

TOLERANCE BUT NOT INCLUSION



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A national survey on experiences of discrimination and social attitudes towards LGBT people in Thailand

In 2018-2019, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) conducted a survey on the experiences of and stigma facing LGBT people in Thailand. It was one of the largest national surveys to examine the experiences of and social attitudes towards LGBT people. Overall, 2,210 participants took part in the study. Respondents ranged in age from 18 to 57. The study also included qualitative data from 12 focus group discussions with 93 people in Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Phitsanulok and Pattani.

Though Thailand has a history and a global reputation for tolerance, the study found that in reality the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people are limited by stigma and discrimination. Negative beliefs and attitudes about LGBT people prevent them from reaching their full potential as workers, students and members of society.

MAJOR FINDINGS

General attitude towards LGBT people

- The survey revealed that non-LGBT respondents have favourable attitudes towards LGBT people and support equal right and equal access to services for LGBT community, This supports drops when it comes to accepting LGBT people as family members, fellow workers, students and social acquaintances.
- Most LGBT respondents perceive stigma. According to the survey, bisexual men perceived more forms of a stigma than any other LGBT subgroups.
- Most LGBT people report experiencing at least one form of discrimination, such as having been called names or made fun of. They were told to hide who they are and conform to heteronormativity at school, workplace and home.
- Only 44 percent of LGBT respondents knew about the Gender Equality Act B.E. 2558. This finding is even more significant given that half of the non-LGBT people were aware of the law.
- There is also significant support for inclusive law and policies. However, some high-profile issues, such as changing gender titles of transgender people, elicited lower levels of support than less contentious topics related to equal rights to services and equal treatment.

LGBT health and health care access

- Previous research has shown that LGBT people around the world struggle to have access to better health care services and well-being. They experience a type of stress and trauma that are not experienced by heterosexual, cisgender people. This has effects on LGBT people, referred to a 'minority stress', results in poor mental health and physical health outcomes.
- Due to the stigma, LGBT people may be denied medical services and treatment, or they may face more subtle discrimination when health care providers do not take time to understand the unique needs of their LGBT patients. This stigma is a significant barrier to accessing healthcare services for them.
- Lesbian and bisexual women scored lowest in health prevention activities. With regards to safe sex counseling, substance abuse counseling and STIs testing, they also showed the lowest rates of participation. This may be a reflection of the "Lesbian immunity myth" which arises from the notion that women who have sex with women are not at risk for STIs.

- The majority of LGBT (54.6%) respondents had never been tested and did not know their HIV status. This result is even more extreme among LGBT youths (18–24 years old), 70 percent of whom had never been tested, and among 18- to 24-year-old bisexual women (84.4%) and 18- to 24-year-old lesbians (90.3%).
- Mental health is an important issue for LGBT people which significantly reflected from a frequency of suicide. Nearly one-sixth of LGBT sample have attempted suicide. Young LGBT adults age 18-24 who have not accepted and faced discrimination from family members were most at risk of suicide.

Family and friends

- Nearly half (47.5%) of LGBT respondents have experienced at least one form of discrimination from within their family. The most common experience of discrimination was being told to “watch your appearance or the way you speak or act.”
- LGBT people are pressured by their families to marry someone of the opposite sex. Opposite sex marriages are a cornerstone of heteronormative cultural standards, as they signal cultural and legal approval. Some see it as an obligation to please their family.
- LGBT people are less inclined to be open towards family members, teachers and doctors. Most respondents were open to at least one family member, though the vast majority (92.9%) were open to non-family members.
- LGBT people feel more acceptance from people outside the family than from family members.

School

- 41 percent of LGBT people and 61 percent of transgender women reported being discriminated against when they were students. Some of them were told to watch their appearance, got verbally attacked and were often sexually harassed.
- Since 1978, sex education has become part of the school curriculum in 60 percent of upper secondary schools. Nevertheless, many schools still focus on sex and physical anatomy and sex education programmes do not include topics related to sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics.

Work

- This study reveals that employment opportunities for LGBT people may be limited by stigma, discrimination and health disparities.
- LGBT people face two types of discrimination in the workplace: formal and informal. The ‘formal’ discrimination is related to the terms of their employment, such as unequal wages, discriminated against during the recruitment process, being fired, and being denied promotions based on their sexual orientation, gender identity and/or expression. ‘Informal’ discrimination is related to the work environment, such as harassment and negative treatment by supervisors and co-workers.

Community and media environments

- Across LGBT subgroups, the average civic engagement scores were lower than belonging to the LGBT community. The difference of the scores may reflect a gap in skills as well as levels of resilience and self-esteem, although it may also indicate a lack of social infrastructure with which people can be engaged with.
- For media consumption habits, Website were the most common sources to access LGBT information for LGBT respondents (81 percent) followed by social media apps (77 percent)

This report recommends that the government begin to track health, educational and labour outcomes of LGBT people as part of national data collection efforts in these areas. In addition, the report includes a number of recommendations for legal and policy reform and strengthening the implementation of LGBT-inclusive laws, policies and programmes.

Download the full report:

