

## **LGBTIQ+ Health Australia and JOY Media**

### **The Latest in LGBTIQ+ Health and Wellbeing Podcast**

#### **Episode 12: LGBTIQ+ People with Disability's experiences of violence**

##### **Triana Butler**

This is an LGBTIQ+ Health Australia and JOY Media podcast. LGBTIQ+ Health Australia acknowledges the traditional owners of country throughout Australia, their diversity, histories and knowledge and their continuing connections to land and community. We pay our respects to all First Nations people and their cultures and to elders of past, present and future generations.

Hello and welcome to the latest in LGBTIQ+ Health and Policy, the podcast that brings you the health and wellbeing hot topic discussions that matter to LGBTIQ+ people.

I'm your host, Triana Butler. Thanks so much for joining me. In December, the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, or ARCSHS, along with the Living with Disability Research Centre at La Trobe University, released a report entitled *Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of LGBTQA+ people with disability, a secondary analysis of data from two national surveys*. This report was compiled from data from the *Writing Themselves In 4* and the *Private Lives 3* surveys and is a sobering reminder of the significant challenges and disparities that LGBTQA+ people with disability experience, especially when other intersections of marginalization are considered.

Joining me to discuss the report is Associate Professor Adam Bourne, the acting director of ARCSHS, along with disability and inclusion consultant Margherita Coppolino. Now, obviously, as you can imagine, this is a particularly sensitive episode. So today we're exploring themes and issues that may cause distress. Those things include statistics and information from the report itself, discussion of trauma, intimate partner, domestic and family violence, harassment and physical violence, sexual harassment and abuse, and mental health and suicide.

If this episode raises any issues, you can contact QLife, which provides Australia wide anonymous LGBTIQ+ plus peer support. QLife services are free and they're available over the phone or on webchat from 3 p.m. till midnight every day. Call 1800 184 527 or visit [qlife.org.au](http://qlife.org.au).

Alternatively, for issues surrounding the Disability Royal Commission, you can contact the Blue Knot National Counselling and Referral Service. Their number is 1800 421 468 or you can visit [blueknot.org.au](http://blueknot.org.au).

So Margherita, Adam, thank you so much for joining us today. Really appreciate your time.

##### **Adam Bourne**

It's an absolute pleasure to be here. Thank you for having us.

##### **Margherita Coppolino**

Yeah, likewise.

##### **Triana Butler**

Now let's start with you, Adam. So just recently we had International Day of People with Disability for 2022. And on that day, the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, or ARCSHS (*pronounced by Triana as 'Arches'*), for people who don't have the time to say the whole thing, put

out a report called Violence Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of LGBTQA+ People with Disability, a secondary analysis of data from two national surveys.

And I'm hoping, Adam, you can kind of catch up with that and talk us through the report.

**Adam Bourne**

I'd be very happy to. So a few years ago, in 2019, so just before the COVID 19 pandemic hit, really, we did two very large surveys of the LGBTIQ community. One was among adults aged 18 and over a study called Private Lives, which had nearly 7000 participants. And the other was a survey called Righting Themselves In, which is a survey of 14 to 21 year old LGBTIQ+ young people.

These are the largest ever surveys we've had in Australia of kind of queer communities in general. And one of the great things about that is that it allows us to dig into the detail of particular parts of our community, to really shine a spotlight on the parts of our community that perhaps haven't received sufficient attention previously. And what was great was that in both of those surveys, there was quite a large number of people with disability of all kinds of disability.

And so the Royal Commission Into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability approached us to say, "can you work with your data to try to understand and unpack in more detail what's going on for LGBTQ people?" So that's what we were really setting out to do in this report.

**Triana Butler**

Well, Margherita, you were involved in the Expert Advisory group, and from looking at the report, you know, there is some quite confronting data in there about the lives of LGBTIQ+ people with disability here in Australia. What was it like being involved in that expert advisory group?

**Margherita Coppolino**

Oh look, what a great honor to actually be involved. And it was a very good demonstration of being able to be part of co-design and what the project, what the report would look like. And when we were talking about the key areas that the report should pick up on and, you know, [...] later when some of the findings, it was really quite daunting when we saw statistics wise just the figures that came [...] quite into the numbers.

**Triana Butler**

Well, you brought up some of the key messages there, Margherita. Adam, I might throw to you on this. What are some of the key messages that we need to know that come from the data?

**Adam Bourne**

Yeah. Look, I'm conscious of needing to have a content warning, really, in talking about some of these findings. They are really quite concerning. It's inescapable. Some of the most concerning findings I think relate to the experience of harassment or abuse. So a very, very large proportion, for example, of LGBTQ+ young people, more than half told us how they'd experienced verbal harassment due to their sexuality or their gender identity within the previous 12 months.

And that was a much higher proportion than among the LGBTQA+ young people in the survey who didn't have a disability, and the same kind of pattern really reflected among adults. More than 40%

saying that they'd experienced verbal abuse due to their sexual orientation or gender identity in the last 12 months. And we also witnessed, you know, appalling high rates of physical harassment or abuse and also sexual harassment and abuse.

And those were happening in all sorts of places. They were happening- harassment was happening in schools, in universities, it was happening in workplaces, it was happening in the home. We saw some quite concerning rates of family and intimate partner violence as well. Also of considerable concern with data relating to mental health and suicidality. And these are perhaps some of the most concerning in across the whole report.

There was a very, very high proportion. In fact, 91% of LGBTQ young people who reported high or very high levels of psychological distress within the previous four weeks of conducting the survey.

**Triana Butler**

Sorry, that was 91%?

**Adam Bourne**

91%. So if you look across all of the intersections of our community, the very highest instance of psychological distress was among LGBTQA+ people with disability, like an appallingly high figure and a similarly high figure of around 78% of LGBTQA+ adults with a disability. Now, most concerning of all, I think, were the data relating to suicidal attempts.

And we saw that one in six LGBTQA+ young people, that's 15% told us that they'd attempted taking their own life within the previous 12 months. Now hold in mind that the proportion among the population of young people in general is less than 1% who will have attempted to take their life in the previous 12 months. And we're talking about 15% of LGBTQA+ young people with a disability and about 40% nearly had attempted suicide at some point in their lives.

That's 40%, that's four in ten LGBTQA+ young people with a disability. It's a proportion that no matter how many times I say it out loud, it feels just as affecting and just as confronting each time. And it's not just an issue that is just impacting or affecting young people. But again, very high rates of suicidality among LGBTQA+ adults as well.

And these two things are interconnected. That experience we know from lots of research that people who've been subject to harassment, abuse, discrimination on the basis of their gender identity and sexuality are much, much, much more likely to experience thoughts about taking their own life, to experience psychological distress or to indeed have attempted to take their own life.

**Triana Butler**

That is all very, very concerning. Margherita, I want to bring you in. There is a lot of recommendations that are made in the report. What would you like to see happening first?

**Margherita Coppolino**

Look, I think first and foremost, when young people would say they feel their voices haven't been heard is that we make a commitment as a sector not only to see LGBTIQ+ community, but also an intersectional lens so that we make sure the young people's voices are at the table and put that into everything that we do.

And I think the second part to that is we do skilling up of representation, giving some funding for this to people so that they can self-advocate and actually do some training about representation and peer support.

**Triana Butler**

Adam, from your perspective, what needs urgent attention?

**Adam Bourne**

Gosh, I wish I could pinpoint just one specific thing, but this in this instance, there's just so many. It is absolutely vital that disability services are paying greater attention to the possibility that their clients and service users may be part of the LGBTIQ+ community, and they need to be ensuring that they're asking questions relating to gender identity, to gender diversity, and to sexuality, to doing everything that they can to ensure access to LGBTIQ+ social and cultural communities for people with disability.

If that's something that they want. Disability services and the NDIS more broadly need to be capturing data about the number of LGBTIQ clients and service users that they're seeing to help us build a bigger and more detailed picture of needs and experiences. And on the other side of the coin, LGBTIQ+ community organizations who I absolutely believe do the very best that they can with the resources that they're given.

But, you know, they do need to be finding ever more creative ways to resource and introduce interventions that are catering to the needs of LGBTIQ+ people with disability. Because at the moment many of them are saying that they don't feel sufficiently included or considered within LGBTIQ+ services and within LGBTIQ+ social and cultural activities. Now, I don't want to, I guess, in saying that I do really want to acknowledge that both the disability service and the LGBTIQ+ sector itself is insufficiently funded.

And I don't want to point a finger at any one individual and say, "You're not doing enough", because I categorically believe that most people are doing the best they can. It's very challenging circumstances, but I think these data are a reminder that we need to redouble our efforts in our advocacy, in our activism, in our fundraising attempts with government and with other agencies to ensure we are creating and providing those safe spaces and those inclusive services that LGBTIQ+ people with disability absolutely need.

**Triana Butler**

So Margherita, what can organizations do in the short term to help with this?

**Margherita Coppolino**

Look, that's a great question. I think in the short term is that all organizations irrespective whether it's LGBTIQ+ organization or mainstream or disability is first to review and make sure that you are including an LGBTIQ+ disability lens in the work that you do. And then secondly is to find if you aren't and I could tell you I know which organizations are and aren't. Also in your selection of your boards or committees.

Are you inviting and seeking out LGBTIQ+ people with disabilities on your governance board to ensure that they actually have a voice?

**Triana Butler**

Well, to wrap this up, Margherita, I'd love to hear some of your reflections on the amazing community of LGBTIQ+ people with disability. It is such a diverse and vibrant and intersectional community. What are some of the things being worked on at the moment I guess is the first part of my question. And then what are some of the achievements that we can celebrate?

Let's look at what's being worked on at the moment.

### **Margherita Coppolino**

Look, I think what's really exciting is we now, particularly here in Victoria, have a funded disability persons organization, which is called Inclusive Rainbow Voices, LGBTIQ+ for people with disabilities, and that's disability led perspective on and by LGBTIQ+ people with disabilities. So we will hear much more about that as we speak, when it officially gets launched very shortly and I think what's also very exciting is and this is just I always see a silver lining in everything, is that there is much more LGBTIQ+ people with disabilities coming out or disclosing than previously, particularly in the past.

And I think part of that is we're now being included in the data sets, we're also ensuring that our voices are being heard. Through Private Lives 3 there was inclusion of data about disabilities. So that means we're being counted. And I think that's exciting that we're now part of the greater mass who were always there but the data was never collected in the past.

And I'm also excited with the younger generation who as we are going forward, are very innovative in the way they use social media and all I can say is "watch out world!" because the number of people that I know and I'm sure people know in the sector who they are, that are up and coming, emerging leaders. So watch this space!

### **Triana Butler**

Well, that's absolutely worth celebrating. Well, Margherita, Adam, thank you both so much for your time today. I really appreciate it.

### **Margherita Coppolino**

Thank you for having us.

### **Adam Bourne**

It's been really great to be here, and I appreciate you helping us talk through and shine the spotlight on these findings.

### **Triana Butler**

LGBTIQ+ Health Australia would like to thank our panellists for their contributions to this episode. If you'd like to suggest an idea or a person for the podcast, shoot us an email [info@lgbtiqhealth.org.au](mailto:info@lgbtiqhealth.org.au). Remember if this episode has raised any issues for you, you can contact QLife, which provides Australia wide anonymous LGBTIQ+ peer support.

Q Life services are free and they're available over the phone or on Webchat 3 p.m. to midnight every day. Call 1800 184 527 or visit [qlife.org.au](http://qlife.org.au). For support surrounding the Disability Royal Commission. You can call Blue Night on 1800 401 468 or visit [blueknot.org.au](http://blueknot.org.au).

### **Voiceover**

This podcast was produced in collaboration with JOY, Australia's Rainbow Community Media Organization. For more information on JOY and our services, visit [joy.org.au](http://joy.org.au).