



# Attitudes of VA mental health professionals towards LGBTQ veterans



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## Introduction

LGBTQ population is subject to much discrimination in our society and in healthcare with disparities including:

- Less access to insurance and healthcare services<sup>1</sup>
- Lower overall health status<sup>1</sup>
- Higher rates of smoking, alcohol and substance abuse<sup>1</sup>
- Higher risk of mental illness such as anxiety and depression<sup>1</sup>
- Higher rates of sexually transmitted diseases<sup>1</sup>
- Increased incidence of cancer<sup>1</sup>
- Less likely to seek basic healthcare than the general population<sup>2</sup>
- LGBTQ population thinks their providers lack basic education, terminology and understanding of LGBTQ culture<sup>1</sup>

Nationwide the VA health care system is striving towards providing equitable healthcare to the LGBTQ population

US Department of Veterans Affairs-Patient Care services offers online training programs on LGBT healthcare

**Currently no literature regarding attitudes, comfort levels and behaviors of mental health professionals in the VA system towards LGBTQ veterans**

## Objectives

Assess the attitudes of VA mental health professionals and trainees (psychology interns/ fellows and psychiatry residents) towards LGBTQ veterans

Identify areas of bias/stigma, ease and comfort levels and need for provider education in relation to the LGBTQ patient population

Direct specific training and curricula for VA mental health providers and trainees that will improve overall care for LGBTQ patients in the VA system

## Review of Literature

- 70% of transgender or gender non-conforming patients experience discrimination in healthcare<sup>3</sup>
- 73% of transgender respondents reported they were be treated differently by medical personnel<sup>3</sup>
- 42.8% of gay, lesbian or bisexual students in grades 9-12 in American schools attempt suicide<sup>4</sup>
- Deans of 150 medical schools in the US and Canada reported that they devoted an average of 5 hours in the medical school program to LGBTQ education<sup>5</sup>
- Preferences for heterosexual people are pervasive among heterosexual health care providers<sup>6</sup>
  - Lesbian/gay providers have implicit preferences for lesbian women/gay men over straight people<sup>6</sup>
  - Mental health providers have weakest implicit preferences toward heterosexual people and nurses have strongest<sup>6</sup>
- Medical students' religiosity and familiarity with religious perspectives on sex have less positive attitudes towards LGBTQ individuals<sup>7</sup>

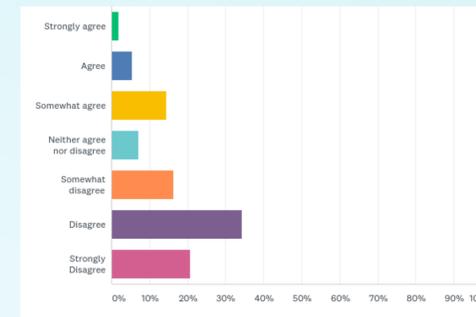
## Methods

- Anonymous 20 question survey (modified LGBT-DOCSS) emailed to mental health professionals<sup>8</sup>
  - Psychologists and psychiatrists, including trainees in each of these disciplines
  - In the Veterans Affairs within VISN-6 using a Survey Monkey
- Eligible participants are either a psychiatry or psychology trainee or professional in the VA healthcare system
- Two reminder emails were sent at a gap of one week after the initial email to increase response rate
- Participation of the survey was voluntary and no financial compensation was provided to participants

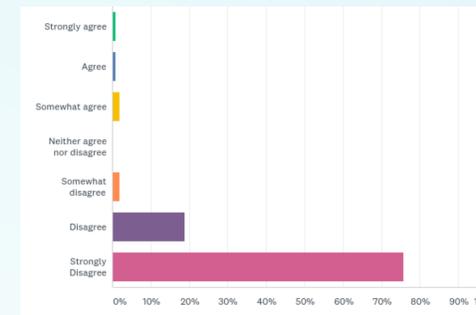
## Results

- So far there have been 112 respondents to the survey
- Number of respondents almost equal across psychiatry and psychology trainees and professionals
- Below are responses to some selected questions from the survey:

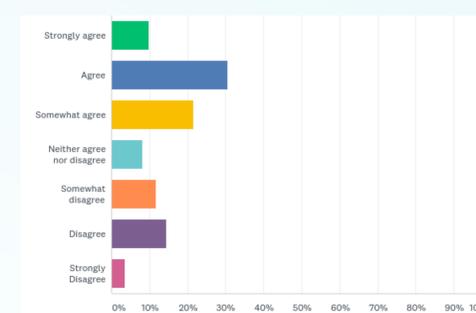
*I feel unprepared talking with LGBTQ clients/patients about issues related to their sexual orientation or gender identity*



*I would be morally uncomfortable working with a LGBTQ client/patient*



*I have received adequate clinical training and supervision to work with LGBTQ clients/patients*



## Conclusion

- Survey responses are still being recorded, so far there have been 112 respondents
- Interpretation of data still underway
- Plan to have results and conclusions completed by November 2018
- Study will provide insight into the current attitudes, competency, and level of comfort of VA mental health professionals and trainees in relation to the several factors being evaluated in the survey such as level of training, religion, race, etc.
- Preliminary data demonstrates that providers generally do not have negative personal views towards the LGBTQ population
- Providers have mixed answers about whether the current LGBTQ clinical training at the VA is adequate
- This pilot study may be used to develop future trainings for VA providers in the form of videos or in person live training, if significant deficits in current trainings are identified by our study
- We hope that the results will help providers be more aware of their attitudes in caring for the LGBTQ population and further promote equal healthcare for patients nationwide

## References

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Funding Source: Salem Veterans Affairs Medical Center Research Pilot Seed Award

The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Department of Veterans Affairs