

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}

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?

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 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach was used to analyze the data.⁵

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

"...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]

Distrust within Sexual Relationships

"Never trust no one, even if you think you can trust them, don't trust them."

Self-Protection from Sexual Relationship Harm

*"Don't let people come into your personal space"
"Be very careful"
"Don't talk to strangers"*

Opportunities for Sexual Health Education and Communication

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