

ISSUES & EXPERTS

January 27, 2020

Simon Fraser University
University Communications
778.782.3210 www.sfu.ca/university-communications

Contact:

Travis Salway, Health Sciences, 778-782-7201, travis_salway@sfu.ca

Sexual orientation conversion therapy still common in Canada, study

New research, published in the Canadian Journal of Psychiatry (<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0706743720902629>), has found that conversion therapy to attempt to change a person's sexual orientation is still common in Canada. The study calls for government and societal support to end conversion therapy practices.

According to university and community-based researchers, four per cent of Canadian gay and bisexual men—approximately 20,000 individuals across the country—have been exposed to conversion therapy, which includes scientifically discredited practices that try to repress, discourage, or change a person's sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. These numbers are based on a survey of gay and bisexual men across Canada, led by the national Community-Based Research Centre (CBRC).

"The ongoing practice of conversion therapy in Canada threatens the health and wellbeing of LGBTQ2 people," says study lead author Travis Salway, an SFU health sciences professor. "For this reason, the federal government is working to amend the criminal code to ban conversion therapy across the country. This research further emphasizes the urgency of this legislative action."

Consistent with other studies conducted internationally, gay and bisexual men who reported conversion therapy in this survey were more likely to report loneliness, regular drug use, thoughts of suicide, and suicide attempts.

While this study was focused on gay and bisexual men, other research has highlighted similar or higher rates of conversion therapy among lesbian and bisexual women and transgender people.

The CBRC has been working with LGBTQ2 communities and policymakers to stop more Canadians from experiencing conversion therapy.

"A federal ban on conversion therapy would send a strong message to Canadians and the rest of the world that attempting to change someone's sexual orientation, gender identity or expression is not only ineffective, but wrong," says Michael Kwag, director of Knowledge Exchange and Policy Development at the CBRC. "For queer and trans people who have been subjected to conversion therapy, a ban would help validate and affirm their experiences of survival and healing."

Salway says other levels of government can also play a role. Provincial conversion therapy bans, in particular, can ensure that healthcare resources are not used to repress or change patients' diverse gender identities and expressions or sexual orientations.

"Several elected officials have asked whether conversion therapy is still happening in Canada," notes Salway. "It's the social responsibility of all Canadians to ensure that LGBTQ2 people are told, without hesitation, that their identities and lives are valued. It's time to end conversion therapy."

Other researchers collaborating on the study are from École de santé publique, Université de Montréal, the Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University of Toronto, the School of Public Health and Social Policy, University of Victoria, the BC Centre for Disease Control, and the Centre for Gender and Sexual Health Equity.

LEARN MORE:

- <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0706743720902629>
- [Community-Based Research Centre](#)

University Communications

Simon Fraser University

[778.782.3210](tel:778.782.3210)

Connect with us on social media