Feeling Unsafe and Threatened: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the Sexual Health Needs of Lesbian and Bisexual Girls in Foster Care

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Background

- LGBTQ+ youth and foster youth are at greater sexual health risk compared to other youth.1,2
- This concern is amplified considering that LGBTQ+ youth are overrepresented in the foster care system.3,4

Methods

- One focus group was conducted with 6 girls in foster care (5 LB and 1 heterosexual).
- Participants were recruited from Hearts & Homes for Youth group homes.
- Youth were asked to describe their perceptions and experiences of sexual health using a semi-structured interview guide.
- A 5-step Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis approach was used to analyze the data.5

Gaps

- Despite heightened risk, it is unknown how LGBTQ+ foster youth experience sexual health and risk.
- Understanding of the role of caretaker, family, and peer relationships in the sexual health experiences/needs of LGBTQ+ foster youth is lacking.
- How to best provide/communicate sexual health education to LGBTQ+ foster youth remains unexplored.
- How and whether sexual health needs/experiences differ for LGBTQ+ foster care subgroups, including lesbian/bisexual girls is currently unexamined.

Research Question

- What is the lived experience of sexual health among lesbian/bisexual (LB) girls in foster care?

Conclusions

- The narrative of fear and distrust speaks to the potential hindrance in sexual health and development and past experiences of sexual victimization and/or other trauma among LB girls in foster care.
- LB girls in foster care prefer to interact with adults who seek their trust, protect their confidentiality, and have strong communication skills.
- Future research should continue to explore the sexual health needs of LGBTQ+ foster youth and examine how to best equip adult caretakers and family members in successfully addressing these needs.

Study Themes

- Fear of Being Victimized within Sexual Relationships
- Distrust within Sexual Relationships
- Self-Protection from Sexual Relationship Harm
- Opportunities for Sexual Health Education and Communication

“…this world is crazy and you never know what who has who and why who how when how they got it [youth 1]. And what their intentions are! [youth 2]” [referring to past sexual history and possible spread of STIs]

“Never trust no one, even if you think you can trust them, don’t trust them.”

“Don’t let people come into your personal space”

“Talk to an adult [about sexual health] that you can trust or that you can put your faith in.”

“Be very careful”

“Don’t talk to strangers”