



Bisexual

What does bisexual mean?

Bisexual people, often referred to as 'bi', are emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to people of more than one gender. For some bisexual people, the degree and ways in which they are attracted to people of different genders may change during their lifetime. Some people who are attracted to more than one gender use other terms such as pansexual, polysexual, fluid, or queer. While numbers vary from study to study, surveys from the United States suggest that between 2 and 3.1 percent of respondents identify as bisexual.

These studies also suggest that as many as 13 percent of women and almost 6 percent of men are attracted to more than one gender, without specifically identifying as bisexual. In a recent study, almost half of youth in the United Kingdom indicated that their sexuality is somewhere in between exclusively heterosexual and exclusively homosexual. Bisexuality is nevertheless often rendered invisible in the media and in health research.

Bisexual persons and human rights

Under international human rights law, all people have the right to be protected from violence and discrimination. States have obligations to prevent and address human rights violations – including violations that are based on sexual orientation.

However, the reality is that bisexual people face a number of human rights abuses on the basis of their sexual orientation. These include violence, torture and ill-treatment in health and detention settings, the criminalization of consensual same-sex relations and other discriminatory laws, discrimination and stigma including in health, education, employment and access to social services and discriminatory restrictions on freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly and association.

Biphobia

Biphobia is an irrational fear, hatred or aversion towards bisexual people. Harmful stereotypes about bisexual people include myths that they are so-called “looking for attention”, “just experimenting”, “immoral” or “unstable”.

Biphobia is one of the root causes of the violence, discrimination, poverty and worse mental and physical health experienced by bisexual people. In Scotland, 48% of the bisexual community experiences biphobic comments, and 38% experienced unwanted sexual comments related to them being bisexual. Denying that bisexuality exists, making it invisible, and policies and services that fail to address the specific needs of bisexual people, are also a form of biphobia. Biphobia affects the ability of persons to report abuses and access services and also the possibility of seeking asylum.

Violence

Bisexual people are more at risk of violence than the general population. According to a study from the European Union, one in four bisexual persons report having been attacked or threatened with violence during the past five years. Bisexual women are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence and rape. Almost one in two bisexual women in the United States have experienced rape, which is 3 times higher than the rate for heterosexual and lesbian women, and 75 percent of bisexual women have experienced other forms of sexual violence.

Bisexual women are also twice as likely as heterosexual women to experience rape, physical violence and/or stalking by an intimate partner. Reports from Japan, Malaysia, Pakistan and





the Philippines also indicate that sexual and intra-family violence is a major concern for bisexual women. Bisexual men also face higher risk of sexual violence; almost half of those surveyed in the US have experienced some form of sexual violence in their lifetime, double the rate of heterosexual men. Bisexual people further face violence that is targeted more generally at the LGBT community. For example, in Iraq, the majority of LGBT people – including bisexual people – report facing physical and verbal abuse. Impunity for violence based on sexual orientation is a concern, with lack of investigation and prosecution of perpetrators and lack of remedy for victims.

Torture and ill-treatment

Bisexual people are at risk of torture and ill-treatment based on their sexual orientation. This includes harmful, unethical and unscientific so-called “conversion therapy” to try to forcibly change their sexual orientation. Bisexual people detained on the basis of alleged same-sex relations are at risk of forced anal examinations. Bisexual people in detention are also at risk of abuse and violence from prison officials and other detainees, isolation and solitary confinement and denial of access to health services, educational and other opportunities.

Criminalization of consensual same-sex relations, arbitrary arrest and detention

In at least 72 countries, discriminatory laws criminalize private, consensual same-sex relationships, exposing millions of individuals, including bisexual people, to the risk of arbitrary arrest, prosecution and

imprisonment – and even, in at least five countries, the death penalty, simply because of whom they love. Other vaguely worded discriminatory laws that also infringe on the rights of bisexual people and expose them to arrest include those arbitrarily restricting public discussion and events on sexual orientation or restricting funding to civil society.

Freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association

In addition to discriminatory laws, bisexual people and those who defend their rights continue to face other discriminatory restrictions on their rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. This includes the refusal to register civil society organizations, denying permissions for public events, police raids on organizations, harassment of human rights defenders and lack of protection for defenders who face attacks.

Poverty and Discrimination in the Workplace

A greater proportion of bisexual women in the United States were in receipt of social assistance for low-income individuals than heterosexual women in a study which also suggests that rates of poverty among bisexual men and women may be higher than their gay, lesbian and heterosexual peers. Workplace discrimination may be part of the problem; bisexual people face discrimination both when applying for work and in the workplace. According to one study, as many as 60 percent of bisexual people report hearing discriminatory comments at work.

Health

Bisexual people face discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation in health, including outright denial of services. They also face unwanted sexual comments or negative stereotypes specifically based on their bisexuality. Such discrimination makes it less likely that they can access the health services they need. As a result, bisexual people experience higher rates of depression, anxiety, self-harm and thoughts of suicide than their straight, gay and lesbian peers, which is further linked to increased risk of homelessness, abuse and violence.

Education

Bisexual students face homophobic bullying and violence in schools, which includes verbal and physical abuse, threats of sexual assault and cyberbullying. This has significant long-term negative consequences on their self-esteem, health and well-being. Such violence also impacts negatively on school results and causes students to miss classes, skip or drop out of school entirely, negatively impacting their education and employment possibilities. More than half of Scottish LGBT youth noted that biphobia and homophobia had negatively impacted their education and a third indicated that it had negatively impacted their employment opportunities in the long run.





ACTION POINTS

States

- 1** Investigate, prosecute and provide remedy for acts of violence, torture and ill-treatment against bisexual people and those who defend their rights.
- 2** Provide police, judicial officials and shelter providers with training to respond to the needs of bisexual survivors of sexual and other forms of violence.
- 3** Repeal laws that criminalize same sex conduct between consenting adults and other laws used to arrest, punish, detain, harass or discriminate people based on their sexual orientation.
- 4** Prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and adopt anti-discrimination policies that are inclusive of bisexual people, including in education, health, employment, housing and public services.
- 5** Sensitize healthcare providers and ensure that bisexual people and their families have access to safe, non-discriminatory health services that address their specific concerns.
- 6** Raise awareness about bisexuality through the education system and dispel negative stereotypes and prejudice through public awareness campaigns.
- 7** Protect and promote bisexual people's freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association.
- 8** Ensure that bisexual people and organizations are consulted and participate in the development of research, legislation and policies that impact their rights.
- 9** Support research that produces disaggregated data on the specific situation of bisexual people including in relation to poverty, employment, housing, health, education and access to public services.

Media

- 1** Feature bisexual voices and positive representations of bisexual people in newspapers, television, radio, and social media coverage.
- 2** Avoid discriminatory language and combat myths and harmful stereotypes about bisexual people.





***You, your friends and others can
make a difference***

- 1** Educate yourself on the experiences of bisexual people, their issues and concerns.
- 2** Make sure you and those around you have zero tolerance for biphobic language, myths and negative stereotypes.
- 3** Speak out and report violence and discrimination against bisexual people.
- 4** Respect the privacy of others and do not make assumptions about people's sexual orientation.

