**////Title: Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Homelessness in Australia: Risk and Resilience Factors**

**////Stand-first**: There is a strong link between identifying as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) and homelessness. Dr Ruth McNair from the University of Melbourne analysed data investigating risk and resilience factors associated with homelessness according to sexual identity in the Australian population to understand the associations with homelessness and to improve LGB-inclusive homelessness policy and services.

**////Body text:**

Lesbian, gay and bisexual (LBG) people are much more likely than heterosexual people to experience homelessness. In the USA and Canada, 20-40% of the youth homeless population consists of lesbian, gay, transgender, queer and two-spirit people (LGBTQ), and in the UK, lesbian, gay and transgender people comprise around a quarter of the youth homeless population.

These figures have led to these people being considered a vulnerable population, resulting in the development of dedicated policies and programmes to offer support. However, in Australia, there is little published data on homelessness in these communities. The national body known as Homelessness Services does not collect information on sexual orientation or gender identity, which means there are no targeted policies or provisions to support the homeless LGBTQ population.

Nonetheless, LGBTQ people are more likely than their heterosexual peers to have experienced homelessness before the age of 16. LGBTQ people are known to be more likely to experience homelessness caused by family conflict, violence, or rejection due to their sexual or gender identity than heterosexual people. Structural stigma within communities, schools and workplaces may exacerbate these negative experiences leading to higher rates of mental health problems, drug use and sexual risks.

Dr Ruth McNair, a GP and Associate Professor at the University of Melbourne worked with a team of researchers including Dr Cal Andrews, Dr Sharon Parkinson and Associate Professor Deborah Dempsey to analyse data from two Australian surveys to further understand the risk and resilience factors associated with homelessness in LBG people in Australia.

The data analysed were part of the General Social Survey (GSS) conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Journeys Home study conducted by the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economics. The GSS study involved 17,401 people aged 15 or over and included questions on sexual identity and homelessness. The Journeys Home study involved 1,659 people with experience of, or who were at risk of, homelessness. Unfortunately, neither study included questions on gender identity, so the team could only analyse data relating to sexual identity. The data analysis team was supported by an advisory group which included LGBTQ people with personal experiences of homelessness.

The results of the GSS study confirmed clear differences in the prevalence of homelessness based on sexual identity. People who identified as LGB were much more likely to have experienced homelessness – 32% for lesbian and gay participants and 26% for bisexual participants compared with 13% for heterosexual participants.

The team also found that bisexual people were almost twice as likely as lesbian and gay or heterosexual participants to have had multiple experiences of homelessness, and when homeless, bisexual participants were more likely to sleep rough than lesbian, gay or heterosexual participants. The Journeys Home study also found that, on average, bisexual participants were much younger than either lesbian, gay or heterosexual participants when they first experienced homelessness.

Analyses were then conducted to understand the reasons behind the first encounter with homelessness. Factors such as poor mental health, drug use, and financial problems caused similar levels of homelessness across all participants regardless of sexual identity. However, family conflict or violence was much more frequently listed as the main reason for first homelessness by bisexual participants than by lesbian, gay or heterosexual participants.

Interestingly, it was found that LGB participants were significantly more likely than heterosexual participants to stay with friends than family when homeless. The data from both studies highlighted that bisexual participants were more vulnerable to family risks such as childhood trauma, sexual abuse, foster care and family violence than lesbian or gay participants. The researchers noted that family conflict resulting in homelessness may be due to different sexual identities being poorly understood and so less accepted by many families, especially within multicultural or regional communities.

LGB participants often reported strong personal support networks which may help them be more resilient when confronted with discrimination and structural stigma. LGB participants reported strong support from friends, high educational attainment, involvement in civic and political groups, and lesbian and gay participants were also more likely to be in relationships.

It is particularly interesting to note a younger age of first homelessness was associated with a higher risk of repeated homelessness and increased levels of mental health problems among the bisexual participants in comparison to lesbian and gay participants. The team suggested that these factors may be due to higher rates of childhood trauma leading to earlier first homelessness which itself is a risk factor for poor mental health and reduced social support. Other studies have suggested that higher levels of mental health problems among bisexual people may be due to biphobia and lack of community and mental healthcare support.

Anecdotal reports from the LGBTQ community and homelessness service providers suggest that trans and non-binary people are also highly likely to experience housing insecurity and should be included in any policy revisions. It is likely that a proportion of participants in the GSS and Journeys Home studies may actually be trans or gender-diverse.

Other limitations of this work include the relatively small numbers of LGB participants, and the fact that the GSS was completed by people living in private dwellings and so excluded people who were homeless or were living in temporary accommodation. Dr McNair and the team recommend that any future housing and homelessness studies include a broad range of questions on sexual orientation and gender identity, as well as questions relating to the influence of these factors on housing stability.

The team’s work has important implications for future housing policy. If LGB people are identified as a vulnerable group, improvements to LGB competency training and specific services can be developed. Policies to prevent LGB homelessness could include educating families about diverse sexual identities. Whilst the LGB participants in the studies often had strong friendship support, an American study demonstrated that strong familial ties were the most important protective factor against homelessness. There is also a role for additional support in education and employment to reduce the risk of homelessness for LGB people.

The study conducted by Dr McNair and the team is the first of its kind to investigate risk and resilience factors associated with homelessness for LGB people in Australia. These important findings can now be used to improve Australian homelessness policy and enhance public services.

This SciPod is a summary of the paper ‘Lesbian, gay and bisexual homelessness in Australia: Risk and resilience factors to consider in policy and practice’ published in Health and Social Care in the Community. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/hsc.13439>

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