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

Prejudice

Stigma

Discrimination

Hostile Social Evironment
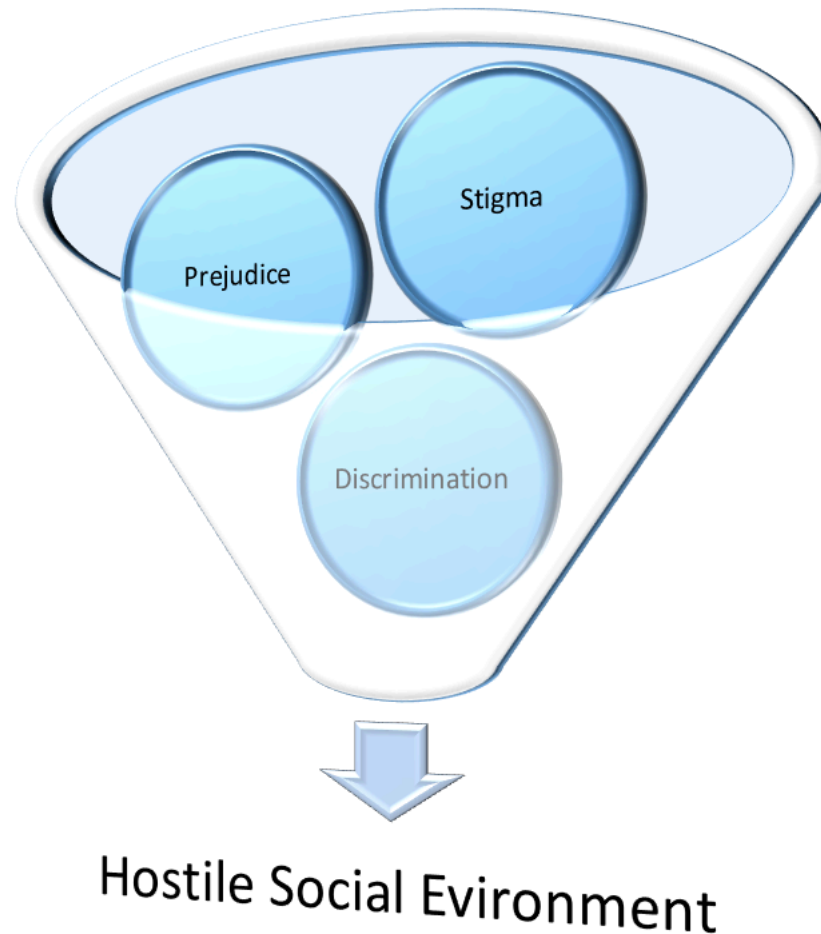
Be on guard! Make choices!

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

Inoculation

Teaching and Learning

Students' Priorities

Pastoral Support

Staff Support

LGBT Awareness

LGBT Support

Family support

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?

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

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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