



COUNCIL ON SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION



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CSWE and Lambda Legal Release First Sexual Orientation and Gender Expression Study in Social Work Education

Alexandria, VA—CSWE and Lambda Legal jointly released the results of a study on sexual orientation and gender expression in social work programs aimed to determine the level of preparation for students to serve lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) individuals and LGBT youth in out-of-home care. This nationwide survey revealed that program directors and faculty need more resources to increase their knowledge on sexual orientation and gender expression and to further infuse content on LGBT individuals and youth throughout curricula areas.

“The results of this study make it clear that we as a profession have integrated sexual orientation-related content into curricular offerings, but we can do more,” said CSWE Executive Director Julia M. Watkins. “There are many opportunities for developing models to better address gender identity/expression in specific course content and field placements.”

A representative, random sample was taken of approximately half of CSWE’s more than 600 social work program members, which represented subpopulations of different degree levels and types of schools (e.g., public, private).

There is a relationship between social work educators’ knowledge of LGBT issues and how prepared students are to work with LGBT populations. Nine percent reported unfamiliarity with sexual orientation issues, while 30% stated that they were not knowledgeable about gender identity/expression content. Of the programs surveyed, 61% indicated there were no faculty development opportunities in the last 2 years to learn about sexual orientation or gender identity/expression issues and nearly a third of program directors gave their faculty members a relatively low rating on knowledge about gender identity/expression.

Recommendations from the report include: special efforts to increase the infusion of material about LGBT issues throughout the curriculum, especially topics about LGBT youth and transgender individuals; ensure that programs have faculty members who are knowledgeable

about LGBT issues and provide faculty development opportunities on these issues; and reward and foster LGBT focused scholarship.

Lambda Legal's Youth-in-Out of Home Care project attorney, Flor Bermudez, commented on the study's findings about social work curricula regarding LGBT youth. "Preparing the next generation of child welfare advocates so they are better equipped to help LGBT youth in out-of-home care is a critical first step in addressing the problems we're hearing from youth. It is clear that faculty and students need more LGBT youth specific training. Working in partnership with CSWE we can offer resources and suggestions for curriculum development."

Though their numbers are hard to count because they have learned to hide who they are and fear for their safety, there are thousands of LGBT youth in child welfare, juvenile justice, and homeless programs throughout the country. Based on surveys from urban centers around the country between 20–40 percent of all homeless youth are LGBT. LGBT youth are a significant population in out-of-home systems of care and have specific needs that are not being met. Many states' child welfare systems routinely subject LGBT youth to discriminatory treatment, deny them appropriate services and fail to protect them from violence and harassment. All too many LGBT youth in care routinely experience verbal, physical, and sexual abuse.

CSWE's Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards, guidelines which baccalaureate and master's programs accredited by CSWE are required to follow to attain and maintain accreditation with CSWE, specifically requires programs to engage in diversity in both practice and program policy. The recently revised standards go further to require that social work graduates are competent to "engage diversity and difference in practice," including the areas of sexual orientation and gender identity and expression. Programs must also address how their faculty, staff, program policies, and facilities reflect a commitment to diversity.

Lambda Legal is a national organization committed to achieving full recognition of the civil rights of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgender people, and those with HIV through impact litigation, education, and public policy work.

The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) is a nonprofit national association representing more than 3,000 individual members, as well as graduate and undergraduate programs of professional social work education. Founded in 1952, this partnership of educational and professional institutions, social welfare agencies, and private citizens is recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation as the sole accrediting agency for social work education.

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To view the executive summary and full report, visit
www.cswe.org/CSWE/research/resources.