

Human Services for At-Risk LGBT Populations

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Human Services for Low-Income and At-Risk LGBT Populations:

Research Recommendations on Child Welfare Programs

This brief presents recommendations created as part of the Research Development Project on the Human Service Needs of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Populations. The project identified the knowledge base and research needs related to LGBT people's socioeconomic circumstances and risk factors, their current participation in human services funded by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and strategies for serving these populations effectively. Its methods included a literature review, analyses of secondary data sources, and consultations with experts and service providers.

In the area of child welfare programs, the project addressed four topics relevant to LGBT people:

1. The risk of experiencing child maltreatment (neglect and physical, sexual, or emotional abuse) among LGBT people, including people who are questioning or unsure of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity
2. Experiences of LGBT youth in child welfare programs
3. The effectiveness of child welfare services for LGBT youth in foster care
4. The participation of LGBT adults in child welfare programs as foster or adoptive parents

For each topic, the project team identified research needs and recommended key questions and possible approaches for future research. Table 1 summarizes these recommendations.

A companion report to this brief, *Human Services for Low-Income and At-Risk LGBT Populations: An Assessment of the Knowledge Base and Research Needs* (Burwick et al. 2014), available at www.acf.hhs.gov/opre, provides details on existing research related to these topics.

A Note on Data Sources for Studying LGBT Populations and Human Services

The Research Development Project identified a general need to increase the number of population-based surveys and administrative data sources on human services that include measures of sexual orientation and gender identity. Implementing many of the research recommendations presented in this brief would require new data collection or the addition of items on sexual orientation and gender identity to existing federal and state surveys and administrative systems.

The collection and analysis of data on sexual orientation and gender identity pose a range of challenges. These challenges include the willingness of respondents to accurately report their sexual orientation or gender identity, differences in conceptualization of sexual orientation and gender identity across racial and ethnic groups and age cohorts, and small sample sizes when such data are available. Nevertheless, researchers in a range of disciplines have successfully implemented sexual orientation and gender identity measures in surveys and other data collection efforts.

Table 1. Child Welfare Programs: Recommended Questions and Possible Approaches for Future Research

Research question	Possible approaches
Topic 1: Risk of experiencing child maltreatment among LGBT people	
Does the prevalence or type of child maltreatment experienced by sexual and gender minorities differ by individual characteristics?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Analysis of national or state population-based surveys^a
What family or community characteristics are associated with risk of experiencing child maltreatment among LGBT people?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Longitudinal study including LGBT people ▪ One-time survey of LGBT people
Topic 2: Experiences of LGBT youth in child welfare settings	
What proportion of youth in foster care do LGBT youth comprise? What are the characteristics of LGBT youth in foster care?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Surveys of youth in foster care
What are perceptions among LGBT youth in foster care of the safety, supportiveness, and appropriateness of placements and other services they receive?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Surveys of youth in foster care ▪ Focus groups/interviews with youth in foster care
How do placement histories and permanency outcomes of LGBT and non-LGBT youth in foster care compare?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Longitudinal study of youth in foster care ▪ One-time survey of youth currently or formerly in foster care
Topic 3: Effectiveness of child welfare services for LGBT youth	
To what extent are public child welfare agencies taking steps to improve services for young LGBT people? What successes and challenges have agencies experienced?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Survey of child welfare agencies ▪ Focus groups/interviews with child welfare agency staff
What models are available to enhance permanency outcomes for LGBT youth in care or young people at risk of child welfare involvement and how effective are they?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Demonstration evaluation^b
Topic 4: Participation of LGBT adults in child welfare services	
What are the experiences of prospective LGBT foster and adoptive parents with public child welfare agencies?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Survey of LGBT foster and adoptive parents or prospective parents ▪ Focus groups/interviews with LGBT foster and adoptive parents
To what extent and how effectively are public child welfare agencies engaging LGBT adults as foster and adoptive parents?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Survey of child welfare agencies ▪ Focus groups/interviews with child welfare agency staff ▪ Focus groups/interviews with LGBT foster and adoptive parents

^a Assumes surveys or administrative data systems include or add items to identify the sexual orientation and/or gender identity of respondents.

^b Including implementation and impact studies.

TOPIC 1: RISK OF EXPERIENCING CHILD MALTREATMENT AMONG LGBT PEOPLE

Research Need:

Child maltreatment risk among LGBT subpopulations and factors affecting maltreatment risk

Existing research has found that young people who are lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB) or whose behavior does not conform to societal gender norms are more likely to experience maltreatment by parents, guardians, or other adults compared to non-LGB and gender-conforming children and adolescents. Further study is needed to understand the prevalence of maltreatment experiences among youth who identify as transgender; how risks may differ based on individual, family, and community characteristics; and why LGBT youth may be at higher risk.

Questions and Possible Approaches for Future Research

- ***Does the prevalence or type of child maltreatment experienced by sexual and gender minorities differ by age, race/ethnicity, gender identity, or other individual characteristics?***

Researchers have compared the prevalence of child maltreatment experience among lesbians, gay males, bisexual males and females, and heterosexuals by analyzing data from representative school-based surveys and longitudinal and retrospective studies with purposive samples. To provide sample sizes needed to examine patterns of child maltreatment among additional subgroups of LGBT youth, standardized measures of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression could be added to large-scale surveys and longitudinal studies addressing child maltreatment. The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), a periodic population-based survey of students administered by states and local jurisdictions, has been used to examine the prevalence of some types of maltreatment among adolescents identifying as LGB or unsure of their sexual orientation. (In the past, not all states and localities have included questions on sexual orientation in the YRBS, but future versions of the standard YRBS questionnaire are expected to include items on these topics.) Other potential data sources include the Longitudinal Studies of Child Abuse and Neglect, which have been funded by ACF.

- ***What family and community characteristics are associated with risk of experiencing child maltreatment among LGBT people? What factors protect against child maltreatment?***

A longitudinal study, or a one-time survey including retrospective reports of child maltreatment, could compare child maltreatment risk for young people who are sexual minorities in families with various structures and backgrounds and in varied communities. This research could be conducted as part of a broader study to explore how family and community risk and protective factors are similar or different for LGBT and non-LGBT people.



TOPIC 2: EXPERIENCES OF LGBT YOUTH IN CHILD WELFARE SETTINGS

Research Need:

Characteristics of LGBT youth in foster care

Surveys of youth in foster care in a few jurisdictions and anecdotal evidence from child welfare service providers suggest that a disproportionate number of youth in foster care are LGBT. However, the number and proportion of LGBT youth in foster care and their characteristics remain unknown in nearly all states and localities. Additional data on the demographics and well-being of LGBTQ youth in care would help child welfare agencies better understand the population they serve.

Questions and Possible Approaches for Future Research

- ***What proportion of youth in foster care do LGBT youth comprise? What are the characteristics of LGBT youth in foster care—including demographics and mental and physical health—and how do they compare with those of non-LGBT youth in care?***

These topics could be addressed through surveys in multiple jurisdictions of youth in foster care. The surveys would include questions to identify sexual and gender minorities. Researchers could develop a model survey instrument and provide guidance to researchers and child welfare agencies on key aspects of its administration among youth in foster care, such as protection of respondent confidentiality, methods for asking questions about sexual orientation and gender identity, and securing informed consent from minors in care. Qualitative research with LGBT youth in foster care could support refinement of survey instruments. If child welfare agencies use standardized data collection instruments, analyses of survey data could compare proportions and characteristics of LGBT youth across jurisdictions. The Los Angeles Foster Youth Survey, which was conducted as part of the Administration for Children and Families Permanency Innovations Initiative, offers one potential model for surveys of these populations (Wilson et al 2014).



Research Need:

The supportiveness of child welfare services for LGBT youth in foster care

In qualitative studies, LGBT youth in foster care have reported harassment and other negative experiences related to their sexual orientation or gender identity. Existing research also suggests that LGBT youth may experience a higher number of foster care placements, on average, than heterosexual youth. Additional study is needed to understand the service experiences and outcomes of LGBT youth in child welfare systems, including possible differences between LGBT and non-LGBT youth across jurisdictions.

Questions and Possible Approaches for Future Research

- ***What are perceptions among LGBT youth in foster care of the safety, supportiveness, and appropriateness of placements and other services they receive? Do perceptions differ among LGBT youth served by different agencies?***

This research could build on previous studies by gathering information from LGBT youth in foster care in a sample of jurisdictions that vary along key dimensions, such as region, urbanicity, and presence of policies or initiatives supportive of LGBT youth. Surveys using purposive or population-based samples may permit quantitative comparisons of perceptions among LGBT and non-LGBT youth in foster care. In-depth interviews or focus groups could qualitatively explore youths' experiences with child welfare agency staff or peers in foster care and their satisfaction with services or referrals they have received. Qualitative studies could also help identify agency policies or approaches that appear to positively or negatively influence perceptions of services. In addition, surveys and qualitative studies including child welfare administrators, direct service staff, and foster parents could explore perceptions among these groups of the supportiveness of services for LGBT youth.

- ***How do placement histories of LGBT and non-LGBT youth in foster care compare? Are LGBT youth in foster care as likely to achieve permanency through family reunification, adoption, permanent relative care, or other arrangements as similar non-LGBT youth?***

A longitudinal study of youth in foster care or a retrospective survey of youth who have exited foster care could document the placement histories and permanency outcomes of participants. This research might also examine nonplacement or post-placement events, such as running away from home. Data collection instruments would need to include measures of sexual orientation and gender identity and may need to oversample youth in the older age ranges to achieve sufficient sample sizes of LGBT youth.



TOPIC 3: STRATEGIES FOR PROVIDING EFFECTIVE CHILD WELFARE SERVICES TO LGBTQ CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Research Need:

Implementation and effectiveness of child welfare interventions for young LGBT people

Child welfare experts and practitioners have recommended a range of practices to improve services for young LGBT people, including adopting nondiscrimination policies, training agency staff regarding LGBT issues, ensuring that youth receive appropriate services and placements, and collecting and managing data regarding sexual orientation and gender identity. However, little is known about how widely child welfare agencies have adopted these recommendations or the effects of efforts to change systems and implement interventions focused on LGBT clients.

Questions and Possible Approaches for Future Research

- ***To what extent are public child welfare agencies taking steps to improve services for young LGBT people? What successes and challenges have agencies experienced in making changes to better serve these populations?***

A survey of public child welfare agencies nationwide could explore whether the agencies have adopted recommended practices, the types of practices adopted, and factors that facilitate or impede such efforts. An in-depth qualitative study of agency practices could focus on facilitators and barriers to system-wide changes, shifts in agency cultures, or implementation of discrete practices designed to improve services for LGBT youth. Such efforts may include training to enhance the cultural competency of child welfare agency staff or the designation of staff members as LGBT liaisons or specialists. This research might also focus on approaches to collecting and managing data on the sexual orientation and gender identity of youth in child welfare systems to explore challenges and successes in collecting, managing, and using these data.

- ***What models are available to enhance permanency outcomes for LGBT youth in care or young people at risk of child welfare involvement? How effective are these interventions?***

Through the Permanency Innovations Initiative, the Administration for Children and Families has funded the evaluation of one demonstration project designed to improve child welfare outcomes for LGBT youth. Future research could identify, document, and evaluate additional intervention models and system changes that focus on improving the safe and supportive identification of LGBT youth by child welfare agencies, helping families at risk of child welfare involvement address conflict related to a child's actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity, developing appropriate foster care placements for LGBT youth, and supporting LGBT youth who transition out of foster care.



TOPIC 4: PARTICIPATION OF LGBT ADULTS IN CHILD WELFARE SERVICES

Research Need:

Interactions of LGBT foster and adoptive parents with public child welfare agencies

Analyses of nationally representative survey data suggest that same-sex couples are more likely than different-sex couples to have an adopted or foster child. Yet LGBT people who wish to become foster or adoptive parents may face distinctive challenges in their interactions with child welfare agencies, including varying state laws and local attitudes regarding LGBT parenting and differing skill levels among agency staff in working with LGBT people. Some agencies target LGBT people in recruitment of foster and adoptive parents; research is needed to understand the results of these efforts.

Questions and Possible Approaches for Future Research

- ***What are the experiences of prospective LGBT foster and adoptive parents with public child welfare agencies?***

A qualitative study involving focus groups and interviews with a large sample of LGBT foster and adoptive parents (or prospective parents) in varied locations could explore perceptions of barriers and facilitators to working with public child welfare agencies and how these perceptions vary across locations and subpopulations, including transgender people and people of color. Studies also could explore perceptions of specific elements of the foster and adoption placement process, such as the home studies or pre- and post-adoption support services. A survey using purposive sampling methods might yield a large enough sample for quantitative analyses of differences across geographic locations or among male and female LGBT individuals and couples.

- ***To what extent and how effectively are child welfare agencies engaging LGBT adults as foster and adoptive parents?***

A survey of public child welfare agencies could assess the proportion of agencies that have completed foster placements or adoptions with LGBT parents, the characteristics of LGBT foster and adoptive parents and children placed with these families, and agencies' approaches to serving these populations. In-depth site visits or interviews with agency administrators could explore the implementation and results of recruitment efforts targeting prospective LGBT foster and adoptive parents.



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Burwick, Andrew, Gary Gates, Scott Baumgartner, and Daniel Friend. (2014). *Human Services for Low-Income and At-Risk LGBT Populations: An Assessment of the Knowledge Base and Research Needs*. OPRE Report # 2014-79. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

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Human Services for Low-Income and At-Risk LGBT Populations:

Research Recommendations on Programs for Youth

This brief presents recommendations created as part of the Research Development Project on the Human Service Needs of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Populations. The project identified the knowledge base and research needs related to LGBT people's socioeconomic circumstances and risk and protective factors, their current participation in human services funded by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and strategies for serving these populations effectively. Methods included a literature review, secondary analyses of data sources, and consultations with experts and service providers.

In the area of programs for youth, the project focused on two types of services that are funded by ACF and may be especially relevant to youth who are LGBT: (1) assistance for runaway and homeless youth (RHY) and (2) sexual health education for adolescents. It addressed three topics:

1. The risk of homelessness or adverse sexual health outcomes among LGBT youth (and those who are questioning their sexual orientation and/or gender identity)
2. LGBT youths' service preferences and experiences in RHY and sexual health education programs
3. Strategies for providing RHY and sexual health education services effectively to LGBT youth

For each topic, the project team identified research needs and recommended key questions and possible approaches for future research. Table 1 summarizes these recommendations.

A companion report to this brief, *Human Services for Low-Income and At-Risk LGBT Populations: An Assessment of the Knowledge Base and Research Needs* (Burwick et al. 2014), available at www.acf.hhs.gov/opre, provides details on existing research related to these topics.

A Note on Data Sources for Studying LGBT Populations and Human Services

The Research Development Project identified a general need to increase the number of population-based surveys and administrative data sources on human services that include measures of sexual orientation and gender identity. Implementing many of the research recommendations presented in this brief would require new data collection or the addition of items on sexual orientation and gender identity to existing federal and state surveys and administrative systems.

The collection and analysis of data on sexual orientation and gender identity pose a range of challenges. These challenges include the willingness of respondents to accurately report their sexual orientation or gender identity, differences in conceptualization of sexual orientation and gender identity across racial and ethnic groups and age cohorts, and small sample sizes when such data are available. Nevertheless, researchers in a range of disciplines have successfully implemented sexual orientation and gender identity measures in surveys and other data collection efforts.



Table 1. Programs for Youth: Recommended Questions and Possible Approaches for Future Research	
Research question	Possible approaches
Topic 1: Risk of homelessness or adverse sexual health outcomes among LGBT youth	
What proportion of homeless youth identify as LGBT?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Analysis of local surveys/counts of homeless youth^a
What are the characteristics of LGBT homeless youth?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Analysis of local surveys/counts of homeless youth^a ▪ Analysis of program administrative data^a
What characteristics are associated with reduced likelihood of homelessness or risky sexual behavior among LGBT youth?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Analysis of national and state/local population-based surveys^a ▪ Longitudinal study including LGBT youth ▪ Focus groups/interviews with LGBT youth
Topic 2: LGBT youths' service experiences	
What proportion of youth accessing ACF services identify as LGBT?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Survey of service providers/grantees ▪ Survey of youth
What are service pathways for LGBT youth involved in multiple systems?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Focus groups/interviews with LGBT youth ▪ Focus groups/interviews with service providers
What service access barriers do LGBT youth perceive?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Survey of youth ▪ Focus groups/interviews with LGBT youth
What are options for collecting accurate information on sexual orientation and gender identity in administrative data?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Focus groups/interviews with LGBT youth ▪ Focus groups/interviews with service providers
Topic 3: Strategies for providing services	
To what extent have providers adopted practices to improve services for LGBT RHY?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Survey of service providers ▪ Focus groups/interviews with service providers
How effective are RHY or sexual health education services for LGBT youth?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Demonstration evaluation^b

^a Assumes surveys or administrative data systems include or add items to identify the sexual orientation and/or gender identity of respondents.

^b Including implementation and impact studies.



TOPIC 1: RISK OF HOMELESSNESS OR ADVERSE SEXUAL HEALTH OUTCOMES FOR LGBT YOUTH

Research Need:

The size, composition, and needs of the LGBT homeless youth population

Studies in local areas and reports from service providers strongly suggest that a disproportionate share of homeless youth are LGBT, although estimates of the size of the LGBT homeless youth population vary widely. Moreover, LGBT homeless youth may experience problems related to mental health, victimization, and substance abuse at higher rates than their non-LGBT counterparts. Additional research is needed to improve understanding of the size and characteristics of the LGBT homeless youth population and the distinctive risks these youth may face.

Questions and Possible Approaches for Future Research

- ***What proportion of homeless youth in local areas and nationally identify as LGBT?***

Future local surveys of homeless youth should adopt promising practices for gathering information on the sexual orientation and gender identity of respondents, such as those identified by YouthCount!—a federal interagency initiative that aims to develop new approaches to counting unaccompanied homeless youth. Multi-site surveys may also provide opportunities for more precisely estimating the proportion of homeless youth who are LGBT nationwide and collecting data on the demographics of this group.¹

- ***How are the characteristics and needs of LGBT homeless youth similar to or different from those of non-LGBT homeless youth?***

Researchers could gather details on the circumstances and experiences of homeless youth, including LGBT youth, through local and multi-site surveys that employ purposive sampling methods to generate a large sample of homeless youth. Analyses could explore differences between LGBT and non-LGBT youth related to physical and mental health, risk behaviors, housing instability, reasons for homelessness, human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation, and other topics. With improvements to administrative data collection in programs for homeless youth, it may be possible to use these data to compare needs of LGBT and non-LGBT youth as identified by providers.

¹ The Youth Count! Process Study final report (Pergamit et al. 2013) recommends options for conducting a national survey to gather information on the number and characteristics of homeless youth.



Research Need:

Protective factors for LGBT youth

LGBT adolescents appear to engage in risky behaviors at higher rates than non-LGBT adolescents, including behaviors that increase the likelihood of pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections. Studies also suggest that LGBT youth are more likely to suffer from depression and have suicidal thoughts or behavior than non-LGBT youth, and that large proportions of LGBT youth experience harassment at school because of their sexual orientation or gender expression. Researchers have begun to explore individual, family, and community characteristics that support positive outcomes or buffer the effects of negative experiences among LGBT youth, but more study is needed to identify protective factors for these populations.

Questions and Possible Approaches for Future Research

- ***What individual, family, and community characteristics, including policy environments, reduce the likelihood that LGBT youth will become homeless or engage in risky sexual behavior? Do types or levels of protective factors differ among subgroups of LGBT youth?***

Analyses of population-based surveys of youth, such as the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, could help identify characteristics that are associated with reduced likelihood of homelessness, health risk behaviors, and negative sexual health outcomes. Alternatively, a longitudinal study including LGBT youth could examine changes in health and well-being over time to identify general and LGBT-specific protective factors. Focus groups or in-depth interviews with LGBT youth who exhibit relatively high or low levels of risk could also inform efforts to identify characteristics that may differ between these groups. Studies focusing on key subpopulations of LGBT youth, including transgender youth, youth of color, and youth living in rural areas could explore whether protective factors differ for these subpopulations.

TOPIC 2: LGBT YOUTHS' SERVICE PREFERENCES AND EXPERIENCES IN RHY AND SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Research Need:

LGBT youths' participation in RHY and sexual health education services

The research base on LGBT youths' use of homelessness or sexual health education services is very limited. Existing studies suggest there may be some barriers to service access, including fears of discrimination among LGBT youth and providers' lack of knowledge or resources related to LGBT issues. Studies of LGBT youths' service preferences suggest that they are interested in LGBT-specific sexual health education, peer support, and help coping with stresses related to their sexual orientation and gender identity, among other services. More study is needed to understand whether LGBT youth are able or willing to access services they may need. Research is also needed to shed light on the experiences of LGBT youth who may be involved in multiple systems, including programs addressing homelessness, child welfare, and juvenile justice.

Questions and Possible Approaches for Future Research

- ***What proportion of youth accessing RHY or sexual health education services is LGBT, and what are the characteristics of these youth? How does service use by LGBT youth differ across providers and locations?***

A survey of ACF-funded RHY or sexual health education providers could offer initial estimates of the proportion of youth served who are members of sexual minorities. More accurate estimates could be developed through entry and exit surveys of youth accessing services. A self-administered survey might minimize youths' potential concerns about responding to questions on sexual orientation and gender identity.

- ***Do LGBT youth perceive barriers to participating in RHY or sexual health education services? If so, what types of barriers exist? How does the extent or nature of these barriers differ across service locations or among subpopulations of LGBT youth?***

Focus groups and interviews with LGBT youth and professionals serving youth in multiple locations could explore perceptions of the accessibility and relevance of RHY and sexual health education services. Participants could include youth who currently use these services and those who are eligible but do not currently participate. Surveys administered during counts of homeless youth in local areas could ask whether LGBT youth use shelters or other homelessness services and why they do or do not access this assistance.

- ***What are the service pathways of LGBT youth involved in multiple systems? How are these similar to or different from those of non-LGBT youth? What are LGBT youths' perceptions of safety or inclusiveness of services across these systems?***

A qualitative study of a sample of LGBT and non-LGBT RHY could use in-depth individual interviews to explore participants' history of involvement in RHY, child welfare, and/or juvenile justice programs and their experiences in these programs. The study could compare responses of LGBT and non-LGBT youth to identify differences in experiences or perceptions that may be related to sexual orientation.

- ***What are options for enhancing collection of administrative data in ACF programs for youth to include questions on participants' sexual orientation and gender identity?***

Through a literature review and consultations with providers and youth, researchers could identify promising questions and protocols for collecting and managing data on sexual orientation and gender identity in RHY and sexual health education programs. A pilot test of these protocols could inform refinements and recommendations for wider adoption.



TOPIC 3: STRATEGIES FOR PROVIDING SERVICES EFFECTIVELY TO LGBT YOUTH

Research Need:

The implementation and effectiveness of homelessness and sexual health education services for LGBT youth

According to researchers and other experts, improving services for LGBT runaway and homeless youth requires establishing policies to prohibit discrimination and ensure the safety of sexual minority youth, increasing staff members' LGBT cultural competency, and addressing the unique shelter and service needs of LGBT youth. To make sexual health education services more relevant to LGBT youth, experts have suggested such steps as discussing sexual orientation and gender identity during sexuality education programs, describing romantic relationships in terms that do not assume heterosexuality, addressing the specific sexual health concerns of LGBT youth, and adopting peer education models. Research is needed to assess these strategies and the effectiveness of services designed specifically for LGBT youth.

Questions and Possible Approaches for Future Research

- ***To what extent have ACF-funded providers of homelessness or sexual health education services adopted practices intended to improve services for LGBT homeless youth?***

A survey of ACF grantees providing RHY or sexual health education services could examine whether and how providers have attempted to make services accessible or relevant to LGBT youth. Follow-up interviews with a subset of providers could explore their reasons for adopting recommended practices and any successes and challenges they have encountered.

- ***How effective are RHY or sexual education services for LGBT youth?***

A demonstration project could identify RHY or sexual health education program models that target both LGBT and non-LGBT youth or LGBT youth exclusively. Research on these models could include implementation analyses to document key program features and target populations (for example, sexual health education in programs for homeless youth or youth in foster care). Experimental or quasi-experimental evaluations could assess whether the interventions improve outcomes for LGBT youth and compare the effectiveness of models that are LGBT-specific with those that target both LGBT and non-LGBT youth. This research should explore a range of outcomes that may affect sexual health outcomes, including mental health status and experiences of victimization.



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Human Services for Low-Income and At-Risk LGBT Populations: Research Recommendations on Income Support and Self-Sufficiency Programs

This brief presents recommendations created as part of the Research Development Project on the Human Service Needs of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Populations. The project identified the knowledge base and research needs related to LGBT people's socioeconomic circumstances and risk factors, their current participation in human services funded by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and strategies for serving these populations effectively. Its methods included a literature review, analyses of secondary data sources, and consultations with experts and service providers.

In the area of income support and self-sufficiency programs, the project addressed three topics:

1. The prevalence of poverty and economic vulnerability among LGBT populations
2. LGBT populations' receipt of income supports, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and potential barriers to service access
3. Strategies for providing income support services and employment assistance effectively to LGBT people

For each topic, the project team identified research needs and recommended key questions and possible approaches for future research. Table 1 summarizes these recommendations.

A companion report to this brief, *Human Services for Low-Income and At-Risk LGBT Populations: An Assessment of the Knowledge Base and Research Needs* (Burwick et al. 2014), available at www.acf.hhs.gov/opre, provides details on existing research related to these topics.

A Note on Data Sources for Studying LGBT Populations and Human Services

The Research Development Project identified a general need to increase the number of population-based surveys and administrative data sources on human services that include measures of sexual orientation and gender identity. Implementing many of the research recommendations presented in this brief would require new data collection or the addition of items on sexual orientation and gender identity to existing federal and state surveys and administrative systems.

The collection and analysis of data on sexual orientation and gender identity pose a range of challenges. These challenges include the willingness of respondents to accurately report their sexual orientation or gender identity, differences in conceptualization of sexual orientation and gender identity across racial and ethnic groups and age cohorts, and small sample sizes when such data are available. Nevertheless, researchers in a range of disciplines have successfully implemented sexual orientation and gender identity measures in surveys and other data collection efforts.

Table 1. Income Support and Self-Sufficiency Programs: Recommended Questions and Possible Approaches for Future Research

Research question	Possible approaches
Topic 1: Prevalence of poverty and economic vulnerability among LGBT populations	
How do poverty rates differ for LGBT and non-LGBT individuals and among LGBT subpopulations?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Analysis of national and state population-based surveys^a
What factors contribute to observed differences in economic vulnerability between LGBT and non-LGBT populations?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Analysis of national and state population-based surveys^a ▪ Longitudinal survey including LGBT people ▪ Focus groups/interviews with low-income LGBT people
Do economic experiences differ for LGBT people in places with or without legal protections against employment discrimination?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ One-time survey of LGBT people
Does access to legal marriage for same-sex couples affect eligibility for and participation in programs targeting low-income people?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Analysis of national and state population-based surveys^a
Topic 2: Access to income supports among LGBT populations	
Does the use of income support programs among eligible people differ by sexual orientation or gender identity?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Analysis of national and state population-based surveys^a
Do LGBT people experience distinctive barriers in accessing income support services?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Focus groups/interviews with low-income LGBT people
How can administrative data collection be improved to measure service use by LGBT people?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ One-time survey of agencies providing income support services ▪ Focus groups/interviews with staff at agencies providing income support services
Topic 3: Strategies for providing services	
What are the characteristics of self-sufficiency interventions targeting LGBT people?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Focus groups/interviews with service providers ▪ Demonstration evaluation^b
How effective are self-sufficiency interventions that target LGBT people?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Demonstration evaluation^b

^aAssumes surveys include or add items to identify the sexual orientation and/or gender identity of respondents.

^bIncluding implementation and impact studies.



TOPIC 1: POVERTY AND ECONOMIC VULNERABILITY OF LGBT POPULATIONS

Research Need:

Extent of poverty among LGBT populations and individual factors that affect poverty risk

Analyses of nationally representative surveys and other data sources suggest that LGBT people are more likely to face economic difficulties than are non-LGBT people, but findings related to poverty vary across analyses focusing on couples or individuals and for LGBT subpopulations. Analyses focusing on couples and controlling for demographic characteristics have found that same-sex couples are more likely to be poor than are married different-sex couples. Analyses focusing on individual adults have found that bisexuals (but not gay men or lesbians) are significantly more likely to be poor than heterosexuals (without controlling for other demographic characteristics). Additional research is needed to identify LGBT subpopulations that are at highest risk of poverty and improve our understanding of the reasons that LGBT people may be economically disadvantaged.

Questions and Possible Approaches for Future Research

- ***How do poverty rates differ for LGBT and non-LGBT individuals and among LGBT subpopulations?***

Researchers could continue to explore the extent of poverty among LGBT individuals and subpopulations by analyzing national and state surveys with population-based samples. Key federal surveys that gather information about the economic circumstances of respondents, such as the American Community Survey (ACS) and the Current Population Survey (CPS), currently allow for the identification of same-sex couples but do not include questions on sexual orientation and gender identity. The addition of such questions to population-based surveys with large samples could facilitate analyses focusing on LGBT subpopulations that may be at highest risk of poverty, including bisexuals, people of color, and transgender people. Statistical controls for other factors that may be related to poverty would be an important element of these analyses.

- ***What factors contribute to observed differences in poverty rates and economic vulnerability between LGBT and non-LGBT populations? Do such factors as social stigma, discrimination, social isolation, and health disparities affect poverty risk?***

A qualitative study including in-depth interviews and focus groups could improve understanding of how experiences of stigma, social isolation, and discrimination among LGBT populations may affect life choices in areas that may affect economic security, such as education, employment, and personal relationships. These studies could explore differences among LGBT subpopulations and the influence of social factors across the life span (for example, whether adverse experiences related to LGBT status early in life have implications for poverty risk among older LGBT people). Longitudinal studies including LGBT people could also explore these questions using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Finally, these topics might be addressed through analyses of data from the National Health Interview Survey, which includes questions on sexual orientation as of 2013.



Research Need:

Effects of legal protections on economic circumstances of LGBT populations

Policies designed to protect LGBT individuals, such as prohibitions against discrimination in employment and housing or legal recognition of same-sex relationships, may reduce the effects of stigma and alter eligibility for programs designed to serve low-income populations. Additional study is needed to assess whether and how such policies influence economic outcomes for LGBT populations.

Questions and Possible Approaches for Future Research

- ***Do wages, workplace experiences, or other circumstances that affect economic vulnerability differ for LGBT people in states and local jurisdictions with or without laws to prohibit employment discrimination based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity?***

Development of a national survey of LGBT individuals focusing on workplace experiences could provide detailed information about the experiences of discrimination and workplace environment that existing literature shows are associated with either negative or positive economic outcomes. Sample sizes would need to be sufficient for comparisons between LGBT individuals in states and local jurisdictions with and without workplace sexual orientation and/or gender identity discrimination protection. Analyses of LGBT subpopulations, including specific sexual orientation or gender identities, age cohorts, and racial and ethnic minorities, could explore potential differences across those groups.

- ***Does access to marriage for same-sex couples affect their eligibility for and participation in federal programs targeting low-income populations?***

This question could be explored through analyses of population-based data sources that allow for identification of legally married same-sex couples and their families, along with information necessary to assess program eligibility and participation. Existing federal surveys, such as the ACS, CPS, and the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), could be used with adoption of new strategies currently being tested by the Census Bureau to improve the validity and accuracy of information collected about legal marriage status among same-sex couples. (However, the SIPP data may have sample size limitations for these analyses.)

TOPIC 2: RECEIPT OF ASSISTANCE AND POTENTIAL BARRIERS TO SERVICE ACCESS FOR LGBT POPULATIONS

Research Need:

Access to income supports among LGBT populations

Analyses of nationally representative data sources indicate that same-sex couples and bisexual adults are more likely to receive cash assistance and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits than their heterosexual counterparts when controlling for other demographic factors. Nevertheless, the proportion of eligible LGBT people who receive assistance is unknown, and disparities in service access may exist between LGBT and non-LGBT people. Additional research could explore whether eligible LGBT individuals face unique barriers in applying for and receiving assistance.

Questions and Possible Approaches for Future Research

- ***Does the use of income support programs among eligible people differ by sexual orientation or gender identity? Are there differences across LGBT subgroups?***

Quantitative analyses could examine the “take-up rate” for income support services among eligible LGBT people. These analyses would rely on national- and state-level population-based data sources that include information on sexual orientation and gender identity, income, and receipt of public benefits. Currently, key federal surveys addressing income and benefit receipt, such as the ACS, the CPS, and the Survey of Income and Program Participation, allow for the identification of same-sex couples but do not include questions on sexual orientation and gender identity. Such questions would need to be added to these surveys or new surveys on these topics would need to be developed and fielded. In addition, sample sizes in these analyses would need to be sufficient to detect differences between LGBT and non-LGBT people and among LGBT subpopulations.

- ***Do LGBT individuals who use income support and self-sufficiency programs experience distinctive barriers in accessing services?***

Focus groups and interviews with LGBT people who participate in income support programs, including TANF and child support, could provide qualitative data on program experiences. Analyses might address how these individuals experience application processes, interactions with case managers, and key program services. Researchers might also identify potential steps for improving service delivery to LGBT populations.

- ***How can administrative data collection be improved to measure service use among LGBT people?***

Key informant interviews with staff of public and private agencies providing income support services could explore potential opportunities and barriers associated with collecting information on client sexual orientation and gender identity. These discussions might address processes for asking questions about demographic characteristics, technical issues regarding changes to administrative data systems, and potential uses for demographic data on sexual orientation and gender identity in the context of income support and self-sufficiency programs. Research might also identify existing models for administrative data collection on sexual orientation and gender identity and develop recommendations for implementing changes.

TOPIC 3: STRATEGIES FOR PROVIDING EFFECTIVE INCOME SUPPORT AND EMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE TO LGBT PEOPLE

Research Need:

Implementation and effectiveness of employment assistance targeting LGBT people

Surveys of LGBT people suggest that large proportions encounter workplace challenges related to their sexual orientation or gender identity. A small number of service providers offer employment assistance designed specifically for LGBT people, especially transgender people. Studies are needed to document the operation of these interventions and whether they improve employment or other outcomes related to self-sufficiency.

Questions and Possible Approaches for Future Research

- ***What are the characteristics of self-sufficiency interventions that target low-income LGBT people? How are these programs implemented?***

An initial research effort could include a scan to identify employment and self-sufficiency interventions for LGBT people and implementation studies to document key service components or strategies. This research might involve data collection through interviews with providers, reviews of program materials, focus groups with participants, and management information systems. Studies could identify distinctive practices among programs targeting LGBT populations and programs in areas with different characteristics, such as the presence or lack of employment protections for LGBT people. Studies also could explore program characteristics that administrators and participants perceive to be associated with positive employment outcomes.

- ***How effective are self-sufficiency interventions that target low-income LGBT people?***

Evaluations using experimental or quasi-experimental designs could establish treatment and control groups of low-income LGBT individuals that differ based on participation in an LGBT-specific self-sufficiency program. These evaluations would follow participants over time to assess differences in employment, income, and other measures. Data sources could include surveys and administrative data, such as wage records. Ideally, analyses would explore differences in outcomes for participants in LGBT-specific and non-LGBT-specific programs. (Program demand would need to be large enough to generate treatment and control group sizes sufficient for an impact evaluation.)



REFERENCE

Burwick, Andrew, Gary Gates, Scott Baumgartner, and Daniel Friend. (2014). *Human Services for Low-Income and At-Risk LGBT Populations: An Assessment of the Knowledge Base and Research Needs*. OPRE Report # 2014-79. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

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