

Homophobia and HIV

Homophobia.jpg



What is homophobia?

Homophobia is "the irrational hatred, intolerance, and fear" of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people.¹

These views are expressed through homophobic behaviours such as jokes, physical attacks, discrimination in the workplace and negative media representation.²

Homophobia and HIV

The global HIV and AIDS epidemic has always been closely linked with negative attitudes towards LGBT people, especially [men who have sex with men \(MSM\)](#); a group that is particularly affected by HIV and AIDS.

"Homophobia continues to be a major barrier to ending the global AIDS epidemic."

At the beginning of the HIV and AIDS epidemic, MSM in many countries were frequently singled out for abuse as they were seen to be responsible for the transmission of HIV. Sensational reporting in the press, which became increasingly homophobic fuelled this view. Headlines such as, "Alert over 'gay plague'",³ and "'Gay plague' may lead to blood ban on homosexuals"⁴ demonised the LGBT community.

In many countries, [stigma and discrimination](#) prevent LGBT people from accessing vital HIV prevention, testing, and treatment and care services. This means that many people are unknowingly living with HIV, or being diagnosed late when HIV is harder to treat.⁵

A global study of MSM showed that young MSM (YMSM) experience higher levels of homophobia than older MSM, obstructions to HIV services and compromises to their housing and employment security.⁶ The loss of these forms of security often lead YMSM to adopt behaviour that puts them at risk of HIV (such as injecting drugs or exchanging sex for money).⁷

The percentage of YMSM able to access cheap condoms, sexually transmitted infection (STI) treatment and HIV education materials for example was extremely low. Nearly half of those living with HIV were not on antiretroviral treatment, compared to only 17% of older MSM.⁸

Homophobia around the world

Despite the important number of countries repealing laws that discriminate against LGBT people, 73 countries (and 5 other territorial entities) around the world maintain laws where homosexuality is illegal.⁹

Homosexual acts are punishable by death in 13 states (or parts of) including Sudan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria and Somalia.¹⁰

Societal opinions about the acceptance of homosexuality vary between regions, with acceptance prominent in [North America](#), the European Union and most of [Latin America](#). Rejection was reported in Muslim nations, [Africa](#), parts of [Asia](#) and [Russia](#). Secular countries, as opposed to religious countries, are more accepting of homosexuality.¹¹

What can be done to tackle homophobia?

Public campaigns

Public campaigns have proven successful in reaching large numbers of people with messages challenging homophobia. For example, the Rainbow Laces campaign in the [UK](#) encourages football players to wear rainbow laces in their football boots to show support for LGBT football players, reaching a wide audience with this positive message.¹²

Schools

Schools have an important part to play in challenging homophobia. Homophobia is fuelled by lack of awareness, and educating young people about LGBT issues is fundamental to overcoming widely accepted prejudice.¹³ A 2012 survey in the UK found that 53% of young LGBT people have no access to any information about LGBT issues at school.¹⁴

Community-based organisations

Community-based organisations play an important role in addressing homophobia. They have the scope to provide support to LGBT people who might feel marginalised and isolated, especially in societies where homosexuality is illegal. Such groups can also influence the attitudes of the general public and can campaign for tolerance towards homosexuality.

Governments

Finally, many governments throughout the world uphold laws that ban homosexuality. Repealing these laws would reduce discrimination against LGBT people, encouraging societies to embrace the diversity of different sexualities.¹⁵

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- [1. Stonewall \(2014\) 'What is homophobia?'](#)
- [2. The Campaign to End Homophobia 'Homophobia'](#)
- [3. Daily Mirror, 'Alert over 'gay plague'', 2nd May 1983](#)
- [4. Daily Telegraph, "'Gay plague' may lead to blood ban on homosexuals', 2nd May 1983](#)
- [5. The Global Forum on MSM & HIV \(MSMGF\) \(2013\) 'Young Men Who Have Sex with Men:](#)

Health, Access & HIV'

- 6. The Global Forum on MSM & HIV (MSMGF) (2013) 'Young Men Who Have Sex with Men: Health, Access & HIV'
- 7. The Global Forum on MSM & HIV (MSMGF) (2013) 'Young Men Who Have Sex with Men: Health, Access & HIV'
- 8. The Global Forum on MSM & HIV (MSMGF) (2013) 'Young Men Who Have Sex with Men: Health, Access & HIV'
- 9. International Lesbian Gay Bisexual Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA) (2016) 'State-sponsored Homophobia: A world survey of sexual orientation laws: Criminalisation, protection and recognition'
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- 11. Pew Research Center (2013) 'The Global Divide on Homosexuality: Greater Acceptance in More Secular and Affluent Countries'
- 12. Stonewall (2014) 'Football - Rainbow Laces'
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- 14. Stonewall (2012) 'The school report: experiences of young gay people in Britain's schools'
- 15. International Lesbian Gay Bisexual Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA) (2014) 'State sponsored homophobia: A world survey of laws: Criminalisation, protection and recognition of same-sex love'

Last updated: 21 April 2017

Last full review: 01 May 2015

Next full review: 01 May 2018