

THE EQUALITIES REVIEW

Sexual Orientation Research Review



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Introduction

This research review provides a concise summary of some of the issues that affect lesbian and gay people, and how these issues can be explored within the context of public policy. The research cited is by no means exhaustive, but is a selection of some of the leading research that relates to lesbian and gay people, and provides a useful starting point for any policy discussion or development.

Each section briefly outlines the issues that contextualise the referenced research. It then details the research gaps in each area, and provides some examples of best practice initiatives in each area.

Research into lesbian and gay issues is limited. This is because of a lack of funding for extensive research projects, and a lack of national emphasis on conducting a thorough needs assessment of the lesbian and gay community.

Opportunities for conducting far-reaching research are limited. There are trusts and foundations that fund equality work, but generally they are now more concerned with finding best practice solutions to solve problems that have already been identified via needs assessments. Such basic assessments have yet to be conducted in the area of sexual orientation. Lesbian and gay policy development is still at its most elementary stages.

This situation has led to significant research gaps. There has been no extensive research to investigate the extent of lesbian and gay people's inclusion in society, or the extent and impact of their exclusion. The fundamental problem is the lack of baseline data that exists in the UK. The National Census does not ask about sexual orientation, and general, national attitudinal studies do not include questions about homophobia and attitudes to lesbian and gay people. There is also no formal mechanism to ensure that lesbian and gay issues are at the heart of any government policy development, nor is there any research that identifies why this is the case, or assesses the impact of this omission. For example, the Social Exclusion Unit has not undertaken any substantial research into the extent of social exclusion experienced by lesbian and gay people. Furthermore, no thorough needs assessment has been conducted in the fields of health, education, employment, housing, the arts, media, and sport, or any other major policy area.

Further difficulties arise in attempting to define the lesbian and gay community. Due to the nature of homophobia (a fear and prejudice towards people who are gay), there is still sometimes a reticence amongst lesbian and gay people to be considered collectively as a community. On occasions when this does happen, such a notion of community masks the diversity that exists amongst lesbian and gay people, preventing integration with other equality work and policy. This has a major consequence on any lesbian and gay research projects. Quantitative studies are often conducted using a 'snowball' technique, where surveys are circulated amongst defined and organised communities, and their friends. Furthermore, research projects are promoted through the lesbian and gay community. This can skew results. More sophisticated methods of research are developing yet this relies on levels of funding sufficient to achieve a wider ranging scope.

Summary

Stage of Life Needs

- Lesbian and gay people have a range of needs throughout their life that may or may not be directly affected by their sexual orientation.
- Pre-school, school, relationships and adolescence, relationship with parents, leaving home, finances, family, work, and retirement, are all significant stages of life that pose issues for lesbian and gay people, or their families.

Citizenship and democracy

- Research and policy development works on the assumption that lesbian and gay people belong to a community who can be involved in the development of equality policy, democracy and citizenship. That is, they identify as a minority.
- Generally, however, lesbian and gay people are removed from the general provisions of society, are unserved by public policy and assume that public policy is not applicable to them, or do not identify as a minority. Where a local area makes a concerted effort to engage lesbian and gay citizens, they are actively involved. In Brighton, 81% of gay people are registered to vote (91% of the general population is registered to vote.)

Public attitudes and involvement

- The greatest barrier to citizenship and democracy amongst lesbian and gay people is homophobia and the prevalent assumption in the development of policies, that everyone is heterosexual.
- Stonewall's *Profiles of Prejudice* (published 2003) commissioned MORI to measure manifestations of prejudice among the UK population. It found that 35% of people knew someone who was homophobic.
- Parents, followed by the media, were thought to provide the best means of tackling homophobia.

Families

- Lesbians and gay men have children, or caring responsibilities for other members of a family, and an extended family like all other members of society, despite the lack of acknowledgement of this in social policy structures.
- Research has established that having same sex parents makes no difference to educational or social development or the eventual sexual orientation of a child.

- Homophobic bullying in schools does have an impact, but it is felt that this is insufficient reason for lesbian and gay people not to have children.
- The Census does not ask about a person's sexual orientation, therefore it is not known how many gay people have families.

Education

- Homophobic bullying is particularly prevalent in schools because schools have not developed mechanisms for tackling it. There is also some entirely unfounded anxiety that if children are taught about gay people, they will become gay.
- In a recent survey, 82% of lesbian and gay adult respondents stated that they had been subject to name-calling at school, 71% had been ridiculed in front of others, and 60% had reported being hit or kicked.
- In another survey, 82% of secondary school teachers were aware of verbal homophobic abuse in schools but only 6% of schools have anti-homophobia policies.

Housing and communities

- Although lesbian and gay people may not have specific housing needs, research suggests that they are more likely to find themselves with housing problems.
- Young people may be more likely to find themselves excluded from the family home if they are lesbian or gay.
- Lesbian and gay people still experience tenancy problems if a partner dies.
- Lesbian and gay people sometimes find it hard to hide their sexuality around their neighbourhood and home, and are therefore more likely to be the subject of homophobic abuse. This has led to the development of discrete estates that have a high gay population.

Health and social care

- It is assumed that gay men's unique health care needs are solely preoccupied with sexual health, and HIV in particular. Half of gay men do not reveal their sexuality to their GP.
- It is also assumed that lesbians do not have any unique health needs, and are generally told they do not need to have cervical cancer screening. However, 69% of women who identify as lesbian have had sex with men in the past.

- Homophobia and discriminatory practices are widespread in the NHS, but this is rarely acknowledged or addressed. 20% of health care professionals admit to being homophobic.

Economy and Business

- Homophobia in the work place has a massive impact on lesbian and gay people. It leads to secrecy at work, and employees consequently underperform. Bullying and harassment on the grounds of sexual orientation has only recently been made illegal in the workplace. There are no statutory duties to help prevent homophobia.
- 36% of gay people would change jobs if they experienced homophobia.
- 55% of those who had experienced homophobia at work, stated that it had a negative impact on their work.

Socio-economic backgrounds

- It is generally perceived, and perpetuated through the media, that all gay people come from affluent, middle-class backgrounds.
- Evidence suggests however, that gay people are likely to come from all socio-economic backgrounds, with no particular difference amongst the gay population.
- Gay people can therefore experience social exclusion, yet initiatives to tackle social exclusion do not acknowledge or recognise the particular needs of lesbian and gay people, nor are preventative measures implemented to stop lesbian and gay people being socially excluded.

Crime and hate crime

- Homophobic hate crime is widely under-reported. It can include verbal abuse and physical abuse. It can be very violent or constitute nuisance and harassment. Gay people can also experience domestic violence and other forms of crime not necessarily prompted by, or associated with their sexual orientation.
- 41% of the general population report violent crime. Only 10% of the lesbian and gay population report such crime.
- Research has found that 48% of East London gay people had experienced homophobic crime.
- Three times as many homophobic hate crimes were reported in 2004 as in 2003.

Personal assets and wealth

- Gay people (particularly gay men) still anticipate that they will be discriminated against in the provision of goods and financial services even if statutory protections in this area are introduced. They therefore seek products and services where they know they will not experience discrimination, even if this means that they pay more.
- 64% of gay people would prefer to buy products that have been marketed to them.
- 70% would consider brands where companies actively did not discriminate on the grounds of sexual orientation.

Arts, culture, media and sport

- Lesbian and gay people are generally invisible in the public demonstration of the arts, even though there is a high concentration of gay people who work in the arts. If public personas do exist, they are exaggerated caricatures, or are overly concerned with their sexuality.
- Research has found that television and the media (including the tabloid newspapers) plays a significant role in shaping British attitudes to gay people.
- Homophobia in sport has a significant deleterious impact on young people's involvement. Homophobia can lead to children and young people (regardless of their sexual orientation) dropping out of physical activity. This is particularly the case amongst women.

Multiple identities and multiple discrimination

- The issue of multiple identity and multiple discrimination is at the heart of understanding of identity, and minority needs.
- In a policy context gay people can be from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, be disabled, be old or young, have faith. Effective public policy development recognises that the concept of 'minority communities' often masks the diversity that exists within those communities.
- The gay community is not free from discriminatory attitudes and behaviours, in the same way that other minority communities are not free from homophobia. Greater acknowledgement of the fact that people belong to multiple communities can help tackle discrimination and prejudice.

Stage of life needs

It is difficult to encapsulate a set of general life-stage experiences for a diverse and disparate population, whose only uniform feature is their sexual orientation, and other people's responses and reactions to that orientation. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify some basic issues that might arise for different generations that may be of use to policy makers. Generally, the issues that have been identified in this section have been explored in more detail in other sections, as identified.

Pre-birth to school (0-5)

Very young children learn important lessons about difference and diversity through their parents, and at pre-school. The world at this stage in life, however, is very heterosexual. As a consequence of Section 28, there are very few children's books that portray same-sex family arrangements, or gay people. Children's television also fails to depict that gay people exist. If they do, or are even suspected of doing so, this prompts outrage from certain sections of society. For example, Tinky Winky (of *The Teletubbies*) was thought to be gay because he was purple, had a triangle on his head and carried a handbag.

(<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/276677.stm>). A similar uproar occurred when it was suggested that Bernie and Ernie of Sesame Street, might be partners (they are two good male friends who live together). The depiction that being gay is normal, and that gay people have children, is very strictly removed from children's vision.

This has an extremely negative effect on children whose parents are of the same sex. Although research (see the **Families** section) demonstrates that children raised by parents of the same sex do not experience any negative consequences in the home, being invisible in the media and at nursery school, will inevitably have an affect on the child's perception of themselves.

Furthermore, anecdotal evidence suggests that using the word 'gay' to denote that something is inferior or laughable is used freely by children as young as five. Fear of gay people, and a heightened sense that gay people are inferior, is an integral part of our society, and (unlike other equality issues) such views are not challenged in young people.

School age (5-16)

The difficulties experienced at the beginning of life, continue and are exacerbated throughout school. For students who think they might be gay, are gay, or who are perceived to be gay, it can be difficult to be in school (see the **Education** section). There are very few mechanisms in place in schools to support young people who experience homophobic bullying, and those with gay people in their family are also exposed to abuse. There is also a marked lack of positive role models to help shape a young person's experience and understanding of their sexuality.

Young people are exploring their sexuality at a young age. Although there is no universal age, young people are increasingly sexually active (even if they do not have full sexual intercourse), and therefore it is logical to assume that gay people are realising their sexuality at younger ages, sometimes as young as 12. Some gay people say that they always knew they were gay. This can lead to difficulties for families who want to support children who may be gay or think they are gay. Although the issue of supporting a child who is gay is becoming a more mainstream topic on adult television, parents can be distressed by the thought that their child is gay. This is caused by the fact that being gay is still seen to be negative. A popular portrayal of gay life is one of promiscuity, drug and alcohol abuse, and unhappiness. Furthermore, most resources for young people who think they might be gay reiterate the thinking that being gay is usually a phase that will pass or might pass. For some young gay people, such reassurance can prove more confusing than the initial feelings. Advice sources generally do not recommend that heterosexuality is a phase that may pass. The Connexions guidance, however, is very thorough and considers the significance of labels, the impact of religion, and the anxieties that are associated with telling someone about your sexuality.

(www.connexions-direct.com/index.cfm?pid=153&catalogueContentID=377&render=detailedArticle)

There are local LGB youth organisations, which can help create a positive identity for young people, but finding out about these, and having resources and freedom to attend meetings, depends entirely on the individual, their family or their school. Some young people in rural areas (for example) struggle to access gay listings or attend meetings without arousing suspicions from their family. This leads to a further sense of isolation and exclusion.

Some young people find themselves excluded from home if they are lesbian or gay. This, coupled with an unsupportive school environment, can lead to complete social exclusion. The young person may find themselves in care, or even homeless (see the section **Socio-economic backgrounds**).

Young adults (16-25)

University is considered to be one of the most tolerant places to be lesbian or gay. Most universities have LGBT societies that organise social events and provide resources for support. Anecdotally, young people comment that although they knew they were gay when they were at school, most wait until university to come out. However, attending university in the UK still broadly relies on the student being socially included. As for all young people, children in care are less likely to go to university, and children who do not attend school, or who are bullied, are unlikely to stay on further study. Children from low socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to go to university (*Fair admissions to higher education: recommendations for good practice* Shwartz 2004 www.admissions-review.org.uk/).

Furthermore, even if a lesbian or gay person has not been excluded from the home, anecdotal evidence indicates that parents are sometimes reluctant to financially support their child at university. As levels of university funding is fundamentally determined by parental income, this has a significant effect on young people. Lesbian and gay students may be reluctant to share details of their relationship with their parents, and their sexuality, with a student support officer who may be able to help.

Lesbian and gay people from certain socio-economic backgrounds, or supportive families, are therefore more likely to have a positive experience than others. The opportunities afforded to young lesbian and gay people are therefore disproportionately and adversely affected as a consequence of their sexuality.

Young gay people may have an initial negative experience the first time they tell someone else about their sexuality. This can shape expectations, and affects people's future attitude to work, or college. Young people can learn quickly that coming out is a challenge. Anxiety learnt at a young age about sexuality, is difficult to unlearn or challenge. As gay people must continually come out at each new aspect of a life stage, they become more adapt at coping with people's reactions. This has an unequivocal impact on their entire life, and influences the choices they make. Although this can lead to a heightened sense of removal from mainstream society, gay people can also learn from these experiences, and can be better at communicating, achieve a higher level of empathy with people from a variety of backgrounds, and are more confident about who they are. (See the section **Economy and Business**).

Working age (25-60)

As well as the fact that lesbian and gay people have to continue to come out throughout their working life, and manage people's reactions and expectations, gay people must also manage their finances (see the section **Personal Assets and Wealth**), perhaps attempt to start a family (see **Families**), and possibly manage homophobia in the workplace and the impact this may have on their promotional opportunities (see **Economy and Business**). This is also a period of life where many gay people begin to perceive their sexuality in a different context, as they might meet a partner. This can be a marked positive stage in life. It may also be the case, however, that at this point, some adults may be coming out for the first time, prompting changes at home, for any children, and within the work place. This situation brings new challenges for the individual, who may be more acutely aware of the extent of prejudice they may encounter, or judgements they may face for 'changing their mind' about their sexuality. Such actions can also lead to ostracising by friends and family, leading to an immediate removal from mainstream society.

Older People (60 +)

Older people face several issues that concern the provision of social services in the UK. Gay people are more likely to live alone when they are older (though this situation may change in time), and are more likely to be without children (see **Multiple Identities and Multiple Discrimination**). There are also difficulties surrounding access to appropriate care through retirement homes, who may not be equipped or willing to support same sex partners. Many elderly lesbian and gay people are apprehensive about having to go into a nursing home, and possibly back into the closet. A thorough needs assessment is necessary to establish the exact needs of older gay people.

Citizenship and democracy

Citizenship and democracy are key, linked concepts, which are central to an individual's involvement and relationship with their country. An active involvement in society, by members from diverse and varied backgrounds, makes a significant contribution to the democratic state. It is generally understood that there is a declining involvement by citizens in the political process in the UK. Although equality, increased rights, and a commitment to a public good, form the fabric of citizenship in the UK, gay people are sometimes excluded from the 'demos'. Gay people can be acutely aware of their difference, and despite an increased emphasis on equality and diversity, are aware that they are not targeted or supported in the same way as other minority groups.

Unequal treatment under the law in the UK can lead to the social designation of gay people. This can sometimes lead, on the one hand, to a greater involvement in gay activism which is separate from mainstreamed political and public activity, although is unequivocally essential for the inclusion and support of LGB people in society. Alternatively, gay people may simply not engage with any level of political activity, assuming that mainstream politics fails to represent or adequately reflect their needs. When gay people do get involved with mainstream politics, it is often from a position of invisibility – the back stages of politics. There are very few 'out' gay politicians. Within a social framework of exclusion, gay people may not want to draw public attention to their sexual orientation. This does not mean that gay people are necessarily uninvolved in democracy, but are discrete about their sexual orientation when they do participate.

This sense of separation can be heightened by discrimination experienced by gay people who attempt to engage with their local or national community, but face homophobia. For example, gay couples may not be accepted to foster children, or a lesbian may not be able to work in a rape crisis centre, or an openly gay man may not be able to run a local Scout company.

Local and regional groups were established, with help from one off funding, to support the greater involvement of the LGB community in public life. Many of these projects have now ceased to practice, usually due to a lack of funding.

Existing research:

In *Sexuality and Democracy: Identities and strategies in Lesbian and Gay Politics*, (2000), Rahman argues that considering the issues of sexuality and gender raises important socio-political questions 'which concern the whole realm of social interaction and sexual relationships' rather than merely raising questions about the human rights of lesbian and gay people. Achieving rights for lesbian and gay people relies on an appreciation of a collective and individual political identity. Such an identity is difficult to identify and articulate.

The Changing Politics of Lesbian and Gay Equality in Local Government 1990-2001 examines the changing nature of the equalities agenda in local government, and the impact this has had on the lesbian, gay and bisexual community and their agenda. The paper finds that although there has been an overall trend towards the mainstreaming of equalities, this is not necessarily reflected in the policies, practices and procedures that exist in local government. Furthermore, the democratic changes towards Cabinet government and the elimination of service committees were also seen to have a negative impact on lesbian and gay representation.

[www.monitoring-group.co.uk/News%20and%20Campaigns/research%20material/homophobia/the changing politics of lesbian and gay equality.pdf](http://www.monitoring-group.co.uk/News%20and%20Campaigns/research%20material/homophobia/the%20changing%20politics%20of%20lesbian%20and%20gay%20equality.pdf)

Out Inside Community Work: Lesbian, Gay & Bisexual Communities, Homophobia & Community Work Rachel Wild examines how lesbian and gay people, who work with communities and are active citizens in their communities, experience that involvement but often play a different, unique role, if they are lesbian or gay themselves. The essay examines the difficult interplay between belonging to a community socially, politically and professionally. Wild notes that the LGB community have had to mask internal diversities in order to emulate other minority bodies of representation (this may be the case for all equality strands) yet despite this, virtually all community practices is initiated and sustained by community action. Wild notes that this is often unsustainable, due to a lack of resources and mainstream commitment and engagement.

Extensive mapping exercises examining lesbian and gay involvement in communities have been conducted. *Count me In: Brighton and Hove* (www.spectrum-lgbt.org/html/countmein.htm) found, amongst other things, that 37% of respondents had volunteered for an LGBT voluntary group and 81% of respondents were registered to vote. Brighton is, however, an area that has a high gay population, and well developed strategies for achieving LGB community involvement. This is still less than the national population however, where 91% of the population are registered to vote. (Understanding electoral registration: *The extent and nature of non-registration in Britain*, The Electoral Commission 2005) (www.electoralcommission.org.uk/files/dms/Undreg-FINAL_18366-13545_ENSW.pdf)

Count me In: London Borough of Newham (www.geocities.com/gaynewham/consultation.html) found that 73% of respondents would attend an LGBT specific local event (indicating that no such event currently exists) and felt that the Borough of Newham could do more to support inclusion and promote opportunities for citizenship.

Research gaps:

If mapping surveys are conducted, it can be assumed that there is a concerted effort in an area to improve LGB involvement in the public life of the locality. Similar surveys should be conducted on a national and local level in order to establish the needs of lesbian and gay people, and their involvement in their community.

Research should be conducted to examine the extent to which those who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual, belong to or interact with a local LGB community, and whether there is any subsequent involvement in public life, via this route. It is possible that the current “LGB community” does not support a diversity of need or experience, and therefore policy makers may feel they are accessing LGB people, but are in fact, only accessing a small minority.

It is also therefore necessary to investigate the extent to which lesbian and gay people feel part of wider British society, and whether there are any significant barriers for democratic inclusion. Research should be conducted to evaluate the extent to which homophobia, or perceptions of homophobia, serves as a barrier for mainstream inclusion.

Existing best practice initiatives:

There are many best practice initiatives taking place in the UK yet due to limited funding, publicity and profile is often limited. However, a selection is listed below as well as nationwide projects instigated to improve lesbian and gay involvement in society.

Get Involved: A guide to active citizenship for LGBT people (Beth Egan and Sarah Lee *Stonewall*) www.stonewall.org.uk/information_bank/community/64.asp.

Get Involved is written from an LGBT perspective, and its aim is to encourage people to be more actively involved in public life. It is split into nine sections that explore the community and voluntary sector, the criminal justice system, democratic participation, education, health, the housing industry and economic development, leisure, cultural services and the environment and social services.

The Year of the Volunteer website has a specific category to enable citizens to volunteer for lesbian, gay and bisexual organisations (as well as many other fields). www.yearofthevolunteer.org

Spectrum LGBT Forum is Brighton & Hove’s Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender (LGBT) Community Forum. Following the Count Me In survey conducted in Brighton & Hove which asked the large gay population of Brighton about their experiences as citizens, Spectrum was formed to support implementation of the community strategy.

Public attitudes and involvement

Public attitude to lesbian and gay sexuality has changed dramatically in the last thirty years. Gay male sexuality is no longer illegal, it is now illegal to discriminate against gay people in the work place, Section 28 has been scrapped, and the age of consent equalised. These legislative developments have had a significant positive impact on the rights of lesbian and gay people in the UK, and mark the beginning of inclusion of lesbian and gay people. There is however, still a significant negative public attitude to gay and lesbian sexuality which hampers the impact of any legislative developments.

Homophobia is still, in many quarters, an acceptable part of British society. Homophobia stems from the assumption that heterosexuality is intrinsic to society; men are attracted to women, and women are attracted to men. Gay and lesbian sexuality, on the other hand, is seen to be behavioural. It is seen as something that someone "does" rather than what someone "is". This leads to a condemnation of a person's "lifestyle choice", which is thought to be changeable, immoral, and highly inappropriate. For example, Conservative councillor Michael Tickner said recently about Civil Partnership Ceremonies: "What about the rights of straight people and people who have normal sexual tendencies?". This view is often tolerated in the media, in politics, and can shape the formation of policy (even if it is well intentioned). There is an overriding sense of otherness that justifies unequal treatment. This unequal treatment manifests itself in terms of limited rights, but also can manifest itself in the form of bullying, verbal and physical harassment, and violence.

Homophobia can also have an impact on lesbian and gay people's perception of themselves. When gay people grow up mostly hearing negative ideas about gay and lesbian sexuality, they can feel rejected or marginalised from society, and this can lead to a fear and hatred of their own orientation. This can lead to further levels of marginalisation, as well as self-hatred and depression. Inadequate social and health care support for people in this situation leads to further difficulties.

Existing research:

Profiles of Prejudice (Stonewall) reveals the profile of prejudice in the England derived from the 2001 Mori Poll. 35% of respondents said that they knew someone who was prejudiced against lesbian and gay people. The report also found that parents were in the best position to tackle prejudice, the next being television. People also stated that their prejudice stemmed from religious belief (26% of those who felt less positive towards lesbian and gay people). Those who knew someone who was lesbian or gay were less than half as likely to be prejudiced indicating that empathy is the key to eradicating prejudice. (www.stonewall.org.uk/information_bank/multiple_discrimination/prejudice/99.asp)

Understanding Prejudice (Stonewall) stems from *Profiles of Prejudice* and examines the nature and manifestations of prejudice. It concludes that prejudice stems from (amongst other things) the feeling that minority groups do not uphold traditional British values, and the assumption that minority groups receive preferential treatment. It also concludes that if a person is homophobic, they are also likely to be racist and sexist.

(www.stonewall.org.uk/documents/pdf_cover_content.pdf)

Research gaps:

Understanding the nature and extent of prejudice against gay people, and the impact this has on the gay community, is integral to any effective policy development. The nature of homophobia is such that many gay people accept it as a facet of their life and do not even recognise that they are receiving unequal treatment. Longitudinal research, to track attitudes over time, is essential.

Research should initially be conducted into attitudes of service providers and the impact this has on service delivery. Research should also be undertaken to examine attitudes within parliament, and assess the impact that these attitudes have on policy development.

General, national, attitudinal surveys should include questions about homophobia and attitudes to lesbian and gay people as a matter of course.

Existing best practice initiatives:

Initiatives to tackle homophobia generally occur in relation to specific aspects of policy, which are explored elsewhere in this paper. However, Stonewall, as an organisation that has an overarching understanding of prejudice, places tackling homophobia at the core of its mission statement. www.stonewall.org.uk

Families

Culture and society reflects a narrow view and concept of family that revolves around the ideal of an opposite sex couple. Despite increased emphasis at all levels of government, on the importance of family to the fabric of society, there is limited acknowledgement that same-sex couples are capable of constituting a family, and that same-sex couples (and gay people who are not in a relationship) have children, or have caring responsibilities to others within their immediate family, or indeed are members of their immediate family. Two key legislative developments have made a difference; first, the Adoption and Children Act 2002 enables same-sex couples to be considered for adoption, and the Civil Partnership Act 2004 makes explicit reference to the responsibilities of a civil partner to their family. These legislative developments, however, do not necessarily reflect general progress. For example, there is still a degree of invisibility at school, within the work place, and within government policy, and this has a significantly detrimental effect on lesbian and gay people, and their families. When lesbian and gay families are acknowledged, it is generally in a negative context. It is assumed that gay parenting has a negative impact on the upbringing of children, and does not constitute a “real” family.

Furthermore, legislation exists that openly prevents lesbian and gay people from seeking fertility treatment in order to have a child. It is generally acknowledged that the safest way for a lesbian to conceive is through in-utero-insemination (IUI) as apposed to via informal arrangements with a man. In order to receive IUI, a lesbian must secure referral from her GP, and then be accepted by a fertility clinic. A fertility clinic is bound by rules set down in the Human Embryology and Fertility Act (HEFA) which makes explicit that any fertility treatment must be administered whilst considering the welfare of the child. The welfare of the child clause makes explicit reference for a child’s need for a father. Some clinics accept a lesbian couple’s explanation and reassurances about male role models, but the insistence perpetuates the belief that a child can only be brought up with a man and a woman.

Difficulties also arise if the partner of the birth mother wants to secure parental responsibility for any child conceived in the relationship. Regardless of a couple’s civil partnership status, a parent must still apply for parental responsibility, and will only receive it if the natural parent rescinds their responsibility. Sometimes, in informal arrangements, men refuse to rescind that responsibility. Furthermore, parental responsibility orders are challenged (for example, if the birth mother dies) and the parent can find themselves losing custody of their children, even if they have brought them up.

Existing research:

The substantial work conducted into lesbians and their families has been undertaken by Dr Susan Golombok. Her major essays include;

- *Openness in lesbian-mother families regarding mother’s sexual orientation and child’s conception by donor insemination*
- *Children’s Play Narratives: What they tell us about Lesbian-Mother families*

- *Children With Lesbian Parents: A community study*
- *Children raised in fatherless families from infancy: A follow up of children of lesbian and single heterosexual mothers at early adolescence.*

Golombok deduced that the parent-child relationship was positive and the children well adjusted and that 'father absence appears to make little difference to sex-role development for either boys or girls...'. Furthermore, her studies, and evaluation of other studies 'failed to find [any] differences with respect to gender development or psychological well-being.'

Professor Sheila Mclean has also considered the Welfare of the Child provision in the HEFA act (www.ccels.cf.ac.uk/literature/publications/2005/mcleanpaper.html) and concludes that there is no justifiable reason for the state to insist on the need for a father as a prerequisite for fertility treatment.

Research gaps:

Very little research has been conducted to examine the extent and success of gay men as parents, or acknowledge that they do exist. Quantitative research is also lacking as to how many families are gay families. This issue would be addressed if a question about sexual orientation was included in the National Census.

Golombok and others also acknowledge that there are limitations in the existing body of research in this area, and the majority of studies have relied on volunteer or convenience samples. Further longitudinal studies are necessary in this area, in order to demonstrate that children brought up with same sex parents are not at a disadvantage. Data collected from the National Census would enable policy makers to identify how many gay people have families.

There is however a distinct lack of reference to alternative family structures in the education system, which perpetuates and endorses the view that same sex families do not exist, which leads to ignorance and prejudice. Extensive qualitative research may assist in defining and identifying the nature of same sex relationships and families, and lead to a greater acknowledgement in society.

Existing best practice initiatives:

Pink Parents (www.pinkparents.org.uk) is a national project, managed by The D'Arcy Lainey Foundation and aims to reduce the isolation and discrimination that LGBT families and families face. The organisation aims to offer support and guidance in relation to all LGBT parenting issues. They also offer the children and young people, within LGBT families, a place to share their experiences, through meetings, social events and activities. They also run workshops and training days, which are taken up by adoption and fostering agencies.

Education

Research suggests that lesbian and gay students can experience difficulties in schools. Some of these difficulties were undoubtedly caused by Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988. This section prohibited local authorities in Britain from “promoting” homosexuality. It also labelled gay family relationships as “pretend”. Section 28 never applied directly to schools, only to local authorities. Nevertheless, it caused confusion and harm. Stonewall's *Playing it Safe: Responses of Secondary School Teachers to Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Pupils, Bullying, HIV/AIDS Education and Section 28* (1997), found that 82% of teachers found Section 28 to be a major stumbling block to the provision of advice and counselling to lesbian and gay pupils. Homophobia in schools existed prior to this, but Section 28 reinforced the stigma of lesbian and gay sexuality, and created an atmosphere where homophobia continued to go unchallenged, and where lesbian and gay pupils found it difficult to access support.

Section 28 was finally repealed in 2003, but it still has an impact in schools. Research shows that schools are ill-equipped to tackle homophobia, anti-bullying policies are not inclusive and teachers are not trained to feel confident supporting lesbian and gay pupils. There is a reticence to address sexual orientation issues in the classroom, beyond sex education, and this has never been properly explored or addressed. Misconceptions about the influencing of children's sexual orientation still abound. Yet, research shows that the impact of homophobic bullying on the lives of lesbian and gay people, their physical and mental health and their academic attainment cannot be overestimated.

Furthermore, it is not just a gay problem. Anyone who is ‘different’ may be singled out for abuse, particularly children who do not conform to conventional gender stereotypes, regardless of their sexual orientation. The word ‘gay’ is a popular insult in the playground, and left unchallenged, it simply reinforces the idea that homophobia is acceptable.

Existing research:

The bullying of sexual minorities at school: Its nature and long-term correlates, Rivers (2001) focuses on the types of bullying experienced by lesbian and gay adults, and found that, 82% of respondents had been subject to name-calling, 71% had been ridiculed in front of others, 60% had reported being hit or kicked. As a result of the bullying, 53% of those lesbian and gay adults surveyed had contemplated self-harm, 40% had attempted suicide on at least one occasion and 30% had attempted on more than one occasion.

Rivers also carried out research among LGB adults in *Social exclusion, absenteeism and sexual minority youth*, Rivers, (2000). The study examines the high levels of absenteeism, self-harm and suicidal tendencies among those adults who had been bullied while at school on account of their sexual orientation. The study also found that LGB pupils are more likely to leave school at 16 than their straight counterparts, despite achieving the equivalent of six GCSEs at grade C.

Playing it safe: responses of secondary school teachers to lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils, bullying, HIV/AIDS education and Section 28, (Stonewall, 1997) surveyed 307 secondary schools and found that 82% of secondary teachers surveyed were aware of incidents of verbal homophobic bullying and 26% were aware of incidents of physical homophobic bullying. However, only 6% of schools had anti-bullying policies that dealt specifically with LGB issues. Many schools cited lack of experienced staff and lack of policies as the reasons for their not dealing with the problem.

Homophobia, Sexual Orientation and Schools: A review and implications for Action (DfES 2004) identified that schools must identify common principles for tackling homophobic bullying in schools, create opportunities for dialogue between schools and key agencies, and conduct a thorough impact assessment of policies, practices and procedures in schools.
(www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RR594.pdf)

Research gaps:

In spite of the small-scale research carried out and the anecdotal evidence cited by organisations such as Stonewall and EACH, there has to date been no national survey of the current climate of homophobia in schools. Policy makers and education professionals would benefit from up-to-date evidence of the scale of the problem, including primary research among current lesbian and gay students about the issues they face and their views on how the education system should be supporting them and reflecting their needs. Using this evidence to create a dialogue between government and education professionals is required if homophobic bullying is to be tackled, and lesbian and gay pupils are to be supported.

Existing best practice initiatives:

Education for All is a joint campaign developed by Stonewall, FFLAG and LGBT Youth Scotland, along with a broad-based coalition of organisations, including government departments, local authorities, unions, voluntary and community organisations, children and LGB groups. Its aim is to ensure that all young LGB people can fulfil their potential, and that the UK's schools and education systems can deal appropriately with homophobia and homophobic bullying.
www.stonewall.org.uk/educationforall

Educational Action Challenging Homophobia (EACH) challenges homophobia through education in schools and delivers training for other professionals. It has a national free phone number for young people. www.eachaction.org.uk

Stand up for us – challenging homophobia in schools, Jennet (2004) www.wiredforhealth.gov.uk/standupforus. This resource was developed as part of the National Healthy Schools Standard, and was sponsored by the DfES and managed by the Health Development Agency. It aims to help schools develop their awareness of homophobia and homophobic bullying and challenge it in the wide context of a whole-school approach.

Joint Action Against Homophobic Bullying (JAAHB) is partnership project of LGBT community organisations in South West England with young people, LEAs, the police, and other stakeholders. JAAHB takes a proactive child-protection-based approach to encouraging schools to become secure environments for all. www.intercomtrust.org.uk

Schools Out is an organisation working for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transperson equality in education. It provides training for teachers, pupils and advice on policy and legislation. www.schools-out.org.uk

Housing and communities

Access to decent housing is key to an individual's capacity to work, learn, maintain good health and develop relationships. Most housing providers and their partner agencies do not collect statistics on sexual orientation or the particular needs and experiences of lesbian and gay people in the housing market. Lesbian and gay sexuality does not in itself represent a housing need. However, other people's reactions to the sexual orientation of individuals can play a role in precipitating a housing need and, potentially, housing crisis.

The range of housing issues which lesbian and gay people may face include eviction from the family home or rented accommodation upon disclosure of sexual orientation (especially amongst young people), unrecognised co-habitation and succession rights and discrimination from neighbours and landlords. Research has shown that young lesbian and gay people may risk homelessness if their families disapprove of, or are expected to disapprove of, their sexual orientation. This group is also at an increased risk of prostitution and substance misuse. Other issues which have been documented include the denial of a mortgage or insurance, ill treatment from housing providers and mortgage lenders and assault in their own home.

Under-reporting of homophobic harassment is an issue which can impact on an individual's ability to maintain a tenancy. Housing providers may assume there is not a problem simply because it has not been reported to them. Reporting homophobic incidents adds a further complication for LGB people, who have to officially reveal their sexual orientation, thus leaving themselves potentially open to further abuse by the agencies which are supposed to be protecting them. This is known as secondary victimisation.

Existing research:

Sexual exclusion: issues and best practice in lesbian, gay and bisexual housing and homelessness Gold (2005) is guidance developed as part of a joint project between Shelter and Stonewall Housing, which aims to raise awareness of the housing and homelessness problems experienced by lesbian and gay people. The guidance focuses on harassment and homophobic violence, same-sex domestic violence, monitoring and age-specific housing issues.
(www.casweb.org/stonewallhousing/file-storage/file?file_id=36762)

Hidden in plain sight: homelessness amongst lesbian and gay youth O'Connor and Molloy (2001) examines the causes and natures of homelessness amongst lesbian and gay young people. It also examines the young people's use and experience of different types of housing and homelessness services, including the barriers they experienced. It looks at issues central to the provision of housing and homelessness services to young lesbians and gay men, and discusses strategies for future provision.

Tackling discrimination against lesbians and gay men: a good practice guide for housing associations and voluntary organisations Crane and Lemos (1994) is good practice guidance which aims to assist housing associations ensure that gay and lesbian tenants, applicants for housing, and staff members do not suffer

discrimination in applying for housing or other services. It covers discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, harassment in housing and access to housing for LGB people.

Equality in housing: guidance for promoting equality and tackling discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation Rogers and McVeigh (1999) promotes good practice across the range of activities undertaken by independent social landlords and provides a practical framework for pursuing equality for lesbians, bisexuals and gay men.

The experience of violence and harassment of gay men in the city of Edinburgh (Crime and criminal research findings No 41) Scottish Executive Central Research Unit (2000). Based on primary research, this study discusses the experiences of gay men and the attitudes of the police, the local authority and other public service providers. It describes experiences in the workplace, responses by housing associations, community based organisations and central government.

Research gaps:

The lack of baseline data on the number of LGB people in the UK, cross-referenced with locale, tenure and socio-economic status, makes it very difficult to establish a clear picture of the housing issues faced by LGB people. Housing associations and other providers are not encouraged by the Housing Corporation or other funding bodies to monitor client sexual orientation. This means it is not possible to ascertain where complaints, incidents or transfers, for example, have a sexual orientation discrimination element.

There is also a distinct lack of training or initiatives to support those who work directly with lesbian and gay people with housing issues. There is also no research that identifies the impact that this lack of training has on individual experiences.

Existing best practice initiatives:

Albert Kennedy Trust works to ensure that that lesbian and gay young people are able to live in accepting, supportive and caring homes. The Trust provides homeless young people (under 21) with lesbian or gay homes where they can live and rebuild their lives.

Stonewall Housing addresses the housing needs of lesbians and gay men. It provides temporary, supported housing for 16-25 years old lesbians and gay men, and arranges resettlement service for tenants moving on to independent housing. It also provides housing advice, information, referrals and advocacy.

Triangle Wales is a helpline, information, advice and support service for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people in Wales aged 16-25. As well as running a confidential housing advice line they aim to provide safe, suitable and affordable housing to LGBT people who are homeless, threatened with homelessness or unsuitably housed.

Stonewall Cymru has carried out research into the barriers to housing and support services faced by LGB people in Wales, based on a national survey and a series of depth interviews. This is due to be published in late 2005.

Health and social care

The health and social care needs of lesbian and gay men are, like all people, varied and diverse yet there are specific needs that have only been partially assessed.

Resources are available to assess the needs of gay men's health. In response to the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s, health authorities have invested significant resources into communicating with the gay men's community about their health and risks. These resources are however, primarily concerned with the sexual health of gay men, and their potential HIV status. Although this is crucial, it can lead to a general oversight of other health needs of gay men. For example, gay men may be more likely to smoke, drink and take recreational drugs. They may be anxious about disclosing their sexual orientation to their GP because they fear that the GP will only consider the needs of the patient in the context of their sexual health. It is assumed that the only distinction between a heterosexual man and a gay man is his potential sexual activity. This sense of difference has a major impact on effective service delivery.

There has been no significant needs assessment of lesbians. A survey undertaken in Brighton by Stonewall, however, found that lesbians were less likely to seek preventative health care, and specifically were less likely to have had a cervical screening, sexual health screening, or breast screening in the last three years. 69% of women surveyed, however, had had sex with men in the past. Both health care providers and the lesbian community make erroneous assumptions about health care needs. Furthermore, lesbians (like other women) are likely to have anxieties about fertility, mental health, and emotional well-being. Lesbians, like gay men, are also reluctant to disclose their sexual orientation to health care providers, including midwives during childbirth. This has a major impact on the quality of care received.

Existing research:

Sigma Research (www.sigmaresearch.org.uk) have conducted extensive studies into the sexual health needs of gay men. They conduct the annual 'Vital Statistics' survey, which is a national survey of gay men. They have also conducted research that examines the impact of homophobia in health care delivery. The Sigma report, *It makes me sick: Heterosexism, homophobia and the health of Gay men and Bisexual men* (2005) found that half of respondents had not disclosed their sexuality to their GP, and that of those half 39% had no intention of doing so. There is an anxiety that a GP will not hold the information confidentially, and that the quality of service provision will be affected.

GLADD (2004) *Dignity at work for Lesbian and Gay doctors and dentists, medical and dental students* found that 20% of the medical profession were homophobic. (www.gladd.dircon.co.uk/PDFs/iwl_guid.pdf).

Research into the health needs of lesbians, has been conducted in America and Australia. Ruth P McNair, (University of Melbourne) has published *Lesbian health inequalities: a cultural minority issue for health professionals* (www.mja.com.au/public/issues/178_12_160603/mcn10852_fm.html) which found (amongst other things) that STI rates increase linearly with the number of lifetime female sexual partners a woman has. This data contradicts the common assumption of low STI risk with female sexual partners.

NHS Scotland (www.lgbthealthscotland.org.uk) funded Stonewall Scotland to conduct extensive research into the needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and have published a series of reports that outline the steps that NHS Scotland need to take in order to fulfil the needs of the community.

- *Towards a Healthier LGBT Scotland* (2003)
(www.show.scot.nhs.uk/publications/Stonewallopt3.pdf)
- *Fair for All – The Wider Challenge: Good LGBT Practice in the NHS*
(www.lgbthealthscotland.org.uk/documents/Good_LGBT_Practice_NHS.pdf)

Research gaps:

A thorough needs assessment, using extensive methods of communication and consultation, is needed for both gay men and lesbians to establish how and when exclusion occurs in public health delivery.

Research should also be implemented to see how useful and effective it would be to record a patient's sexual orientation on their records. It is possible that this would ensure immediate enhanced service delivery, and a patient would not have to keep 'coming out'. On the other hand, it could lead to an increase in discriminatory practices. There may be better methods to improve awareness of sexual orientation issues within the health care sector.

Training of all NHS staff to understand and appreciate the needs of the lesbian and gay community is essential, and should be a core part of any primary training programme. Research should also be conducted to assess the impact that a lack of training thus far has had on gay people's experiences of the NHS.

Existing best practice initiatives:

Many best practice initiatives have stemmed from the fact that lesbian and gay health workers are more likely to be out at work, and are therefore implementing schemes to support lesbian and gay patients. These initiatives however, are often dependent on individuals' implementing policies, rather than a concerted high level business effort to improve lesbian and gay experiences. Such initiatives also do not lead to high level research or quantitative evidence that can be shared with policy makers and other implementers.

The British Medical Association has recently published guidelines that help health care professionals be 'out' at work, and support lesbian and gay service users. (www.bma.org.uk/ap.nsf/Content/Sexualorientation)

The Orange Clinic provides sexual health advice to women who sleep with women. (www.hivgum.demon.co.uk/charing/chorange.html). The After Five Clinic is open to gay and bisexual men and offer a range of services. (www.gsttsexualhealth.org.uk/clinictour/after5.php?PHPSESSID=c24870495467e6ceed947b394f0caafa). Both of these clinics are based in London.

Economy and business

Homophobia is as prolific in economy and business as all other areas of life. There are two major policy implications in this area; in employment, and in the provision of goods and services.

In 2003, the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations were introduced in the UK. This prohibited discrimination against gay people in employment, and ensured that gay people could be protected from direct discrimination, indirect discrimination, harassment and victimisation. However, employers are not under the same legislative requirements to protect people on the grounds of sexual orientation (or perceived sexual orientation). There are no statutory duties to monitor, train, communicate and consult, conduct impact assessments, or implement positive actions to address institutional inequalities. A hierarchy of priorities is therefore created within employment, where organisations invest and develop strategies to support staff on the grounds of race, gender and disability, but do not do so to the same extent in relation to sexual orientation. Furthermore, lesbian and gay people are accustomed to experiencing and tolerating discrimination in the work place; there has been limited public acknowledgement that such discrimination is unacceptable, and no legal framework to support redress. This combination of factors means that discrimination in the work place against gay people is profuse, and damaging.

Despite the lack of legislative framework, gay people are slowly becoming more empowered as consumers. Some gay people will not work for organisations who have not demonstrated a commitment to protecting staff on the grounds of sexual orientation, and will not bestow business on organisations that fail to support lesbian and gay people. This independent implementation of market forces can be powerful, yet companies are able to discriminate in the provision of goods and services in relation to sexual orientation. So, a gay man can be refused a mortgage, turned away from a hotel, or asked to leave a bar for being gay. This legal disparity in relation to the provision of goods and services heightens the sense of difference between gay people and other minority groups. Such differences can lead to a further disconnection of gay people with mainstream society, and prevents mainstream society from becoming accepting of gay people. Legal protections against such discrimination are needed as a matter of priority.

Training in the workplace has an unequivocal impact on individual attitudes. It is recognised that parents shape their children's views; if an employee is taught not to discriminate, discrimination will eventually be eradicated.

Existing research:

This area is one of the more thoroughly researched aspects of lesbian and gay equality. Róisín Ryan-Flood in *A case study of lesbian and gay workers in a local labour market in Britain* (2004) found that sexuality effects decisions about employment opportunities, prior to a person applying for a job. Respondents stated that they had made deliberate choices not to enter certain professions because they perceived them to be homophobic.

(www.lse.ac.uk/collections/genderInstitute/pdf/Roisin.pdf)

'The Pink Ceiling is too low' Workplace Experiences of Lesbians, gay men and transgender people' (1999) by Jude Irwin found that 36% of gay people would change jobs if discrimination continued and 59% of respondents had experienced homophobia in the work place. 55% of those who faced discrimination reported that this had a negative impact on their work. 20% of all respondents also revealed that they had considered suicide.

(www.girl.org.au/pdf/major_reports/Pink_Ceiling_Is_Too_Low.pdf)

Tackling 'Multiple discrimination' and social exclusion at work: lesbian, gay and bisexual workers – an examination of the intersection between gender, race, age, disability and sexual orientation is to be published in 2006 by The Centre for Equality Research in Business at London Metropolitan University. This geographical based work will examine, evaluate and assess the experiences of lesbian and gay people in the work place.

(www.workinglives.org/docs/Multiple_discrim_projectpagedoc.doc)

Research gaps:

It is necessary to conduct research to assess the business and economic costs of introducing a statutory positive duty in relation to sexual orientation in the work place. Investigation is also needed to find employment (and social) solutions to possible conflicting freedoms that may emerge with different equality agendas, for example, religion and belief and sexual orientation.

Research should also be conducted to examine the impact that sanctioned discrimination in the area of the provision of goods and services has an impact on service delivery to gay people, and its consequential impact on economic behaviour.

No research has been undertaken in Britain into sexual orientation and productivity of individuals. A piece of research might enable policy makers to demonstrate that equal treatment in the workplace, leads to an improvement in productivity.

Existing best practice initiatives:

Stonewall's Diversity Championship Programme is Britain's good practice forum in which employers can work with Stonewall, and with each other, to promote diversity in the workplace. On 9 June the programme celebrated reaching 100 members and membership now stands at 123 organisations. The programme publishes a Corporate Equality Index which benchmarks and showcases the leading 100 companies for lesbian and gay employees. They also publish a recruitment guide for gay graduates, run employment conferences and lecture series, run a leadership conference, and publish good practice guides to assist in the implementation of specific equality strategies. (www.stonewall.org.uk/workplace/)

Socio-economic backgrounds

There is a general assumption that gay people are white, middle-class, male and have a high disposable income due to the fact that they do not have dependents. This myth is perpetuated by market researchers who conduct surveys with a narrow range of respondents, and by the gay community themselves. The gay press, for example, recognise that it is beneficial to present the gay community as affluent and status orientated; such conclusions encourage companies to target the “pink pound” and place adverts.

The reality is, however, that lesbian and gay people are as likely to live in affluence or poverty as heterosexual people. There is no overwhelming evidence that suggests gay people are generally richer or poorer than their heterosexual counterparts. The general assumption however, that everyone is affluent, has a major impact on gay people from low-income backgrounds, and the resources that are made available to support them.

Gay people living in poverty may find it more difficult to find employment, especially in sectors that require low skills. Although larger corporations and public sector organisations have worked beyond the limits of the law to attract lesbian and gay people into the workforce, such proactive messages are not usually associated with smaller businesses. Furthermore, socially excluded lesbian and gay people may not be as aware of their rights at work. If they are members of unions, people from low-income backgrounds are less likely to be actively involved. Lesbian and gay people are therefore unlikely to participate in LGB networking groups.

It is also well documented that women are more likely to live in poverty, and stay in poverty, than men. The Fawcett Society report, *An audit of women’s economic welfare in Britain today*, found that women continue to be disadvantaged by a gender gap in every single aspect of economic welfare and experience a higher risk of poverty and of dependency on the state or on their partners. If this is the case, then it is logical that lesbians, and lesbians in partnerships, will experience economic disadvantage.

Existing research:

The only comprehensive survey of gay and lesbian income levels was conducted in America. The paper, *Income Inflation: The Myth of affluence among gay, lesbian and bisexual Americans* by M.V. Lee Badgett, found that gay people were no more likely to be richer than their heterosexual counterparts. The paper also examines the validity of many of the existing statistics in this area.
www.thetaskforce.org/downloads/income.pdf

M.V. Lee Badgett, author of *Myths, and Change: The Economic Lives of Lesbians and Gay Men*, also argues that lesbians and gay men do not earn more than their heterosexual counterparts, but less. According to her study, gay men earn between 17% and 28% less than similarly qualified heterosexual men. Lesbians were likely to earn the same as their heterosexual counterparts.

The Brighton Survey, *Count Me In*, found that 45% of respondents had an annual income of less than £15,000 per year and 10% had an annual income of more than £35,000 per year. The survey concluded that there was no universal economic state for gay people, but noted that gay people required further protection from discrimination at work.

Research gaps:

An accurate and far-reaching survey should be conducted to assess the income levels and lifestyles of lesbian and gay people, in order to challenge the assumptions that all gay people are affluent.

The advent of the Civil Partnership Act will ensure that, for benefit purposes, all same sex couples are treated as a couple. This means that data will be available about the number of people living on benefits in a same sex partnership. There should also be some investigation to examine the effect that changes in benefits (contrary to expectation) has on income levels of lesbian and gay people.

There is very little substantial research or resources in relation to social exclusion and lesbian and gay people, and has been overlooked (despite the creation of the Social Exclusion Unit) in any policy to tackle social exclusion in the UK. Existing studies that consider exclusion of young people from families, school and employment should consider the needs and experiences of lesbian and gay people.

Existing best practice initiatives:

The Albert Kennedy Trust (www.akt.org.uk/) works to ensure that all lesbian, gay & bisexual young people are able to live in accepting, supportive and caring homes, by providing a range of services to meet the individual needs of those who would otherwise be homeless or living in a hostile environment.

The Citizen's Advice Bureaux (www.citizensadvice.org.uk/) ensure that Lesbian and gay issues are mainstreamed throughout their resources. There are very few specific lesbian and gay pages (except in relation to civil partnership). Instead, CAB work to ensure that all work reflects the fact that people who use their services may be lesbian, gay or heterosexual.

Crime and hate crime

Society and the law increasingly recognise a crime where the perpetrator's prejudice against any identifiable group of people is a factor in determining who is victimised. Hate crime against lesbian and gay people is prolific and many cases are reported, yet more go unreported every year, because victims fear further victimisation from police, and court services. There is a general lack of acknowledgement in society that hate crime against lesbian and gay people is a cause for concern.

This situation is improving. Police forces are now generally recording hate crimes, and they are obliged to monitor crime if it is perpetrated on the grounds of race. The Criminal Justice Act 2003 enables courts to impose tougher sentences for offences motivated or aggravated by sexual orientation. Police forces are also setting up specific schemes and programmes to support lesbian and gay people, for example, the establishment of LGBT Officers in London boroughs. Furthermore, local authorities are required, by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to work with local LGB communities in Community Safety Partnerships.

Homophobic hate crimes are generally under-reported for several reasons. There is a lack of confidence in the police to respond sensitively to homophobic hate crimes, and there is anticipation of a negative reaction. There is also anxiety that a person will be charged with a gay offence. For example, if a man is beaten up and attacked whilst walking through a well-known public place to meet other gay men, he will not want to be accused of conducting sexual activity in public, or seeking to do so. There may also be a fear that their sexual orientation may be disclosed if a case was taken to court; such disclosure could lead to further victimisation.

It is also possible that both gay people and heterosexual people tolerate a level of violence and abuse, particularly verbal abuse. This stems from the belief that gay people cannot expect the same rights and freedoms as heterosexual people, and such abuse is an inevitable consequence of being gay. This leads to a heightened sense of difference and disenfranchisement from society. In the case of violence within the lesbian and gay community, particularly domestic violence, it is felt that the mainstreamed resources of support are designed and aimed at heterosexual people. It is also the case that gay people are reluctant to acknowledge that domestic violence can occur in same-sex relationships.

Existing research:

Stormbreak Consultancy have conducted extensive research into the extent and nature of homophobic hate crime, and have developed best practice initiatives in collaboration with local police forces.

Their latest (unpublished) work are findings that stem from research conducted throughout 2004 in East London from a broad demographic spectrum of the gay community. 48% of East Londoners had experienced homophobic hate crime and 40% had witnessed a homophobic crime committed against someone else. 40% of the crimes were more serious than verbal abuse, yet only 44% of those who had experienced crime had reported it to the police. (www.stormbreak.co.uk)

GALOP (Gay and Lesbian Policing Group) conducted a study to investigate levels of violence against lesbian and gay black and minority ethnic groups in London. The study, *The Low Down, Black Lesbians, Gay men and Bisexual people talk about their experiences and needs* (2001) found that 68% had experienced homophobic abuse and 81% had experienced racist abuse.

www.casweb.org/document-repository/document-view?item_id=13544

The Crime Prosecution Service reported that prosecuted hate crimes committed against members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community had increased from 103 cases in 2004 to 317 cases in 2005. Although counting methods have changed slightly between these years, it is not clear whether this increase is a result of higher reporting, an increase in homophobic crime, or a combination of both.

Research gaps:

Domestic violence occurs in same sex relationships but is rarely acknowledged within the gay community. It would be useful to develop research to examine the extent of this problem and make recommendations for effective service delivery of existing resources.

Reporting of homophobic hate crime is sporadic, and is clearly influenced by the types of resources invested by any local government and police force. Research to identify best methods of preventing and tackling homophobia and eradicating prejudice is essential to help tackle all forms of hate crime.

Research is also needed to establish whether the increase in reported hate crimes is a consequence of increased homophobia in the UK, an improvement in reporting, or a combination of both.

Existing best practice initiatives:

www.report-it.org.uk is a police funded web site designed to provide lesbian and gay people with information about Hate Crime. Accompanied by a high profile leaflet and poster campaign, it provides a means for gay people to (if they choose, anonymously) report incidents of homophobic hate crime. Several police forces have also identified an LGBT liaison officer, with a public telephone number, so that local lesbian and gay people know who to contact. This is not a universal system of tackling homophobic hate crime, but is thought to be effective in police forces where it exists.

GALOP (www.casweb.org/galop/) is a London community safety charity. They provide a helpline, support case work, respond and contribute to consultations and policy development, conduct training and research.

Broken Rainbow (www.lgbt-dv.org/html/rainbow.htm) provides services to LGBT people experiencing domestic violence. Funded by the Home Office, they provide a phone line and publish and collate research into same sex violence.

Personal assets and wealth

The nature and extent of financial discrimination against lesbian and gay men is changing as the law changes. The Civil Partnership Act will alleviate some of the major difficulties in relation to pensions, inheritance tax, and life insurance. The Disability Discrimination Act should ensure that gay men will not have to face compulsory medical and HIV tests. New ABI guidance states that insurers cannot ask about any HIV negative results, nor can they ask about sexual orientation. Instead, insurers can ask about lifestyles and behaviour. (www.abi.org.uk/Display/default.asp?Menu_ID=1140&Menu_All=1,946,1140&Child_ID=437). Furthermore, an independent report by Zurich Professional found that the number of gay people buying property has increased considerably in the last year. The report suggested that this was due to the fact that gay people are more openly buying property together, in a partnership. This is likely to be a result of the Civil Partnership Act.

However, gay men and lesbians (more specifically gay men) expect to be discriminated against in the provision of financial services, because this has been an expected aspect of financial affairs. There is an understandable reluctance and anxiety about declaring one's sexuality when applying for a mortgage or insurance. Gay people therefore are likely to seek financial services from gay service providers, even if this proves to be more expensive.

Similar anxiety surrounds private pension schemes, which are not legally obliged to recognise same-sex couples in the same way that they would consider married couples. Pension providers have to provide retrospective access to guaranteed minimum pensions for a surviving civil partner, and public sector schemes will consider civil partners in the same way as other spouses. Private sector schemes, however, are not obliged to provide the same benefits beyond the contracted out element. For example, a spouse may receive 50% of the deceased partner's pension under some private pension schemes, but this benefit may not automatically be extended to a civil partner. It is likely that most private pension providers will choose to treat civil partners in the same way as spouses, yet this disparity in treatment, and complexities of law, mean that gay people may be less likely to take out a private pension.

A similar removal from mainstream activities occurs in relation to the way in which gay people spend. Gay people are more likely to choose a holiday in a gay resort, using a gay travel company, where they can guarantee that they will not be discriminated against. Gay people expect to spend more on leisure activities in order to ensure that they are not discriminated against at the point of delivery.

This different treatment, and long-standing perception of different treatment, is yet another reason why gay people remove themselves from mainstream society, often paying higher prices, and receiving less consumer choice. This makes limited economic sense, and inevitably has an impact on general spending patterns of gay people.

Existing research:

Harris Interactive/Witeck Combs Internet Survey (2000) found that 64% of gay consumers prefer brands that speak directly to them over competitors that ignore their community and 70% were highly likely to consider brands that are known to provide equal benefits to gay and lesbian employees.

(www.harrisinteractive.com/)

Stormbreak Research conducted a survey amongst 283 visitors to the Gay Life and Style Exhibition. The survey found that visitors were upmarket, with two-fifths falling into professional social classes AB a further one-third C1s (basically office workers). Salary levels were much higher than the national average (of around £18k) at £30k per annum. Gay men earned more than lesbian (averaging £31k compared with £26k per annum). The amount of monthly disposable income was £663, but far higher for men (£743) than for women (£493). It is worth noting however, that a specific demographic was attending this event. What this indicates is that gay people with a high income identify themselves with a Gay lifestyle, that may or may not be provided for in mainstream society.

(www.stormbreak.co.uk/gay.html)

Research gaps:

Despite the fact that the gay economy is an important and useful area of research, little is instigated. This is explored by Klawitter in her essay, *Why Aren't More Economists Doing Research on Sexual Orientation?* She concludes that this is because there is a lack of interest and knowledge about sexual orientation issues, including discrimination that prevents the commissioning of research.

Research is needed to examine the effects of a separate and limited “pink economy” and the impact this has on the general economy. In order to receive reliable statistics on this issue, a question relating to sexual orientation should be included on the National Census.

Research is also needed to examine the impact of discriminatory practices in the provision of financial goods and services, and the economic effect this has on the economy.

Existing best practice initiatives:

www.gayfinance.info/index.htm is a website that provides financial information to lesbian and gay people about financial services which is hosted by ISIS Financial Planners Ltd. ISIS is staffed by gay financial advisers, who are independent from any other company. They provide advice to gay and lesbian people about their financial needs.

The British Tourist Authority actively promotes the UK as a tolerant and gay friendly country to visit. Although this is to be welcomed, as hotels and other forms of accommodation can continue to turn away gay visitors, it means that gay tourists can only really visit the heavily gay populated areas of Britain. It is possible that tourists want to visit the Scottish highlands, as well as Brighton Pier.

www.visitbritain.com/VB3-en-GB/experiences/gay/rainbow_nation/rainbow_nation.aspx

The arts, culture, media and sport

The arts, culture, media and sport can play a crucial role in bridging barriers between different groups and fostering a sense of community cohesion. There is a concerted drive to increase visibility of minority groups in media, culture and sport yet lesbian and gay participants remain invisible. This is despite the fact that many lesbian and gay people work in the area of art, culture and media. This background gay presence is often not reflected in public art. In discussions of culture, the sexuality of the artist is cautiously avoided, and media presentations of gay sexuality, are generally exaggerated caricatures. There are very few "out" gay athletes and sports participants, and homophobia is an expected form of derision. This has a negative impact on lesbian and gay youth participation in sport, as well as young people who are perceived to be lesbian or gay because of their involvement in sport. Young people may drop out of sport because of homophobic bullying. This contradicts government drives to ensure more young people are involved in sport, and may have a significant impact on participation in the 2012 Olympics.

There is no non-stereotyping standard in the media and arts. In the history of broadcasting, for example, there has been a tendency to portray gay men simply as effeminate and camp, belying the fact that in real life, gay men are no less likely than straight men to be responsible individuals, carrying out serious and perhaps community-serving professions. In terms of lesbians, there is very little visibility at all. This not only sends out an unrealistic and unhelpful message to society about what it is to be lesbian and gay and the contribution which lesbian and gay people make to society, but it also denies young lesbian and gay people realistic role models to aspire to.

Research carried out by Stonewall (*Profiles of Prejudice*, 2003) LGB people were one of the most likely social groups to elicit prejudicial views. Further research (*Understanding Prejudice*, Stonewall, 2004) found that LGB people also experience significant rates of benign prejudice, including stereotyping. Furthermore, when it comes to influencing prejudice, television is one of the most powerful influencing forces – more so than newspapers, friends, religious beliefs or political beliefs (*Profiles of Prejudice*).

Existing research:

Stonewall is carrying out research into the representation and portrayal of LGB people in broadcast media. This is due for publication at the end of 2005.

Research gaps:

No research has been carried out into how lesbian and gay people participate in the arts, culture, media and sport, and whether or not their participation is hampered by discrimination or stereotyping. It would also be useful to establish what the arts, culture, media and sports sectors are like for lesbian and gay employees. Lesbian and gay people have traditionally been associated with the arts and media, and yet anecdotal evidence suggests that these industries are not necessarily as compliant with the law as others. There may be a degree of complacency among creative industry employers who do not see lesbian and gay employment equality as an issue for them. For instance, the BBC's annual report states the importance of diversity, but makes no reference to sexual orientation or homophobia.

Existing best practice initiatives:

FA anti-homophobia policy: www.TheFA.com/FootballForAll

Multiple identities and multiple discrimination

The concept of multiple identity explains the fact that one person rarely belongs to just one minority group, and therefore attempting to identify an homogenous collective experience is difficult. Equality legislation and work in the UK encourages us to think about identity issues in isolation. The needs of people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds are therefore separate and distinctive to the needs of the lesbian and gay community. The needs of women are different to the needs of lesbian and gay people. The fact remains however, that lesbian and gay people can also come from BME backgrounds, from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds, can be disabled, old or young, have a religion or belief, and be male, female or transgender. The lesbian or gay person with a multiple identity, has a different relationship with the broad lesbian and gay community, than someone who does not have this multiple identity. Within the lesbian and gay community therefore, women have historically identified with a distinct and separate community. Increasingly, lesbian and gay men from BME backgrounds are forming communities that are separate from the mainstream community. Understanding these layers of identity is crucial for any effective communication or consultation with the lesbian and gay community. It is also an integral part of a person's relationship with their lesbian and gay community; most gay people have an identity other than their sexuality. Policy makers at the Commission for Equality and Human Rights will need to recognise the diversity of the lesbian and gay community (and other minority communities) in order to deliver effective policy recommendations.

Multiple discrimination can occur when a person has a multiple identity, both external to the core lesbian and gay community, and within that community. A woman who is Chinese and a lesbian, may experience homophobia from the Chinese community and racism from the lesbian community. A gay man with HIV might be discriminated against in the workplace, both on the grounds of his sexual orientation and his HIV status. The nature of prejudice is such that it is rarely focussed on one particular element of identity, and therefore recognising the multifaceted aspects of the lesbian and gay community is key to tackling prejudice.

Existing research:

Although there is no useful research about the general concept of multiple identity, various organisations have begun to consider the issue of sexual orientation and how it relates to other minority issues.

The Disability Rights Commission published *It's Not Just About Ramps and Braille: Disability and Sexual Orientation* (Michael Brothers) which identified that self identity was extremely complicated, and concluded that LGB disabled people faced extensive discrimination from both heterosexual people, and the gay community.

www.drc-gb.org/publicationsandreports/campaigndetails.asp?section=oth&id=418

Sigma Research have published a research report which examines *Ethnic Minority and Gay men: Redefining community, restoring identity*. This extensive research looks at the importance of family, religion, education and sexuality through case studies and explores the strengths of the BME gay male community and their relationship with the mainstreamed LGB community. (www.sigmaresearch.org.uk/downloads/report04c.pdf)

Invisible and Khush: An Investigation into the Experiences of British South Asian Gays, Lesbians and Bisexuals (Sociology Working Papers) by Nazia Anan explores the cultural experiences of South Asian people.

Asian gay counter-hegemonic negotiation of Birmingham's Pink Pound Territory by Camila Bassi examines how the Asian community in Birmingham sits and works with the gay community.

Age Concern held a conference on the needs of lesbian and gay people and published a report entitled *Opening Doors to the needs of older lesbians, gay men and bisexuals*. The report identifies the challenges facing lesbian and gay people and identifies solutions for service delivery. (www.ace.org.uk/openingdoors). Opening doors has also learnt from American research that older gay people are more likely to be single (80%), without children (90%), and live alone (75%). This is indicative of the very different experiences of older lesbian and gay people.

Although there is a limited amount of research that examines the social policy implications of religion and belief and sexual orientation, there are a number of informal groups that reflect an increased visibility of people with faith who are open about their sexuality; these organisations can be found on the Stonewall website.

The SAFRA project, however, have published the report *Identifying the difficulties experienced by Muslim lesbian, bisexual and transgender women in accessing social and legal services*. This report examines in detail some of the issues experienced by Muslim women who are lesbian. (www.safraproject.org/Reports/Safra_Project-Initial_findings-2002.pdf)

Research gaps:

There is surprisingly little research that examines the needs and identities of women who identify as gay, despite the fact that they make up half of the lesbian and gay population, and can be disabled, and from BME backgrounds.

Further work on the potential personal conflict between religion and belief and sexual orientation is urgently needed in order to find solutions, to what is generally thought to be an acceptable set of problems, namely conflicting freedoms. This is essential to tackle multiple discrimination, homophobia, and gay people's own perceptions of themselves. For example, a person who is Muslim and gay may experience a heightened sense of anxiety about their sexual orientation, than someone with no faith. The nature of identity is such, however, that the research into these areas is infinite.

Existing best practice initiatives:

There are some leading local groups who are beginning to consider and tackle the issue of multiple identity. On-line communities and message boards have made a considerable difference to the lesbian and gay community, and has enabled a degree of fragmentation, according to identity, whilst retaining a larger lesbian and gay community.

Black Lesbians UK (www.bluk.org.uk) creates an empowering space for women who identify as lesbian or bisexual and are from black or minority ethnic backgrounds. This voluntarily run organisation aims to educate and support.

