

“I just tell my GP medical information but not anything else”: Healthcare access in New Zealand LGBTQ+ teens

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Background:

Discrimination against LGBTQ+ people has led to underutilization of healthcare services in other countries. Little is known in New Zealand about utilization of healthcare resources by LGBTQ+ teens. This study examines perceived barriers/enablers for LGBTQ+ teens in New Zealand to seeking healthcare and the effect of barriers on sexual risk behaviour in this population.

Methods:

A cross-sectional, mixed methods study, enrolling teenagers aged 15-19 years, who live in New Zealand and identify as LGBTQ+ or questioning. The quantitative component, using data collected via an anonymous online questionnaire, is presented here. Data analysis was done using descriptive statistics. Recruitment was done mostly through social media and LGBTQ+ organizations.

Results:

Overall, 310 valid survey responses was collected from across New Zealand. Of these, 21% indicated that their LGBTQ+ stopped them from seeking healthcare in the past. Only 18% indicated they came out to their general practitioner (GP), while 45% worried that coming out to their GP will out them to their family. Of note, 58% worried about being judged if they disclose their sexual identity to a healthcare provider, and 50% worried about being discriminated against by a healthcare provider if they disclose their sexual identity. Survey answers also indicated the cisgendered sexual minority population did not consider their sexual identity relevant to their overall medical care.

Conclusion:

The study contributes new knowledge on a hard-to-reach population. Common concerns around disclosing their sexual or gender identity indicate there are serious gaps in meeting the healthcare, including sexual health, needs of LGBTQ+ teens in New Zealand. When interpreting these findings we suggest the need for educating providers on how to foster trust in a population that is under constant minority stress conditions. Strengths include a geographically varied sample. Limitations included the use of a convenience sample.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

The authors have no conflict of interest to disclose.