males have experienced suicidal thoughts, 14.4% actual attempt, and 60% some form of harassment throughout the lifetime (Hidaka et al., 2007a). Similarly, 58.6% of transgender youth have experienced suicidal thoughts, 28.4% have attempted suicide or other types of self-harm, and 1 in 4 have shown non-attendance including due to gendered school uniform constraints (Nakazuka et al., 2016). Also, suicide attempt is reported to be 6 times higher for homosexual youth than among peers, while showing twice as much (17%) self-harming

(Hidaka et al., 2007b).

In relation to school life, 70% of LGBT students have experienced bullying including some form of physical or sexual violence; 52% have not discussed it with anyone; and as a result, 43% have shown non-attendance, 33% trauma, 32% suicidal thoughts, and 22% wrist cutting (White Ribbon Campaign, 2013). Meanwhile, 84% of LGBT students have experienced homophobic remarks or jokes; and 50% of males and 30% of females could not discuss their sexuality with anyone until high school graduation.

Regarding the economic sphere, 60% of LGBT workers have experienced involuntary change of employment in contrast with a 51.8% average, while transgender workers show especially high occurrence (Nijiuro Diversity, 2015). High incidence (52.4%) of poverty (annual income lower than two million JPY) is observed for MtF transgender workers. Additionally, 40% of LGBT job seekers face difficulties in job hunting; an especially high number (70%) for the transgender community. Altogether, 70% of LGBT workers have experienced some form of discrimination at the workplace.

### III. Professional standards

The above results show that the LGBT population tends to have higher than average social needs due to existing discrimination and their oppressed position in society. This means that often there is a need for social work intervention and that LGBT persons are more probable to become social work clients. Therefore, this chapter looks at international and domestic professional standards in social work that are related to sexual diversity.

### 1. International documents

The *Global Definition of the Social Work Profession* adopted by the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) designates respect for diversities as a principle central to social work (IASSW et al., 2014). In the commentary notes, sexual orientation and gender are specifically mentioned in the section related to Core Mandates. It is in relation to the development of critical consciousness through reflecting on structural sources of oppression, and the development of action strategies towards addressing these as a central part of emancipatory practice where professional goals are the empowerment and liberation of people. Also in the commentary notes, the Principles section is concerned with the violation of the rights (including the right to life) of minority groups such as homosexuals in the name of culture.

Both the IASSW long version and the IFSW short version of the joint *Global Social Work Statement of Ethical Principles* have LGBT related content with regard to the principle of Promoting Social Justice (IASSW, 2018; IFSW, 2018). The section on Challenging Discrimination and Institutional Oppression states that social workers challenge discrimination including not only gender and sex, but also gender identity, sexual orientation, relationship status, and family structure. Furthermore, the section on Respect for Diversity requires that social workers recognize that diversity of culture must not be used to stretch the boundaries of moral relativism to the point where the rights (including the right to life) of some groups, such as of sexual minorities are violated. Hence, social

workers are expected to problematize and challenge cultural practices that limit the full enjoyment of human rights for LGBT persons.

In the *Global Standards for the Education and Training of the Social Work Profession* adopted by both IASSW and IFSW, sexual orientation and gender are mentioned among the standards with regard to Core Curricula in relation to the Paradigm of the Social Work Profession (specifically an appreciation and respect for diversity) and among the standards regarding Social Work Students in relation to non-discrimination (IASSW et al., 2004). Furthermore, the Global Standards have a standalone section on standards regarding Cultural and Ethnic Diversity and Gender Inclusiveness that contains altogether nine articles.

The *Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development* prepared by IASSW, IFSW and the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW) mentions sexual orientation and gender in the following contexts (IASSW et al., 2012).

- With regard to Our Role in Ensuring the Dignity and Worth of the Person, specifically in relation to the United Nations and other international agencies to end discrimination
- In relation to Our Own Organizations to promote respect for diversity and advocate for education and training programs that prepare practitioners for ethical and informed interventions

Finally, IFSW's professional *Policy Statement on Sexual Orientation and Gender Expression* lists the areas of criminalization, pathology, sin, culture and intersectionality as major international Issues and designates the following as Areas of Critical Concern for

Social Work (IFSW, 2014).

- Right to Life, Liberty and Security
- Interpersonal Violence
- Economic Inequality
- Health Disparities
- HIV/AIDS
- Youth and Education

In accordance with this IFSW statement, the formerly described data from Japan show problems particularly in the following concern areas: Interpersonal Violence (in from of various kinds of harassment), Economic Inequality (due to discrimination on the labor market and at the workplace), Health Disparities (mainly mental health), and Youth and Education (difficulties in school life).

## 2. National documents

According to the *Japanese Amplification of the Global Definition of the Social Work Profession*, the profession in Japan respects human rights and works towards the realization of social change and social inclusion so that people can experience connectedness regardless of sexuality among other diversity factors (JASSW et al., 2017).

The *Code of Ethics* in Japan includes sexual orientation together with gender or sex among its Ethical Standards, namely in the section on Ethical Responsibility towards Service Users, however this context is limited to the article on the Prohibition of Sexual Discrimination and Sexual Abuse (JCB-IFSW, 2005).

Also, the *Practice Standards for Certified Social Workers* elaborates on this point and in addition to prohibition, it points out the need for related learning; however, it is still limited to the same context (JACSW, 2005).

#### IV. Practice principles

With regard to diversity in social work practice, particularly when working with minorities, two common approaches are anti-discriminatory practice and cultural competence. This chapter explains LGBT related practice principles based on these two approaches.

##### 1. Anti-discriminatory practice

This approach focuses on the social context and its negative impact on sexual minorities (Marsiglia et. al, 2009; Thompson, 2012). This include the existing social reality of various phobias such as *homophobia*, *biphobia*, *transphobia*, various ‘isms’, mainly *heterosexism* and their adverse effects in the form of oppression and discrimination. These phobias refer to fear and hate towards LGBT persons, while heterosexism refers to sexual majority being the only acceptable social norm.

Anti-discriminatory practice aims to reduce the level of oppression. To do so, anti-discriminatory practice principles go beyond the conscious (intentional) personal dimension and focus on structural (often unintentional) dimensions when challenging the following types of discrimination.

- **Institutional discrimination**, namely the mechanisms of exclusion of sexual minorities and LGBT needs apparent in the legal system and the design of social services
- **Cultural discrimination**, namely taken-for-granted assumptions, customs, social norms based on heterosexism (heteronormativity)
- **Personal discrimination**, namely the surfacing of LGBT related phobias and ‘isms’ in everyday interaction;

heavily influenced by (but not limited to) the above mentioned structural factors (institutional situation and cultural norms)

- **Professional discrimination**, namely the historical tendency in human services to pathologize and medicalize LGBT persons; this dimension is also easily influenced by structural factors and can be unconscious or unintentional without proper self- and other-awareness training
- **Internalized discrimination**, namely potential low self-esteem of LGBT persons as a result of constant negative homophobic or heterosexist messages from society

All these types of discrimination do not only act as a severe source of stress for sexual minorities, but also result in considerable social disadvantages as seen previously.

##### 2. Cultural competence

The cultural competence approach provides professionals and organizations a practice framework for effective practice in cross-cultural (in this case ‘cross-sexual’) situations (Lum, 2011). Culture in this context refers to shared meanings and life patterns in a certain social group and therefore includes the LGBT community as a sub-culture with its unique values and norms. Components of cultural competence include awareness, knowledge and skills. Based on LGBT specific culturally competence frameworks, necessary practice principles include the following (Tully, 2001; Tully, 2011; Walters et al., 2007).

Competencies in the area of **cultural awareness** include self-awareness and other-



awareness. The former means that the social worker is aware of his or her own sexuality including all dimensions as previously shown in Table 1. Other-awareness refers to being aware of one's attitudes towards others with different sexualities, including the level of the above mentioned phobias or 'isms'. Both types of awareness also extend to recognizing and being aware of how one's own sexuality and attitudes towards other sexualities were formed throughout the lifetime with regard to environmental and social factors. This requires reflection and self-assessment.

**Cultural knowledge** with regard to sexual diversity entails a proper understanding of related terminology, a working knowledge of demographic characteristics and social indicators of the LGBT population in general and specifically in the practice area, a critical thinking perspective on sexuality and related issues, recognition of LGBT history including a history of oppression, an understanding of sexually diverse values and LGBT value systems, a working knowledge of available social resources and social services in relation to sexual diversity, and an understanding of the theoretical base on sexuality (queer theory etc.).

**Cultural skills** introduced here are based on a process-stage framework. Engagement skills include the avoidance of the 'heterosexual assumption' or the 'cisgender assumption' (assuming that all clients belong to the sexual majority). Among general casework principles, the following are especially useful with LGBT clients to ensure a safe working relationship: nonjudgmental attitude, acceptance, confidentiality, and self-determination including the right to define one's own sexuality. Provision of an overall LGBT friendly

environment through verbal and non-verbal messages including the physical setting is also required for a positive and easily accessible initial contact. Assessment skills include being able to assess whether aspects of the client's sexuality (sexual orientation, gender identity and expression etc.) are affecting the problem itself in the first place (just being the member of a minority group does not necessarily mean that such membership is the cause of the client's problem). Assessment with sexually diverse clients also extends to assessing unique resilience factors or social resources (such as community strengths) in addition to LGBT vulnerability and risk factors. Another culturally competent point for assessment is focusing on both the *family of origin* and the *family of choice*. Intervention skills call for individualization depending on whether the problem has to do with sexuality or not. However, since the client belongs to an oppressed minority, micro-mezzo-macro level empowerment and advocacy skills are needed. Other professional social work roles required on this stage include the following.

- *Broker*: referral to and linkage with LGBT friendly social resources and establishment of an LGBT friendly social support network
- *Enabler*: enhancing client awareness of own strengths or resilience and self-esteem through reduction of internalized discrimination
- *Teacher*: assisting the acquisition of new problem solving and coping skills in the face of discrimination
- *Mediator*: challenging discrimination through conflict management and rights advocacy

## Conclusion

According to intersectionality theory also evoked by the above mentioned IFSW policy statement, while aspects of sexuality may not be visible on the surface, they are an important part of human diversity among other internal factors (Kirk, 2005). Sexuality affects not only one's affection, cognition and behavior, but also how other people feel towards, think about or treat someone. As seen above, in case of sexual minorities, one's sexuality can be a source of serious oppression through prejudice, stereotypes and actual discrimination that exist in the social environment.

Social work must avoid the heterosexual assumption that views all clients as part of the majority when it comes to sexuality. On the other hand, pathologization of LGBT people, that is assuming that sexual minorities necessarily have problems and are automatically potential clients, is also something what social workers must resist. Instead of being occupied with identifying or finding LGBT clients or making them come out, social work must be focusing on establishing an open and inclusive social environment where LGBT clients can come out safely if they choose to do so. While keeping in mind that clients can belong to the LGBT community, the social worker must clarify the professional reasons whenever directly inquiring about sexuality.

The findings in this paper suggest that there is a need to properly introduce anti-discriminatory practice models and culturally competence approaches that take LGBT issues into consideration to the Japanese profession. This would necessitate an educational program to teach competence needed for working with diverse populations in a manner

that fits social reality, as well as the cultural and historical context, while also satisfies the call for an obligatory subject and the ideals set out in the above mentioned international standards. Unfortunately, the description of such a program for diversity education in social work is beyond the scope of this paper; however, it probably has to start as an elective course first.

## Notes

- 1) Lesbian and gay identities have to do mainly with sexual orientation (romantic interest) and not to be confused with occasional or circumstantial sexual behavior with same sex partners such as in prison and other specific environments (girls or boys schools etc.). The terminology used in epidemiology or public health to focus on the social dimension (sexual interaction) in same sex relationships is *women who have sex with women (WSW)* and *men who have sex with men (MSM)*.

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