



JULY 2023

LYPSA

**LGBTQ+ YOUNG PEOPLE IN
SOCIAL CARE**

PRACTICE BRIEFING

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What Works for
**Children's
Social Care**

WHY IS THIS PROJECT IMPORTANT?

Little attention has been paid to needs & experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender & queer or questioning (LGBTQ+) young people in social care. The available evidence, mainly from the USA, shows that LGBTQ+ young people face rejection & discrimination based on their sexual orientation, gender identity & expression throughout their care journeys – from initial referral through to leaving or transitioning from care. There is limited research in the UK with only one previous research study focused on the experiences of LGBTQ+ young people in foster care (England).

The studies reported here provide important & ground-breaking knowledge useful for children's social care practitioners & managers. The project included an international systematic scoping review about LGBTQ+ young people's experiences in foster & residential social care. We also present findings from the first study investigating LGBTQ+ young people's residential care experiences in England and a large study testing the effectiveness of an e-learning module for children's social workers supporting LGBTQ+ youth.

AIMS OF THE LYPSA PROJECT

The Lgbtq+ Young People in Social cAre (LYPSA) research project sought to understand & improve the social care experiences of sexual & gender minority young people in England.

HOW WERE THE STUDIES CONDUCTED?

The methods included:

Study 1: Systematic scoping review of the international knowledge about LGBTQ+ young people's foster & residential care experiences & their health & wellbeing.

Study 2: The first in-depth interview study exploring the residential social care experiences of 20 LGBTQ+ young people (aged 16 to 24) in England.

Study 3: The first randomised controlled trial evaluating the effectiveness of an online LGBTQ+ knowledge training package for children's social workers (N = 614) supporting LGBTQ+ young people. We tested to see whether the training improved social workers' knowledge of & attitudes towards LGBTQ+ young people.

The LYPSA project benefited significantly from the input of young people with lived experience. Several LGBTQ+ young people (16 to 24) with lived experience of social care were employed as young advisors. A second advisory group included academics & social care professionals from both statutory & voluntary services.

KEY FINDINGS

Findings from the Scoping Review* & Interviews with LGBTQ+ Young People in Residential Care** (Both Studies***)

- LGBTQ+ young people are more likely to come into care, have more placements moves, & spend longer periods of time in care than non-LGBTQ+ youth*
- LGBTQ+ young people experience poorer health, mental health and wellbeing outcomes & report greater dissatisfaction with care systems compared to their cisgender/heterosexual peers*
- These inequalities stem from rejection & discrimination based on their LGBTQ+ identities - from social care professionals, their birth families, peers, placements, & wider society.
- These challenges affect LGBTQ+ young people access to & engagement with education systems.

- Racial & ethnic minority LGBTQ+ young people & transgender & nonbinary young people face heightened challenges when in care***
- LGBTQ+ young people are more likely to experience homelessness & have greater risks of exploitation, including more survival sex for food & shelter*
- Social workers report a lack of knowledge & uncertainty about supporting LGBTQ+ young people. There is also evidence of homo/bi/transphobic attitudes among some care professionals***
- Very few national or organisational policies focus on protecting LGBTQ+ young people from discrimination*
- Placement instability & high staff turnover was common & made it more difficult to access support networks. Young people often hid their LGBTQ+ identities in placements, fearing discrimination**
- Supportive relationships with caregivers & professionals were hugely important to their confidence & well-being, but examples of these were rare**
- Several participants demonstrated remarkable self-sufficiency to ensure services met their needs, even in the face of resistance by some practitioners or systems**

“

There was this new staff member who would often misgender me to other staff members... if there were residents around when he was doing that, he would be placing me in a dangerous situation... I wrote a complaint about it, but it was never seen through.

”

“

When I was doing emergency placements I would go to a place for the night, then my social worker or one of their colleagues would pick me up in the morning, & then I would spend the day at the social worker's office, & they'd try and get me a bed by 8.00 pm that night. That went on for six weeks, every single night... I was going from one side of the county to the other every day. I spent extreme amounts of time out of school.

”

Findings from the Randomised Controlled Trial Study with Children's Social Workers

- The online training had two positive effects for children's social workers, the e-module:
 1. Increased their LGBTQ+ knowledge &
 2. Improved their attitudes towards LGBTQ+ young people.
- Children's social workers who completed the training felt more confident about their ability to support LGBTQ+ young people, & thought the training was suitable.



PRE/POST-PLACEMENT

SOCIAL CARE SECTOR FACTORS

MEDIATING ISSUES

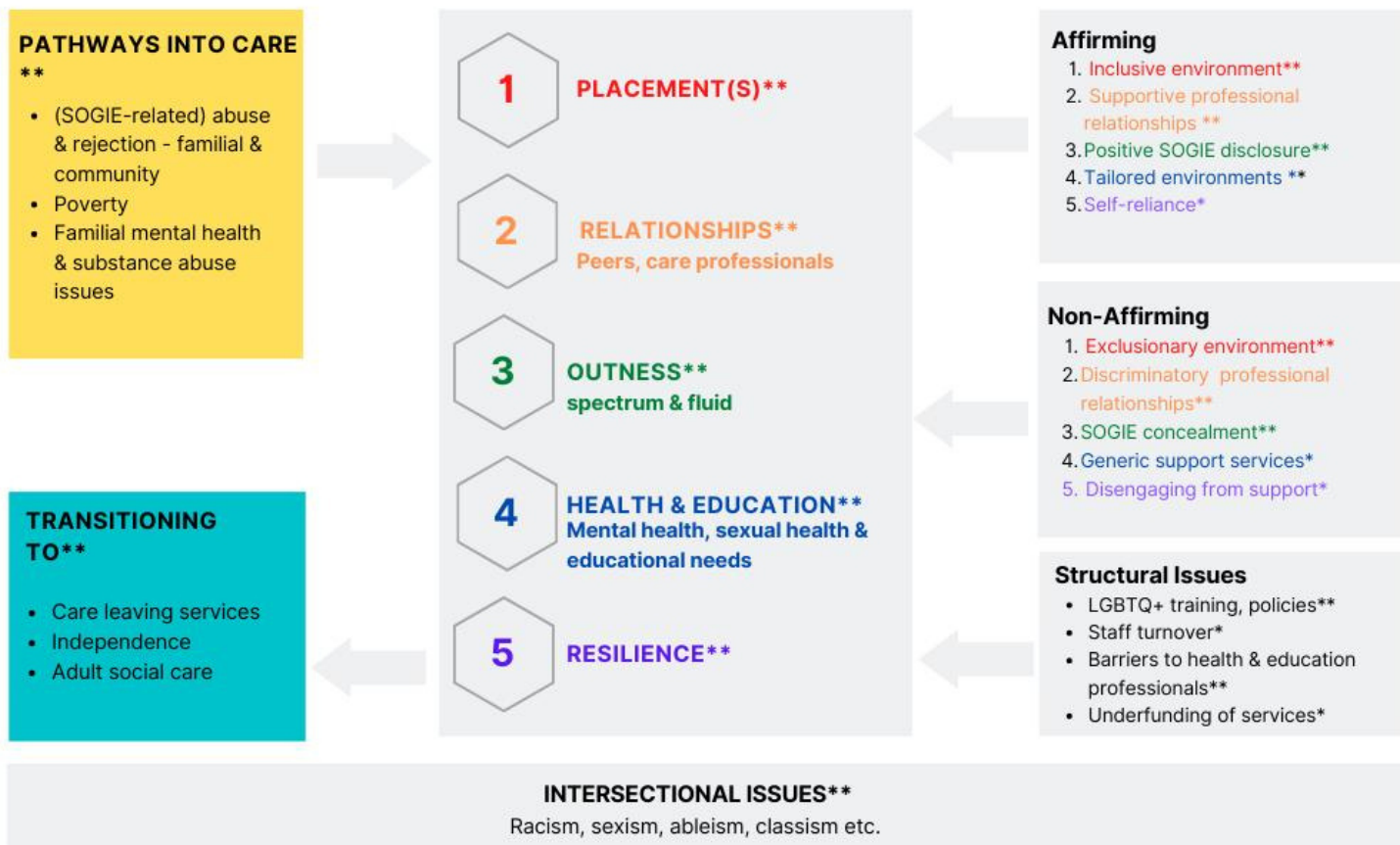


Figure 1. Conceptual model for understanding (un)supportive residential social care environments for LGBTQ+ young people

*Findings from residential care qualitative study

**Findings from both residential care study and international scoping review of the research evidence (Schaub et al., 2022a)

MODEL FOR UNDERSTANDING (UN)SUPPORTIVE RESIDENTIAL CARE ENVIRONMENTS FOR LGBTQ+ YOUTH

The above model outlines important factors as well as mediators (either affirming or disaffirming) & structural issues linked to how social care is managed. Key contributors to LGBTQ+ young people's positive or negative care experiences & their wellbeing, include: (1) placement(s); (2) relationships; (3) degree of "outness" about their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression (SOGIE), (4) health and education needs, & (5) resilience strategies.

The interplay of structural stressors such as racism, sexism, ableism, heterosexism, cisgenderism, and homo/bi/trans-phobia directly impact LGBTQ+ young people's care journeys on multiple levels simultaneously - intrapersonally (e.g., self-stigma), interpersonally (e.g., relations with others) & institutionally (discriminatory and/or exclusionary policies and systems).

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Knowledgeable & affirming care professionals are incredibly important for LGBTQ+ young people in care. Mandatory & comprehensive training about LGBTQ+ young people is recommended in both pre- & post-qualifying programmes.
- This training should be easily accessible & combined with ongoing coaching & reflective supervision.
- Detailed policies to reduce LGBTQ+-related discrimination in care settings is also needed.
- Practitioners & foster carers' attitudes & competence should be assessed to ensure care is both inclusive & affirming.
- Care experienced LGBTQ+ young people should have input in service design and delivery to ensure these services are tailored to their needs.

More information about the project & reports:

www.birmingham.ac.uk/lypsa