

HEALING THE SUFFERING

Our religious traditions call on us to help heal the world. Bisexual people have suffered because of the failure of faith communities, LGBT communities, and society at large to embrace them fully. The following statistics do not indicate that being bisexual causes suffering; rather they reflect the harmful effects of discrimination, marginalization, and invisibility on bisexual persons.

Bisexual persons are at greater risk for mental health issues than lesbians, gay men, or heterosexual persons.

- Bisexual people have higher rates of mental health problems than gay men, lesbians, or straight people, including post-traumatic stress disorder¹, depression, and mood or anxiety disorders.²
- Bisexual people are more likely to report feeling suicidal than gay men, lesbians, or straight people.³
- Almost half of bisexual people have had negative experiences with mental health providers. A 2004 study of bisexual persons who accessed mental health services asked, “*What do you think is the most important issue or problem you face in being both a mental health consumer and a bisexual?*” The top response, from 42% of those in the study, was that their mental health providers invalidated or pathologized their bisexual identities by assuming that clients’ bisexuality was connected to clinical issues when clients didn’t agree, or assuming that bisexual attractions and behavior would disappear when clients regained psychological health.⁴

Bisexual persons have greater physical and sexual health risks than lesbians, gay men, or heterosexual persons.

- Bisexuals report higher rates of hypertension, poor or fair physical health, smoking, and alcohol use than heterosexuals, lesbians or gay men.^{5, 6}
- Bisexual women in relationships with either heterosexual or lesbian partners are at greater risk of domestic violence than lesbian or heterosexual women.⁷
- Bisexual people are more likely to be victims of intimate partner violence than lesbians, gay men, or heterosexual people. Sixty-one percent of bisexual women and 37% of bisexual men report ever experiencing rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner (compared to 44% of lesbians, 35% of heterosexual women, 26% of gay men, and 29% of heterosexual men). Of the bisexual women who experienced intimate partner violence, approximately 90% reported that the violence was committed by an opposite sex partner.⁸ Of the bisexual men who experienced intimate partner violence, 78% reported it was committed by an opposite sex partner.⁹

Bisexual persons face more stressors in daily life than lesbians, gay men, or heterosexual persons.

- In a California survey, bisexual women were more than twice as likely as lesbians to live in poverty (17.7% compared with 7.8%), and bisexual men were more likely to live in poverty than gay men (9.7% compared with 6.2%).¹⁰
- In a Pew Research Center survey of LGBT people in the United States, only 28% of bisexual people said that most of the important people in their life knew of their sexual orientation, compared with 71% of lesbians and 77% of gay men.¹¹
- Only 22% of bisexual people in the Pew survey said that their sexual orientation was a positive factor in their lives, compared with 46% of gay men and 38% of lesbians.¹²
- A study that examined heterosexual adults' attitudes towards bisexual men and women found that "respondents' attitudes toward bisexual men and women were more negative than for all other groups except injecting drug users."¹³

Bisexual youth are at particular risk.

- According to a 2011 report from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, the prevalence of risky health behaviors such as attempted suicide, tobacco use, alcohol use, other drug use, and behaviors that contribute to unintentional injuries and violence is higher among students who identify as bisexual or who have sexual contact with more than one sex than among heterosexual or gay/lesbian students.¹⁴

Questions for Reflection

1. What responsibility does our faith community have for healing the suffering of bisexual persons? What principles of our faith uphold that responsibility?
2. Would a person who identifies as bisexual feel comfortable in our faith community? Why or why not?
3. Reflect on the statistics presented in "Healing the Suffering." In what ways can our faith community ameliorate such suffering? Why is this important even if you aren't aware of congregants who identify as bisexual?
4. What are some ways in which congregations and religious leaders can create safe spaces for bisexual persons to integrate their sexuality and their faith?