

Written evidence submitted by the LGBT Foundation (MISS0052)

About LGBT Foundation

LGBT Foundation is a national charity delivering advice, support and information services to lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans communities. With a history dating back to 1975, we campaign for a fair and equal society where all LGBT people can achieve their full potential. Through our services we reduce isolation amongst LGBT communities, help people feel more confident and in control of their lives and enable people to flourish. Together with LGBT communities and their supporters, LGBT Foundation are working to secure a safe, healthy and equal future for all LGBT people

Body Image and Eating Disorders

There is a range of research to show that LGBT people are more likely to have poor body image and to have an eating disorder.

- Studies have found that LGBT people are more likely to have an eating disorder and lack in confidence about the way they look.^{1 2} There is a particularly high prevalence of eating disorders among gay men.³
- LGBT men are more likely to have an eating disorder compared to men in general.⁴
- 13% of GB men have had a problem with their weight or eating in the last year compared 4% of men in general.⁵
- 37% of LGB respondents said they would not feel confident seeking help with an eating disorder, compared to 24% of heterosexual people.⁶

A recent BBC News⁷ article highlighted some of the body image issues that gay and bi men experience. Shockingly one man said that he had people tell him he was “too ugly to be gay.” It was also clear that pressure from social media and dating apps was having a huge impact with another man saying "people having in their profiles 'no fats', or that they're only into masculine and muscular guys, so they don't want anyone that's super skinny."

Impact of Covid-19

Covid-19 is worsening issues around poor body image and eating disorders. LGBT Foundation is currently running a survey on the impact of Covid-19 on LGBT communities,⁸ although the survey did not specifically ask about eating disorders, the question on substance and alcohol misuse elicited a number of responses around eating disorders. Disruption to routines, a lack of access to usual support, reduced activity levels and changes in access to food are all contributing factors to worsening these kinds of conditions. These conditions are also often linked to poor mental health. Free text survey responses from LGBT people included:

‘My depression and anxiety is spiking more often and I’m also still trying to recover from trauma and an eating disorder on my own so I worry I may slip into old damaging habits’

‘Been fighting intrusive thoughts, especially eating disorder thoughts, more. Increased focus on gaining weight in isolation and removal of usual support group means I’m considering

more kinds of self-harm (eg denial of food, hitting myself, urge to work out in excess, urge to take larger doses of substances)'

'i am relapsing in my eating disorder recovery. id just finished a twenty week cbt course, and now am about to leave the programme. worst timing.'

July 2020

Endnotes

¹ Hunt, R, J, Fish. 2008. 'Prescription for Change. Lesbian and bisexual women's health check', Stonewall. Available at:

https://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/Prescription_for_Change_2008_.pdf

² Diemer, E, Grant, J, Munn-Chernoff, M, Patterson, D, Duncan, A. 2015. 'Gender Identity, Sexual Orientation, and Eating-Related Pathology in a National Sample of College Students', J Adolescent Health. Available at:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4545276/>

³ Guasp, A. 2013. 'Gay and Bisexual Men's Health Survey', Stonewall. Available at:

https://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/Gay_and_Bisexual_Men_s_Health_Survey_2013_.pdf

⁴ Thompson, D. 2017. 'Boys and men get eating disorders too'. Men's Health. Available at:

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/tre.568>

⁵ Guasp, A. 2013. 'Gay and Bisexual Men's Health Survey'. Stonewall. Available at:

https://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/Gay_and_Bisexual_Men_s_Health_Survey__2013_.pdf

⁶ Beat. 2019. 'New research shows eating disorder stereotypes prevent people finding help'. Available at:

<https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/news/beat-news/eating-disorder-stereotypes-prevent-help>

⁷ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-51270317>

⁸ <https://lgbt.foundation/coronavirus/hiddenfigures>