

Pledge of Pride: Exploring the Experiences of LGBTQ+ Care Leavers

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Abstract

This co-produced empirical study addresses the dearth in research examining the multiple intersecting disadvantages that LGBTQ+ care-leavers face, based on gender, sexual orientation and being care experienced. A mixed-methods study was co-produced with a fostering engagement manager and team of three LGBTQ+ young people with recent experience of leaving care. Purposive followed by snowball sampling sought to include participants with a range of identities. In-depth interviews were conducted to explore the rich perspectives of five self-identified LGBTQ+ people with recent experience of leaving care in the UK. Professional perspectives were examined using a survey collecting quantitative and qualitative information about leaving care services across the UK. A thematic analysis was employed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six stages and utilizing an analysis framework integrating elements of cisgenderism and stigma theory. Findings show that although there are pockets of good practice, provision of effective support for LGBTQ+ care leavers is insufficient; impacting upon young people's housing, finance, education, emotional wellbeing, mental and physical health. Young people felt ignored, invalidated, and reported examples of homophobia, biphobia and transphobia. Professionals report a lack of consistent training, policy and organizational support to meet the specific needs of LGBTQ+ young people as they prepare to leave care. The findings of this exploratory study are relevant to international professionals and social scientists with an interest in addressing the overt and covert ways in which cisheteronormativity can enact a devaluing of identities that sit outside of entrenched binary norms of gender and sexual orientation.

Keywords: care, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans