



News Release

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MOST GAYS AND LESBIANS SEE GREATER ACCEPTANCE, BUT SUBSTANTIAL NUMBERS REPORT DISCRIMINATION, VIOLENCE AND FEAR

Public Supports Federal "Hate Crimes" Legislation and Other Anti-Discrimination Measures, Holds More Mixed Views on Family Policy Issues Such As Gay Marriage and Adoption

Menlo Park, CA -- Most lesbians, gays and bisexuals believe there is more acceptance of gay people today than a few years ago, but similar numbers also report that they have experienced prejudice and discrimination based on their sexual orientation -- including verbal abuse or physical violence -- according to a new national survey of self-identified lesbians, gays and bisexuals released today by the Kaiser Family Foundation.

Although more than three quarters (76%) of lesbians, gays and bisexuals believe there is greater acceptance today, roughly equal numbers (74%) report that they have experienced prejudice and discrimination, and about one third (32%) report that they have been the target of physical violence because someone believed they were gay. In addition, three out of four (74%) report being the victims of verbal abuse. About four in ten (41%) believe there is more violence directed towards lesbians and gays today than a few years ago (19% say less), and similar numbers (39%) report that they are "very" or "somewhat" worried that they may be physically assaulted or beaten by someone who does not like gay people.

General Public Also Sees Prejudice, Supports Anti-Discrimination Policies and Domestic Partner Benefits

A companion survey conducted by the Foundation found similar views among the general public: more than three quarters (78%) believe that gay men and lesbians experience at least some prejudice and discrimination -- including more than half (57%) who say "a lot," and 39% think there is more violence toward gays and lesbians in this country today than a few years ago. Majorities of the public support policies to address such violence and discrimination, including federal legislation that would mandate increased penalties for those who commit so-called "hate crimes" based on prejudice toward gays and lesbians (73% support), and measures to protect against discrimination in employment (76%) and housing (74%). Equally large numbers support extending certain rights and benefits to lesbian and gay domestic partners, including: inheritance rights (73%); employer-sponsored health insurance (70%); and social security benefits (68%).

"Whatever one's views on the broader issues, it is alarming that one third of lesbians, gays and bisexuals report having been the target of violence because of their sexual orientation," said Drew Altman, Ph.D., president of the Kaiser Family Foundation.

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Public More Divided on Family Policy Issues

Over half (55%) of the general public opposes legally sanctioned gay and lesbian marriages; 39% support the policy, up from previous surveys conducted in 1998 (33%) and 1992 (27%). The public is less likely (42%) to oppose legally sanctioned gay and lesbian unions or partnerships, and more support (47%) than oppose such a policy. Roughly equal proportions of the public support (46%) and oppose (47%) adoption rights for gay and lesbian couples, and support for this policy has also increased in recent years (from 29% in 1994 and 36% in 1998). The public's mixed views on gay and lesbian parenting are further reflected in the fact that over half (56%) says that gay and lesbian couples can be just as good parents as heterosexual couples.

Perhaps portending changing views in the future, the majority of 18- to 29-year-olds support gay and lesbian unions or partnerships (68%), marriage (60%) and adoption (55%), whereas those age 65 and older support such policies by much smaller margins (27%, 25% and 25%, respectively).

Public is Increasingly Accepting in Many, Though Not All, Circumstances

Two thirds (64%) of the general public believe there is more acceptance of gays and lesbians today compared to a few years ago, and most believe that greater acceptance is either good for the country (29%) or that it doesn't matter one way or the other (44%). Large numbers say they would feel comfortable working with someone who is openly gay or lesbian (78%). The majority would also allow their children to attend high school (71%) or elementary school (61%) if the teacher were openly gay or lesbian and would vote for a gay or lesbian political candidate (58%). Americans are more divided as to whether they would (46%) or would not (49%) attend a church or synagogue where the minister or rabbi is openly gay or lesbian.

Debate Over Morality Continues, Views Vary Across Groups

Two thirds of the general public believe that homosexual behavior is a normal part of some people's sexuality (36% completely agree, 33% somewhat agree); more than a quarter disagree (20% completely, 8% somewhat). However, about half of the general public believes that homosexual behavior is morally wrong (38% strongly agree, 13% somewhat agree).

Three quarters (73%) of the general public now know someone who is gay or lesbian, up from 55% in 1998. Those who know someone who is gay (47%) are significantly less likely to believe that homosexuality is morally wrong compared to those who do not know someone who is gay (68%).

Attitudes towards homosexuality also vary by religious affiliation and gender: 60% of Evangelical Christians "completely agree" homosexuality is morally wrong, compared to 31% of non-Evangelical Christians and 27% of Catholics. Women are somewhat less likely than men to believe this (28% and 56%, respectively).

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Survey Methodology

The Kaiser Family Foundation *Inside-OUT: A Report on the Experiences of Lesbians, Gays and Bisexuals in America and the Public's Views on Issues and Policies Related to Sexual Orientation* was designed and analyzed by researchers at the Kaiser Family Foundation. Dr. Randall Sell of Columbia University served as an academic consultant on the design of the survey. Fieldwork was conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates from February 7 through September 4, 2000. The study had two components, the General Public (GP) Survey and the Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) Survey. The GP results of this project are based on a telephone survey among a randomly selected nationally representative sample of 2,283 adults 18 years or older living in continental United States. Interviews were completed in both English and Spanish, according to the preference of the respondent. The margin of sampling error for the GP survey is +/- 3.5 percentage points. For results based on subsets of respondents the margin of sampling error is higher. Note that in addition to sampling error there are other possible sources of measurement error.

Estimates of the number of men and women in the United States that identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual vary considerably, and drawing a scientific random sample of a group that is a relatively small percentage of the U.S. population without knowledge of its absolute size or geographic distribution poses numerous challenges. In an attempt to have a representative, random sample of opinions, we assembled a random sample of telephone households geographically limited to 15 major U.S. metropolitan areas. All sampled households were asked a series of questions inventorying household member characteristics, including whether there was any adult "who is gay, lesbian, bisexual." The LGB survey results are based on 405 telephone interviews among these randomly selected, self-identified gay, lesbian and bisexual adults 18 years or older. The margin of sampling error for the LGB survey is +/- 5.9 percentage points.

Inside-OUT: A Report on the Experiences of Lesbians, Gays and Bisexuals in America and the Public's Views on Issues and Policies Related to Sexual Orientation (Pub #3193) and the survey topline (Pub #3194) are available free online at www.kff.org or by calling the Foundation's Publication Request Line at 1-800-656-4533.

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