



## Historical context and its effect

*“Remember, we started out life as being ‘criminals’. Homosexuality was illegal till 1967 so many of us lived in fear of being caught, losing our jobs and even our families. Though I think mum always knew deep down, it was never talked about and that’s how we all just got on with life.”*  
(Joseph – *All of Me*. Age UK)

For many older LGBT people, the criminalisation of homosexuality and fears of prosecution, the consequences of institutionalized HBT including legislation such as Section 28 leave an imprint of mistrust and a reluctance to disclose.

Sexual orientation and gender identity are very often ignored in monitoring by organisations working with older people and there is a risk that a lack of data about the needs of older LGBT people, as a consequence of ignorance, marginalisation and discrimination, could be misinterpreted as evidence of an absence of needs.

For some older LGB people care settings involve ‘going back in to the closet’ as a protective mechanism at an uncertain time.

You may ask, why hide or want to be hidden? Fear of homophobic, biphobic or transphobic responses, fearful of services being taken away from you and worries about harassment all play a part in the dynamic of disclosure.

Historically (until 1967) many LGBT people, particularly gay men were subjected to various aversion therapies and treatments including ECT and chemical castration. They may have experienced criminalisation in law, been stigmatised by society, had condemnation from religious authorities and have been pathologised by medical practitioners. Put those people into a place where they are faced with an uncertain future, feeling vulnerable making decisions about care providers, potentially living with people who also grew up at a time when homosexuality was illegal, and for some returning to the closet may seem the only way.

*Agnes (92, blind and living in sheltered accommodation) told the warden of her accommodation that she identified as a lesbian. Agnes was previously married to a man for 60 yrs. When the warden left she felt unable to tell the new warden and spends a lot of her time wondering which of her carers she might tell but is fearful of their response.*

*‘What if they took a dislike to me? I don’t think many people would understand it or accept it’ (Westwood S: 2015)*

In Stonewall’s survey, Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual people in later life’ ([www.Stonewall.org.uk](http://www.Stonewall.org.uk)) 73% of older LGB people said they wouldn’t feel comfortable disclosing their sexual orientation to care staff. Some people may have never come out, some may have always been out and some people may be out to some and not others. HBT and harassment, not only from workers but other residents, are all too familiar to older LGBT people.

Older lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people are not likely to admit that they have first-hand experience of being actively discriminated against or bullied. In a study conducted by Dundee University on behalf of Stonewall Housing participants were asked during the interview if they



- Develop links with local LGBT agencies and groups
- Monitor sexual orientation and gender identity
- Absolute zero-tolerance approach to any harassment both from staff and customers
- Create robust reporting systems for harassment
- Challenge HBT - not only from your staff but from your other customers.
- Use your anti-social behaviour policy- know what it is and what it says.
- Be consistent throughout your staff group

## Conclusion

The overwhelming perception by older LGBT people is that housing and care for older people is inherently heterosexual and cisgender. Care staff and other residents are perceived to be HBT. In this setting and considering all of the above it is no surprise that housing, care and support service have to work hard to build trust and provide safe spaces for older LGBT people to report hate crime.

## Further reading and contacts

Adult Social Care Outcomes framework LGBT companion document

<http://lgbt.foundation/ascof?home>

Stonewall Housing (Older Housing Network and Training) [www.stonewallhousing.org](http://www.stonewallhousing.org)

Dementia and LGBT people – roundtable report

<file:///C:/Users/asususer/Downloads/The%20dementia%20challenge%20for%20LGBT%20communities.pdf>

This information sheet was produced by Stonewall Housing, an LGBT charity providing housing advice, support for LGBT people in their own homes and supported housing for young LGBT people. It is a part of a series of 17 resources on hate crime for LGBT people and service providers, created on behalf of the National LGBT Hate Crime Partnership. Other useful information sheets include:

1. Glossary of Terms Relating to Hate Crime
2. Diary Sheets and Guidance on Keeping a Written Record of Hate Crime
3. Hate Crime Laws: A Guide for LGBT People
8. Training Toolkit on LGBT Hate Crime
9. LGBT Hate Crime Quality Standard: A Service Improvement Tool for Organisations
10. Tackling Biphobia: A Guide for Safety Services
11. Tackling Transphobia: A Guide for Safety Services
12. Complaints to Statutory Agencies: A Guide for Advice Workers
15. Housing, Disability and LGBT Hate Crime
16. Commissioning LGBT Hate Crime Services: A Guide for Organisations
17. Building Partnerships to Tackle Hate Crime

Find out about our work at [www.stonewallhousing.org](http://www.stonewallhousing.org) and [www.lgbthatecrime.org.uk](http://www.lgbthatecrime.org.uk).

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