



# An Exploratory Study on Social Workers' Attitudes and Practices with Gay and Lesbian Clients

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# Introduction

- ◎ Homophobia and Heterosexism
- ◎ Lead to discrimination, harassment and violence
  - > Mental health issues, homelessness, abuse, school performance
- ◎ Negative attitudes and lack of resources
  - > Risky sexual behaviors and unsafe coping skills

# Methodology

- ◎ 140 Social Workers at Fresno County DSS
- ◎ Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men (ATLG)
  - > ATL
  - > ATG
- ◎ Gay Affirmative Practice (GAP)
  - > GAP1- Beliefs
  - > GAP2- Behaviors
- ◎ Gender, age, ethnicity, education, experience

# Literature Review

- ◎ Cognitive-behavioral theory
- ◎ NASW and CSWE
- ◎ Cultural Competence
- ◎ Studies on social workers' attitudes
- ◎ Studies on social workers' practice
- ◎ Correlates
- ◎ Purpose of the study

## Mean Scores of Attitudes toward Gays and Lesbians and GAP Beliefs and Behaviors

Scale	n	Mean	SD
ATL (10-50)	136	<b>19.83</b>	6.82
ATG (10-50)	140	<b>20.72</b>	7.88
GAP1 (15-75)	139	<b>62.68</b>	8.12
GAP2 (15-75)	139	<b>49.64</b>	15.69

- ATL/ATG- higher score= more negative attitude
- GAP1- higher score= level of GAP beliefs
- GAP2- higher score= level of engagement in GAP behaviors

- No statistically significant differences found
  - Gender, level of degree, year SW degree earned
- Findings approaching significance

Subscale	Finding	p-value
GAP2	SW I, II, III scored lower than SW Practitioners	.088
GAP2	SW I, II, III scored lower than SW Supervisors	.097
ATL	BSW scored higher than MSW	.059
ATG	55 and older scored higher than 34 and younger	.054

## Percentages of Responses to Selected Questions on ATG and GAP1 subscales

		Strongly disagree or disagree	Neither agree nor disagree
ATG	I would <i>not</i> be too upset if I learned that my son were a homosexual.	24.2	16.4
GAP1	Practitioners should help clients reduce shame about homosexual feelings.	1.4	21.4
	Practitioners should verbalize respect for the lifestyles of gay/lesbian clients.	0.7	29.3
	Practitioners should help gay/lesbian clients develop positive identities as gay/lesbian individuals.	0.0	30.0
	Practitioners should challenge misinformation about gay/lesbian clients.	0.0	26.4



## Percentages of Responses to Selected Questions on GAP2 scale

	Never or Rarely
I help gay/lesbian clients address problems created by societal prejudice.	54 (39.3)
I acknowledge to clients the impact of living in a homophobic society.	61 (43.6)
I help gay/lesbian clients overcome religious oppression they have experienced based on their sexual orientation	71 (50.7)
I provide interventions that facilitate the safety of gay/lesbian clients.	55 (39.6)
I verbalize that a gay/lesbian orientation is as healthy as a heterosexual orientation.	67 (47.9)
I help clients identify their internalized homophobia.	83 (59.3)



# Suggestions for Cultural Competency Curriculum

## ◎ Clarify Roles and Responsibilities

- Verbalize respect for diverse lifestyles
- Help clients develop a positive identity
- Reduce shame about having homosexual feelings

## ◎ Enhance/Introduce GAP skills

- Acknowledge the impact of living in a homophobic society
- Address the problems created by sexual prejudice (i.e. religious oppression, internalized homophobia)
- Affirm a homosexual orientation as a healthy expression equivalent to a heterosexual orientation

## ◎ Create safe and welcoming environments

# Policy Recommendations

- ◎ Assess the level of prejudice held by staff
- ◎ Assess the level of gay affirmative practice
- ◎ Develop a data collection system to identify gay and lesbian clients
  - > Without putting clients at risk
  - > Must create safe environment to facilitate disclosure
  - > Benefits- 1<sup>st</sup> step to corroborating service delivery, track accurate data regarding outcomes