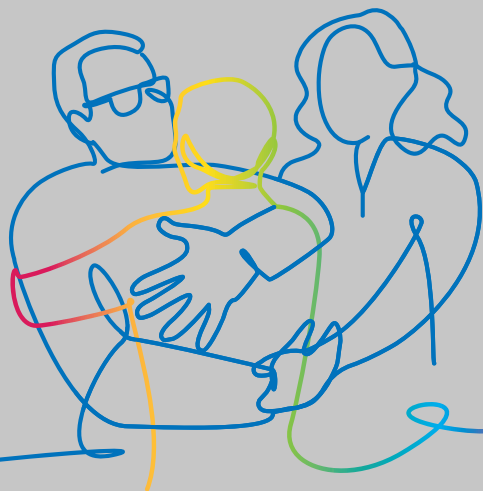


關注同志青年及其家長

精神健康的研究

Families and physical and mental health of LGBT youth in Hong Kong



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01 Preface

The Boys' & Girls' Clubs Association of Hong Kong has launched "Project Touch" since 2007, being the first project in Hong Kong to provide support to LGBTQ+ teenagers and their parents. We believe and hope that every teenager could develop positive growth, eventually living their true-selves; and that sexuality would not be a barrier between teenagers and their parents, instead they could communicate and understand each other.

In 2017, with sponsorship from the Keswick Foundation, the project was able to develop further counselling services to LGBTQ+ families. In order to systematically analyze and consolidate our service experiences, we invited the Gender Research Centre from the Chinese University of Hong Kong to conduct research in looking into the mental health of LGBTQ+ teenagers and their parents. Over the past three years we have invited over 550 LGBTQ+ teenagers and 140 parents with LGBTQ+ children to fill out surveys and participate in focus group interviews; their mental health status, factors affecting their mental health and how it would be related to sexuality were studied.

It is revealed in this research that over 50% of the LGBTQ+ teenager participants yearn for their parents' acceptance and affirmation, and most parents want to be informed of their children's sexuality and any conditions arising from that. As the Chinese saying goes, "to raise a child till he reaches age one hundred, a parent would always worry about the child for 99 years" (養兒一百歲, 長憂九十九), LGBTQ+ parents would not be an exception, they worry mostly about the negative experience and discrimination their children might face due to their sexuality. It is also shown in the research that parents' acceptance of the sexuality of LGBTQ+ children would bring about positive effect in both parties' mental health.

The above findings are reflected in the frontline work of the project as well. Different values and discriminative attitudes in the society has made coming out a stressful experience for both LGBTQ+ teenagers and their parents. Nevertheless, with love and communication, more parents are able to re-examine their thoughts and values on sexuality, which help to understand their children and rebuild their relationship. The above research findings and our service experiences have proved the importance of social acceptance and support to LGBTQ+ parents and teenagers.

We sincerely hope that this research could allow the public and professions to gain more understanding on the difficulties and needs that LGBTQ+ teenagers and their parents encounter, in order to provide the support they need. Furthermore, different members of the society are invited to contribute in building a more diverse society, where more people can live apologetically.



CHAN KIN HUNG

Executive Director, The Boys' and Girls' Clubs Association of Hong Kong

Highlights from the survey of LGB youth:

74.6% of LGB youth lived with their mothers and 66.6% had everyday contact with their mothers.

57.3% and 41.1% of the LGB youth in Hong Kong wished to come out to their mothers and fathers respectively. However, only slightly more than half of the respondents (51.9%) did disclose their sexual orientation to their mothers and 34.2% of them did disclose to their fathers.

Among those who had come out to their parents ($n=324$ to their mothers, $n=196$ to their fathers), half of them reported their mothers' (55.2%) and fathers' (56.6%) first reaction were unaccepting or very unaccepting. However, nearly half of them reported observing some positive changes in their mothers' (47.5%) and fathers' (35.7%) attitudes toward their sexual orientation.

It was found that both negative and positive treatment of different forms with regard to their sexual orientation from the family were reported by LGB youth.

Mothers' attitudes and acceptance toward the LGB youth's sexual orientation were positively related to the LGB youth's reported life satisfaction.

03

Highlights from the survey of parents with LGBT children:

A vast majority of the parent respondents would like their LGBT children to come out to them (82.1%). However, nearly half of the respondents (45.1%) expressed unaccepting or very unaccepting attitudes when their LGBT children first came out to them.

Nearly half of respondents became more accepting of their children's sexual orientation (49.6%), 28.6% of them remained unchanged, holding their unaccepting or neutral attitudes. 20.3% of them kept their accepting attitudes. And only 1.5% of them became more unaccepting.

It was found that parents who attended LGBT-related talks/ workshops and sought social service (e.g. from Project Touch, BGCA) were more likely to become more accepting of their children's sexual orientation. Also, having social support from their friends was another factor for positive attitude change.

More than one-third of parents (35.2%) showed a moderate-to-high level of worries related to their children's sexual orientation. It was found that parents were most worried that their children would face discriminatory experiences in their daily lives (53.1%). Comparatively, fewer parents were worried about themselves being negatively judged and treated by their peers and in the society (15.2%). It reflects that parents are mainly concerned about their children's well-being.



Methodology

The study consists of two surveys: an online survey of LGBT youth in Hong Kong, and a survey of parents who have LGBT children



An online survey with LGB Youth in Hong Kong

The survey was designed with a careful review of existing research literature, with additional valuable feedback from staff of the BGCA Project Touch programme, and pilot interviewees. Data collection was conducted from March 2019 to Feb 2020. Respondents were recruited through BGCA Project Touch, other LGB local community groups and social media in Hong Kong.

The inclusion criteria for the study were (1) self-identifying as gay, lesbian, bisexual or otherwise non-heterosexual and (2) living in Hong Kong. Individuals who were interested in the study were directed to the online survey platform, Qualtrics. They were required to read the study background and provide informed consent before participating in the study. After completing the survey, the respondents could choose to enter the lucky draw with the chances of winning an online gift voucher HK\$50. The study was approved by the Survey and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee of the Chinese University of Hong Kong. For this study, respondents who were aged from 18 to 35 years old were included, yielding an analytical sample of 552 LGB youth in Hong Kong. The demographics of the participants can be found in Table 1.



A survey with parents who have LGBT children

A survey was designed for parents who have LGBT children. The survey was designed with a careful review of existing research literature, and the staff from the BGCA Project Touch programme provided important feedback on the survey based on their frontline experiences of working with the parents. Participant recruitment was conducted through BGCA Project Touch. The inclusion criteria for the study were (1) parents; (2a) having children who self-identified as gay, lesbian or otherwise non-heterosexual; or (2b) having children who self-identified as transgender or gender-nonbinary; or (2c) having doubts about their children's sexual orientation or gender identity; (3) living in Hong Kong.

Participant were recruited from January 2018 to June 2020. The staff in Project Touch introduced the research to parents who received their service or participated in their activities. Parents who expressed initial interest were invited to participate in the survey. They were informed that the information collected would be kept strictly confidential and their participation was completely voluntary. They had the right to refuse to answer any specific questions and could withdraw anytime without affecting the service they received from the NGO. After getting their informed consent, the participants completed the paper-based survey. An online survey link was also given to parents who wished to fill in the survey online. In addition, a brief introduction of the research and an online survey link were posted on the social media to recruit more participants. In total, 146 respondents completed the survey. The demographics of the respondents can be found in Table 2.

05

Major findings: Survey with LGB youth

Based on previous studies, transgender people face unique stresses and challenges related to their gender identity and expression, which are clearly different from the experiences of LGB people. The lived experience of transgender people should be studied in a different research in order to give a more in-depth discussion of their needs and challenges faced.





Close proximity between LGB youth in Hong Kong and their parents

Close proximity was found between LGB youth in Hong Kong and their parents. Majority of LGB youth lived with their mothers (74.6%), fathers (60.3%) and siblings (46.6%). Around half of them reported everyday contact with their mothers (66.6%) and fathers (46.1%).



LGB youth in Hong Kong: many want to come out to their parents but fewer had done so

57.3% and 41.1% of the LGB youth in Hong Kong wished to come out to their mothers and fathers respectively. 71% and 50.1% of the respondents reported that having their mothers (71%) and fathers' (50.1%) acceptance were important or very important for them.

Yet, only around half of the respondents disclosed their sexual orientation to their parents. Only slightly more than half of the respondents (51.9%, n=324) did disclose their sexual orientation to their mothers and 34.2% (n=196) of them did disclose to their fathers. However, 80% and 65.4% of the respondents reported that their mothers and fathers likely, very likely or definitely knew about their sexual orientation respectively.



5.3

Majority of parents' immediate responses were unaccepting when the LGB youth came out

Among those who had come out to their parents (n=324 to their mothers, n=196 to their fathers), half of them reported their mothers' (55.2%) and fathers' (56.6%) first reaction were unaccepting or very unaccepting. Around one-fourth of them reported that their mothers (24.1%) and fathers (25.0%) were neutral about it. Only 20.7% and 18.4% of them reported that their mothers and fathers were accepting or very accepting respectively.



5.4

Positive changes in parents' attitudes were observed by LGB youth over time

Nearly half of them reported observing some positive changes in their mothers' (47.5%) and fathers' (35.7%) attitudes toward their sexual orientation, 29% of them reported that their mothers' and 45.9% of them reported their fathers' attitudes towards their sexual orientation remained unchanged and had unacceptable or neutral attitudes towards their sexual orientation.



Negative treatment from parents experienced by LGB youth was not uncommon

It was found that both negative and positive treatment of different forms with regard to their sexual orientation from the family were reported by LGB youth. A substantial proportion of LGB youth reported experiencing negative and positive treatment from their parents in the past year

A substantial proportion of the respondents (N=552) indicated that their mothers (48.5%) and fathers (26.9%) had performed negative treatment on them in the previous year. The three most common negative treatment reported were (1) being encouraged by their mothers to enter heterosexual relationship (30.0%), (2) being reminded by their mothers to watch their behaviour and appearance (25.8%), and (3) their mothers pretended not knowing/refused to acknowledge their sexual orientation (21.5%).

Some more extreme forms of negative treatment experienced in the respondents' lifetime were also reported, such as (1) their mothers cried in front of them (23.2%), (2) their mothers accused them to be unfilial/dishonouring the family (14.8%), (3) their mothers considered letting them receive conversion therapy (9.8%), (4) their mothers threatened to kick them out (6.8%), (5) their mothers restricted their personal freedom (7%) and (6) their mothers threatened to commit suicide (4.4%).

Respondents who were female, had non-conforming gender expression, were significantly much more likely to have experienced negative treatment from their mothers. No significant pattern had been observed in terms of negative treatment from their fathers.

Less than one-fifth of the respondents (all) reported facing strong or very strong pressure from their parents to get married with an opposite-sex partner (17.6% from their mothers and 10.8% from their fathers) and having children (12.2% from their mothers and 6.3% from their fathers).



Positive treatment from parents experienced by LGB youth

A substantial proportion of the respondents reported that their mothers (50.4%) and fathers (25.9%) had performed some positive treatment on them in the past year. More than one-third of the respondents reported that their mothers (37.5%) and their fathers (20.6%) said that they respected the youth's choices. 26.2% and 12.8% reported that their mothers and fathers welcomed their partners to visit them. 14.8% and 5.3% reported that their mothers and fathers discussed LGBT-related issues at home respectively.

Some positive treatment from their parents experienced by the respondents' lifetime were also reported. 18% of their mothers expressed support on their children's sexual orientation, 11.2% of their mothers showed their supportive stances on LGBT issues. 8.4% of their mothers supported their marriage with their same-sex partner. 3% of their mothers participated in LGBT-related advocacy (e.g. Pride Parade and Pinkdot) and 2.3% of their mothers participated in LGBT-related activities (e.g. seminars).



LGB youth: mothers' attitudes and acceptance toward the youth's sexual orientation were positively related to the youth's reported life satisfaction.

A third of the respondents (33.9%) showed moderate to severe depression in the past two weeks. Nearly half of them (48.9%) reported to have a low level of life satisfaction (extremely dissatisfied, dissatisfied and slightly dissatisfied). One-fifth of the respondents (19.5%) had ever thought of suicide and 1.6% had ever attempted suicide.

It was found that mothers' attitudes and acceptance toward the youth's sexual orientation were positively related to the youth's reported life satisfaction. Fathers' attitudes and acceptance towards the youth's sexual orientation were not significantly related to the youth's mental health.

06

Major findings: Survey with parents with LGBT children



Parents were from diverse background

The background of parents with LGBT children was very diverse. They came from various socioeconomic backgrounds, with different marital status and religious beliefs, but they faced similar experiences and concerns related to their children's sexual orientation.



A vast majority of the parent respondents would like their children to come out to them, however, it was a challenge for parents to accept their children's coming out at the beginning

A vast majority of the parent respondents would like their children to come out to them (82.1%). 14.5% of them said their attitudes were complicated about it and only 3.4% of the parent respondents would not like their children come out to them.

However, nearly half of the respondents (45.1%) expressed unaccepting or very unaccepting attitudes when their children first came out to them. 33.8% of them reported they held neutral attitudes and only 21.1% of them had accepting or very accepting attitudes.

Currently, at the time of the survey, more than half of the respondents (56.2%) reported accepting or very accepting attitudes toward their children's sexual orientation. 28.8% of them expressed neutral attitudes and 15.1% of them had unaccepting or very unaccepting attitudes.

Respondents whose children were 30 years old or above were more likely to hold accepting attitudes, compared with those who had children aged 19-29 and aged 18 or below. Respondents who had cisgender children were more likely to accept their children's sexualities, compared with those whose children were self-identified as transgender, and those who themselves or their children were not sure about it. Respondents who perceived their partners having accepting attitudes were more likely to accept their children's sexual orientation. No significant pattern between parents' demographics (including their gender, age, educational attainment, income and religious background) and parents' attitudes toward their children's sexual orientation could be observed.



6.4

Parents who had negative attitudes towards their children's sexual orientation showed higher levels of depressive and anxiety symptoms

13.8% and 13.1% of the respondents showed moderate-to-severe depressive and anxiety symptoms respectively, 55.2% and 64.4% of the respondents had felt despair and had engaged in self-blame because of their children's sexual orientation respectively, 16.6% of them had had suicidal thoughts and 4.2% of them had attempted suicide because of their children's sexual orientation.

Parents who had unaccepting/very unaccepting attitudes towards their children's sexual orientation showed higher levels of depressive and anxiety symptoms than the parents who had neutral or accepting/very accepting attitudes towards their children's sexual orientation. Also, parents who expressed higher degree of worries based on their children's sexual orientation showed higher level of depressive and anxiety symptoms.



Negative treatment to LGB children was common, especially among parents who had unaccepting attitudes towards their children's sexual orientation

A substantial proportion of the respondents (67.6%) indicated that they had performed negative treatment on their children. The three most common negative treatment included: (1) reminding their children to watch their behaviour and appearance (41.3%), (2) encouraging their children to enter heterosexual relationship (29.6%) and (3) crying in front of their children (20.1%).

Some more extreme forms of negative treatment were performed on their children, such as (1) considering letting their children receive conversion therapy (20.6%), (2) restricting their children's personal freedom (2.1%), (3) financial control (4.9%), (4) letting their children receive conversion therapy (6.4%), (4) physical violence (0.7%) and (5) threatening to commit suicide (0.7%).

Parents who had unaccepting/very unaccepting attitudes towards their children's sexual orientation were more likely to report having performed negative treatment on their children than those who had neutral or accepting/very accepting attitudes towards their children's sexual orientation.



6.6

Positive treatment to LGB children co-existed

Majority of the respondents (81.9%) indicated that they had performed some positive treatment on their children, including (1) showing that they respected their children's decision (76.9%), (2) showing welcome to their children's partners to visit them (57.6%), (3) supporting their children to join LGBT-related activities (46.2%), and (4) talking about LGBT issues at home (42.3%).



Parents wish to meet other parents with LGBT children and LGBT youth; BGCA Project Touch service is one of the ways for parents to receive support and get connected to those who had similar experience

46.2% and 42% of the respondents said they strongly hoped /hoped to meet other parents who had LGBT children and other LGBT youth respectively.

41.4% of the respondents did not receive BGCA Project Touch service or join their activities at all, 28.3% of them received the service and/or joined their activities for less than one year, followed by 12.4% of them who joined for 1 to 2 years, 9% of them who joined for 3 to 5 years and 9% of them who joined for more than 6 years.

For those who received the BGCA Project Touch service or joined their activities, 18.8% of the parents said their children introduced the BGCA parental service to them, 35.3% said they knew about the service through online information. The top three reasons why they chose to seek help from BGCA Project Touch Service were (1) they wanted to seek professional social service (67.1%), (2) the social workers could provide them support (58.8%) and (3) this project could let them meet more parents who had similar experience (56.5%).

For the service provided by BGCA Project Touch, 4.5 out of 5 marks was given by the respondents who joined the programme. 83.3% of the parents said they would recommend or definitely recommend the BGCA Project Touch service to others, 57.8% thought that the services should be further expanded.

07 Conclusion

This study contributes to the discussion on the experiences of LGB youth and their parents in Hong Kong. In particular, it provides novel empirical evidence of self-reported experiences of 148 parents who had LGBT children, where any data on this group has been extremely rare as they have been a hard-reaching population. A few key points will be elaborated and highlighted. First, both LGBT youth and parents perceived coming out as important. LGBT youth wished to disclose their sexual orientation to their parents. Parents wished their children to come out to them. LGBT youth perceived getting their parents' acceptance as important.

Second, change is possible. From the findings from both LGBT youth and parents' surveys, parents' attitudes changed over time. Even though parents may have unaccepting attitudes when their children first came out, their attitudes may change over time and become more accepting. Attendance of LGBT-related workshops and seminars, gaining social support from friends and getting social service are crucial for parents' attitudinal changes.

Third, parents showed a higher degree of worries about discriminatory experience and poor well-being experienced by their children, compared to the worries about themselves being judged or treated negatively. Parents' worries about their children's experience may be based on their perception of LGBT-unfriendliness in the general society.

Forth, parents' attitudes toward their children's sexual orientation affected both parents and children's mental health. Some parents experienced despair, self-blaming, suicidal thoughts and attempts because of their children's sexual orientation. Parents who had unaccepting/very unaccepting attitudes and expressed higher degree of worries about their children's sexual orientation showed higher levels of depressive and anxiety symptoms. It is also found that mother's attitudes and acceptance toward the LGBT youth's sexual orientation were positively related to the youth's reported life satisfaction.

Limitations

While the present study provides a crucial understanding on the relationship between LGBT youth and their families, some limitations are needed to be acknowledged. First, the study employed a cross-sectional design, which did not allow causal relationships between variables to be established. Second, targeted and snowball sampling methods were adopted for this study, yielding a non-probability sample of LGBT youth and parents with LGBT children. Third, particularly for the survey with parents, the respondents were recruited by BGCA Project Touch's staff and via their social media platform. Parents who were more accepting of their children's sexual orientation were more likely to take part in the survey, while parents who held extremely unaccepting attitudes would not be reachable by this study because they were a hidden population. Even within parents who were willing to participate in this study, serious struggles and poor mental health condition can be observed. The actual situation may be even worse and urgently need attention from the society.

09 Implications for Policy makers / Service providers

1. To the Government

Provide support for mental health services for LGBT youth and their parents

When LGBT children come out, both the children themselves and their parents face a lot of pressure and different mental health issues.

The Social Welfare Department shall provide funding support for mental health services for LGBT youth and their parents; while at the same time, promote public understanding and acceptance of people of different sexual orientations and gender identities.

2. To Schools

In parental education and sexuality education in schools, there shall be more emphasis on understanding sexual orientation and gender identity issues, so that both youth and parents can better understand and accept differences and diversity in the family.

3. To Parents

If their children come out to them, accept how they themselves feel at that time without judgment, and allow time to digest the news. At the same time, let their children know, no matter what, they are still loved and accepted by their parents. In case of need, they can seek help from social workers.

Sexualities Research Program and Authors

Sexualities Research Programme is the first research programme in Hong Kong dedicated to conducting rigorous, independent research on sexuality issues, with a particular focus on sexual

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11

Project Touch

Project Touch is the first social service for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) youths in Hong Kong since 2007. We strongly committed towards supporting marginalized youths, and promoting equality and social inclusion. When we first started, social services tailored for the LGBT population were very limited despite the high service demand. Identifying the crippling need for support in LGBT individuals and their families, we took the initiative and developed a holistic development program for LGBT youths in 2007 and the first Parent Support Group in 2008, in the forms of and on-going support group.



Demographic background of LGB respondents (N = 552)

Demographic background	n (%)
Gender	
Male 303	(54.9%)
Female 236	(42.8%)
Others 13	(2.4%)
Sexual orientation	
Gay / lesbian	(69.1%)
Bisexual / pansexual	(23.7%)
Others (e.g., asexual, queer, questioning)	(7.1%)
Age	
18 – 25 320	(58.1%)
26 – 35 231	(41.9%)
Education level	
Secondary or below 59	(10.7%)
Post-secondary 95	(17.1%)
Bachelor's degree or above 391	(71.0%)
Did not respond 7	(1.3%)
Employment status	
Students 204	(36.8%)
In employment 312	(56.6%)
Not in employment 29	(5.3%)
Did not respond 7	(1.3%)
Monthly personal income	
No income 90	(17.2%)
HK\$1 – HK\$4,999 212	(40.5%)
HK\$5,001 – HK\$29,999 151	(28.9%)
HK\$30,000 or above 70	(13.4%)



Table 2

Demographic background of parent respondents and their LGBT children (N = 146)

Demographic background of parent respondents	n (%)
Gender	
Male 32	(21.9%)
Female 111	(76.0%)
Did not respond 3	(2.1%)
Age	
35–54 77	(52.7%)
55 or above 66	(45.2%)
Did not respond 3	(2.1%)
Education level	
Secondary or below 88	(60.3%)
Bachelor's degree or above 55	(37.7%)
Did not respond 3	(2.1%)
Employment status	
In employment 81	(55.5%)
Not in employment 58	(39.7%)
Did not respond 7	(4.8%)
Monthly income	
HK\$0 – HK\$24,999 50	(34.2%)
HK\$25,000 or above 58	(39.7%)
Did not respond 38	(26.0%)



Demographic background of parent respondents and their LGBT children (N = 146)

Demographic background of parents' LGBT children	n (%)
Sex assigned at birth	
Male 100	(68.5%)
Female 46	(31.5%)
Gender identity (self-identified as transgender)	
Yes 29	(19.9%)
No 83	(56.8%)
Their children do not know/not sure 10	(6.8%)
Parents do not know 19	(13.0%)
Did not respond 5	(3.4%)
Sexual orientation	
Gay/lesbian 112	(76.7%)
Bisexual/others 17	(11.7%)
Their children do not know/not sure 6	(4.1%)
Parents do not know 10	(6.8%)
Did not respond 1	(0.7%)
Age	
18 years old or below 16	(11.0%)
19 – 29 95	(65.1%)
30 years old or above 29	(19.9%)
Did not respond 6	(4.1%)

附錄

Appendix



策劃：香港小童群益會 性向無限計劃

贊助：凱瑟克基金

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