



A Bed of Roses? Exploring the Experiences of LGBT

Newcomer Youth Who Migrate to Toronto

Key Details

KEY WORDS

Gender, migration, race, inequality, sexuality, refugee/asylum seeker

POPULATION GROUP

LGBT Newcomer Youth

STEPPING UP THEMES

Health and Wellness; Diversity, Social Inclusion & Safety; Coordinated & Youth Friendly Communities

RESEARCH ORIGIN

Ontario

SOURCE

Academic Article

“... youth do not experience homophobia and transphobia in isolation; there are other forms of discrimination that can intersect to create a complex system of multiple oppressions.”

1. What is the research about?

This academic article presents findings from research that explored the lived experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) newcomer youth and the various oppressions they face post-migration, including homophobia and racism.

This paper explored two main questions:

- What are challenges facing LGBT newcomer youth after their journey?
- How can we, as a society, respond to these challenges?

2. Where did the research take place?

The research took place in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), Ontario, Canada.

3. Who is this research about?

This research is about LGBT newcomer youth who migrated to Canada over the last 10 years, and settled in the GTA.

4. How was the research done?

This study explored a subsample of focus group and interview data from the Teens Resisting Urban Trans/Homophobia (TRUTH) project, which was launched in partnership between Planned Parenthood Toronto and Wilfred Laurier University. A team of university and community-based investigators and a Youth Advisory Committee, consisting of 10 LGBT youth, supervised the project.

To better understand the discrimination facing the LGBT youth, the researchers examined data from four focus groups with newcomer LGBT youth who self-identify as immigrants or refugees. In addition, one service provider and four youth, three of who also attended the focus groups, were interviewed in-depth to get a better sense of the issues facing the youth.

Researchers asked the youth to respond to the following questions:

- What does homophobia and transphobia mean to you?
- Where have you experienced homophobia and transphobia and in what forms?
- How do these experiences impact your daily life?

The data was analyzed using a social determinants of health theoretical lens with a particular focus on how social exclusion impacts people's health.

5. What are the key findings?

This study found out that LGBT newcomer youth experience various forms of oppression, such as homophobia, racism and xenophobia in different stages of their lives. Religious persecution and homophobic violence in their home countries are the main reasons why they immigrated to Canada. Canada was their first choice destination because of its multiculturalism and the external perception of tolerance towards the LGBT community.

Despite the perception of tolerance, many youth indicated that they still face verbal and physical discrimination because of their sexual orientation. These incidents took place in workplaces, educational institutions, social service organizations and ethnic communities, as well as during the refugee/immigration settlement process.

Many participants in this study claimed that they struggled to prove to immigration authorities that they were gay because they did not conform to the authorities' stereotypical ideas of how gays and lesbians dress or act.

This study also found out that participants experienced racism at the hands of social service providers and immigration authorities, as well as within the LGBT community. Because of their race, a number of youth alleged that some service providers and immigration authorities had a hard time believing that they were gay.

Due to the systematic racism and homophobia, the newcomer youth's quest to establish a new stable life in Canada faces some serious hurdles. These hurdles not only have negative impacts on their new life, but also on their health and emotional wellbeing.

6. Why does this research matter for youth work?

Despite facing fewer homophobic and racist experiences in Canada than in their home country, LGBT newcomer youth continue to face homophobia and racism in the GTA. Although there are a number of agencies serving LGBT youth, they are inadequate in meeting their complex needs. Therefore, some serious efforts are needed to counter the systematic homophobia and racism LGBT newcomer youth face.

Enhanced anti-homophobia and anti-racism trainings should be provided to all service providers so that they can better understand the complex needs of the LGBT newcomer youth and address them in an appropriate and timely fashion. In addition, expecting LGBT youth to act or dress in certain ways is dehumanizing and further nurtures the stereotypes. To better serve LGBT newcomer youth, immigration authorities and social service providers should stop looking at the LGBT newcomer youth through a stereotypical Western lens of "gays" and "lesbians". Without these changes, LGBT newcomer youth will continue to experience barriers to service and the ongoing effects of marginalization.



Munro, L., Travers, R., St. John, A., Klein, K., Hunter, H., Brennan, D., & Brett, C. (2013). A bed of roses?: exploring the experiences of LGBT newcomer youth who migrate to Toronto. *Ethnicity and Inequalities in Health and Social Care*, 6(4), 137-150.