HEALTHY AGING FOR SEXUAL MINORITY SENIORS IN CANADA

BILL RYAN, McGill University
OCTOBER 20, 2009
KEEP ON ROCKING: SEXUALITY AND AGING TORONTO
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Age</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Born 1930 (80 years old)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Decriminalization (39 years old)</td>
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<td>Depathologization (43 years old)</td>
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<td>Charter Protection (52 years old)</td>
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<td>Couple Recognition (65 years old)</td>
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<td>Marriage (75 years old)</td>
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<td>Recognition in Senior Environments</td>
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PHASE 1: PILOT STUDY

Objectives and Goals

- To gather information about the experiences and realities of gay and lesbian seniors and their families from across Canada in accessing a broad range of health and social services in the community

- To examine the role of health care and social service organizations in shaping access and service delivery

Shari Brotman, Bill Ryan, Robert Cormier 1999-2000

Activists on Gay and Lesbian Health Issues (9); Public Sector Service Delivery Organizations (8); Mainstream Seniors Groups, Including Caregivers 3); Policy Makers (5) 21 Self-Identified as Gay/Lesbian
PHASE 2
NATIONAL STUDY

Methodology: What We Asked

- Perspectives of allies and activists on the needs and issues facing gay and lesbian seniors and their families

- Perspectives of mainstream policy and practice organizations with respect to their knowledge about or current practice with gay and lesbian seniors

- Sharing of gay and lesbian elders’ and their families’ experience of care

Shari Brotman, Bill Ryan, Robert Cormier, Line Chamberland, Danielle Julien, Alan Peterkin, Iryna Dulka (Project Coordinator) 2002-2004

FINDINGS

Historical Experiences of Discrimination

- Intense Hostility
- Enforced medical treatments
- Lack of Communal Identity/Community
FINDINGS
Surviving/Coping with Discrimination

- Hiding was and continues to be a strategy of survival
- Health impacts of exposure to discrimination over time are varied and substantial
- Mistrust/Fear/Avoidance of the health care system
FINDINGS
Resilience of Older Gay Men and Lesbians

- Mastery of Stigma
- Gender role flexibility
- Creation of alternative family networks
- Working the system
- Self reliance and independent populations
FINDINGS
The Aging Network

- Unchallenged discriminatory attitudes and practices
- Profound Invisibility
- Discrimination/Discomfort by professionals and contemporaries
- Definitions of “family” based almost exclusively on biological kin
- Little recognition of specific needs and experiences
FINDINGS
The Gay and Lesbian Community

- Lack of support for elders
- No funding for seniors programs
- Ageism results in isolation and invisibility
The great majority of those individuals and organizations that work with GL elders named social isolation and loneliness as the major challenge in the lives of GL individuals as well as the major obstacle to overcome in attempting to reach out to this population. This loneliness appears to be related to several factors:

- They live alone
- They seek help when it is too late
- They are hesitant to go to seniors’ organizations
- They have been conditioned to anticipate homophobic reactions
PHASE 3: POLICY PAPER

- REQUESTED BY HEALTH CANADA IN EARLY 2008
- DELIVERED ON MARCH 31, 2008

Healthy Aging for Gay and Lesbian Seniors in Canada:
An Environmental Scan

Shari Brotman and Bill Ryan
McGill University, School of Social Work
Montréal QC  March 2008
How We Can Apply What We Have Learned

- Sensitive long-term housing
- Sensitive homecare services
- Increased visibility in social agencies and the health care system
How We Can Apply What We Have Learned

- Gay and lesbian specific curriculum in university programs
- Training programs for professionals already working in health care systems, social service settings and home care services
- Education of social groups and elders advocacy organizations