

Sexuality and Social Work Conference 2016

Conceptualizing Sexual Prejudice and Barriers in Seeking Social Services

Voices from Chinese Sexual Minorities

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Sexual prejudice experienced by sexual minority (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and questioning/queer-LGBQ) youth within social services is a global and regional concern. A survey conducted by the Hong Kong Government revealed that sexual minority youth were perceived as receiving the highest rate of discrimination. Comparing with some North American and European cities, where law and policies have been established to protect sexual minorities, sexual prejudice against sexual minorities has not been prohibited by law and equal opportunity policy in Hong Kong. Although overseas studies confirmed that sexual minority youth experience high rates of mental health difficulties due to sexual prejudice, social service use among them was unreasonably low. Very limited research has been conducted to examine the service accessibility for sexual minority youth, and none has been conducted in East Asian societies.

The presentation derived data from two research projects on sexual prejudice experienced by sexual minorities in Hong Kong. This specific presentation focused on understanding sexual minorities' barriers to access social services in Hong Kong using qualitative research strategies.

Sexual minorities, school teachers, and social workers in educational and social service settings were recruited to participate in in-depth individual and focus-group semi-structured interviews. This presentation only attended to sexual prejudice manifested in social services as perceived by 35 sexual minority informants. Interviews were audio-taped, transcribed, and coded through NVivo computer software.

Initial thematic analysis through Nvivo coding indicated the following themes: 1) Manifestation of sexual prejudice at institutional level: Sexual prejudice manifested at institutional level while the sexual minorities access social services in schools and in communities; 2) Unique cultural forces constructing sexual prejudice in Hong Kong: Confucianism allied with religiosity in Hong Kong might well be important cultural forces contributing to institutional sexual prejudice manifested in social services ; 3) Dilemma facing by social workers when facing sexual prejudice at the professional level: Social workers and helping professionals face dilemma when navigating heterosexual hegemony as a consequence of their institution's cultural/religious backgrounds without professional supports, such as code of practice, affirmative sexual diversity policy, or professional training to combat sexual prejudice.

When conceptualizing the barriers of accessibility to social services for sexual minorities in Hong Kong, we need to take the unique culture context into consideration, such as lack of explicit code of practice to challenge sexual prejudice, a right-based and up-to-date sexual diversity training curriculum for social workers, cultural, and contextual factors, which may create barriers for sexual minorities to access social services.

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A Brief Biography of the Presenting Author

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sexuality education and sexual diversity training to pre-service and in-service teachers and social work students in tertiary institutions. She conducts research on sexual prejudice experienced by LGBQ and transgender people, especially in education and social service settings. She is a member of the Ethics Committee of the Hong Kong Social Workers' Registration Board, and Professional Training Committee of the Hong Kong Social Workers' Association.