

# LGBT COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH

## RESEARCH REPORT SERIES

### 2. SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE

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# PROJECT OVERVIEW

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## BACKGROUND

Earlier studies have consistently documented sexual orientation disparities in mental health, with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals being at greater risk of poor mental health than cisgender heterosexual individuals [1-3]. The present study aimed to examine mental health of LGBT individuals in Hong Kong, and identify protective and risk factors that contribute to their mental health outcomes.

This report is the second in a series of reports on LGBT community mental health. It presents the research findings on the social acceptance, loneliness, and mental health of the LGBT respondents in Hong Kong.

## METHODS

Data collection of the study was conducted through an anonymous online questionnaire from February to April 2017. Targeted and snowball sampling was adopted for participant recruitment. Participant recruitment messages were disseminated through local LGBT social media, community organizations, advocacy groups, and social venues.

## PARTICIPANTS

A total of 1,050 LGBT individuals participated in the study. The inclusion criteria were individuals: (1) aged 18 or above, (2) who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or otherwise not heterosexual, and (3) currently living in Hong Kong.

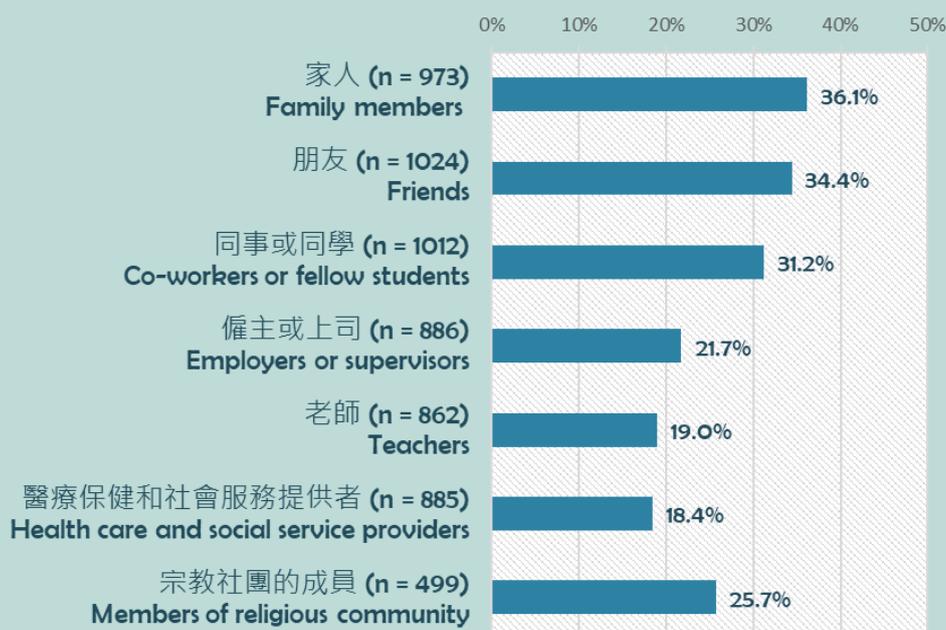
# RESEARCH FINDINGS

## SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE

Respondents were asked to indicate how often they have experienced sexual orientation-based rejection or unequal treatment from different sources in the past year [1]. More than one-third of the LGBT respondents indicated that they have been rejected by family members (36.1%), friends (34.4%), and/or unfairly treated by co-workers and/or fellow students (31.2%) because of the sexual orientation over the past year. Around one-fifth of the respondents revealed that they have been treated unfairly by their employers/supervisors (21.7%) and/or teachers (19.0%). A considerable proportion of the respondents also indicated that they have been treated unfairly by health care and social service providers (18.4%) and members of their religious community (25.7%). In general, 60.9% of the respondents have encountered rejection and/or unequal treatment due to their sexual orientation from any of the sources mentioned above.

在過去一年你曾否因性傾向受到拒絕或不公平的對待？

Have you been rejected or treated unfairly because of your sexual orientation over the past year ?



Note: The analysis only included the respondents who had such person or group of people in their life

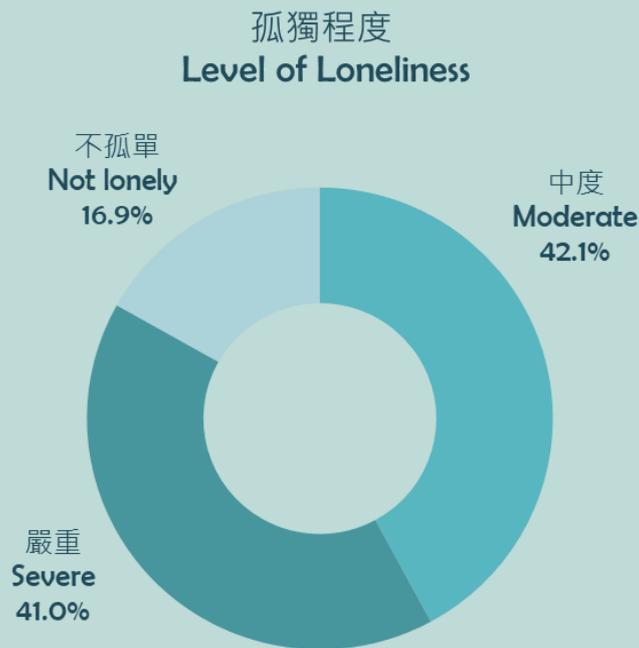
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# RESEARCH FINDINGS

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## LONELINESS

The level of loneliness was assessed by the short form of the De Jong Gierveld Loneliness Scale [2]. Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they felt lonely (e.g., experiencing a general sense of emptiness). Based on the criteria established by Gierveld and Tilburg [2], about 41.0% of the respondents were considered as having severe level of loneliness.



# RESEARCH FINDINGS

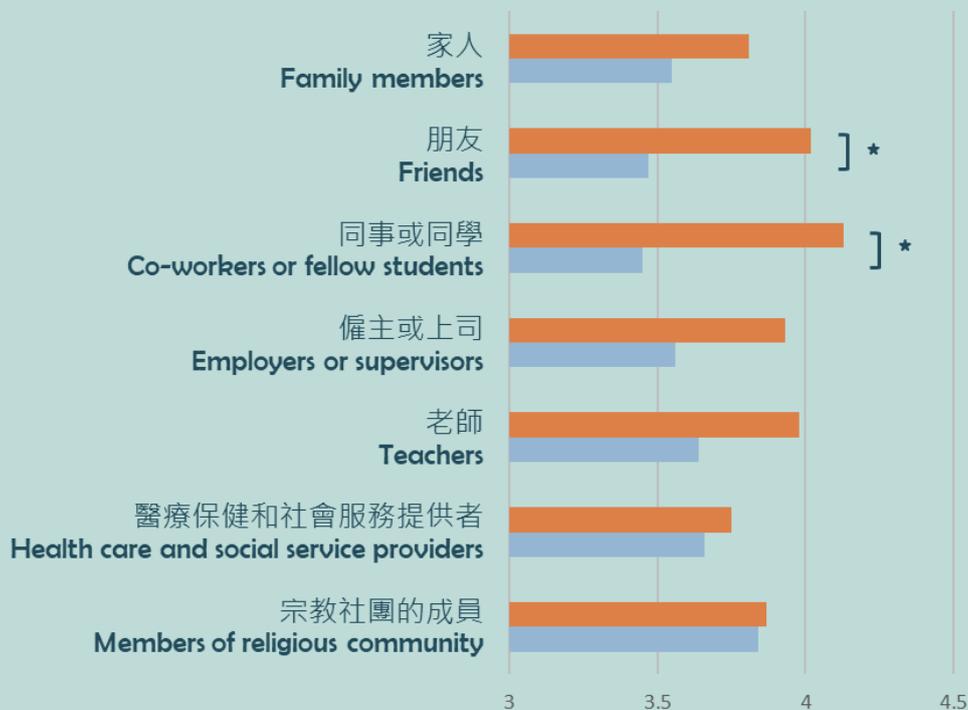
## EFFECTS OF SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE

### 1. Loneliness

Results showed that LGBT individuals who have experienced rejection or unfair treatment on the basis of sexual orientation from (1) friends and (2) co-workers or fellow students reported a significantly higher level of loneliness than those who have not experienced.

曾經及未曾因性傾向受到拒絕或  
不公平對待的 LGBT 人士的孤獨程度

Level of loneliness between LGBT individuals who have and have not been rejected or treated unfairly because of sexual orientation



★ 兩個組別之間有顯著差異 ( $p < .01$ )  
Significant difference between  
the two groups ( $p < .01$ )

曾經受到拒絕或不公平對待

Have been rejected or treated unfairly

未曾受到拒絕或不公平對待

Have not been rejected or treated unfairly

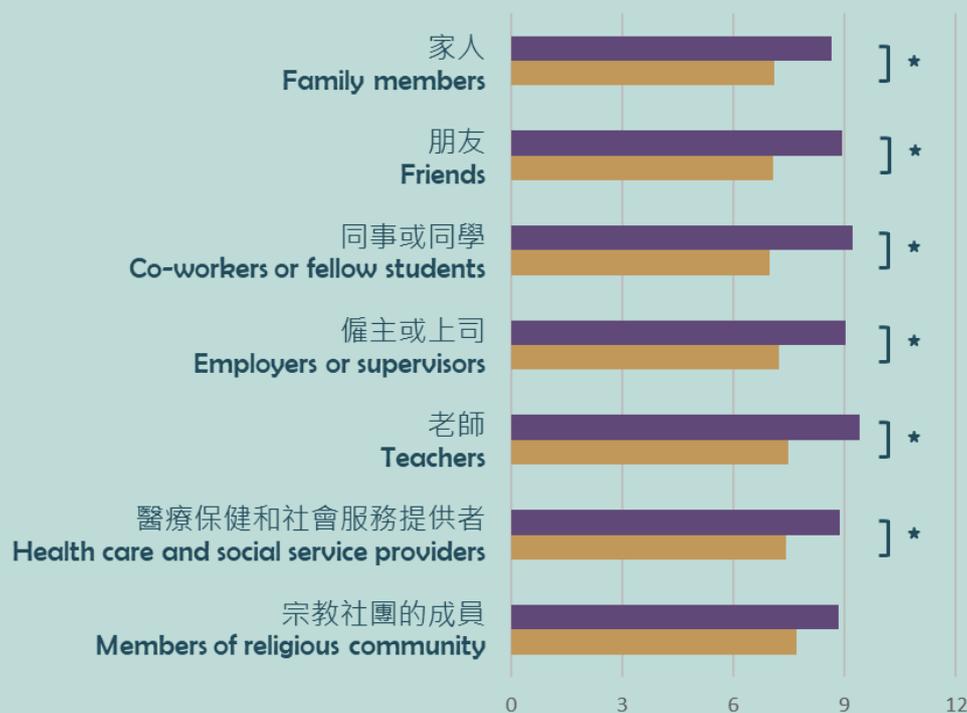
# RESEARCH FINDINGS

## 2. Depressive Symptoms

LGBT individuals who have been rejected or treated unfairly by (1) family members, (2) friends, (3) co-workers or fellow students, (4) employers or supervisors, (5) teachers, and (6) health care and social service providers were likely to have a significantly more severe level of depressive symptoms, as measured by the 9-item Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9) [3], than those who have not received such treatment.

曾經及未曾因性傾向受到拒絕或  
不公平對待的 LGBT 人士的抑鬱症狀程度

Level of depressive symptoms between LGBT individuals who have and have not been rejected or treated unfairly because of sexual orientation



\* 兩個組別之間有顯著差異 ( $p < .01$ )  
Significant difference between the two groups ( $p < .01$ )

■ 曾經受到拒絕或不公平對待  
Have been rejected or treated unfairly  
■ 未曾受到拒絕或不公平對待  
Have not been rejected or treated unfairly

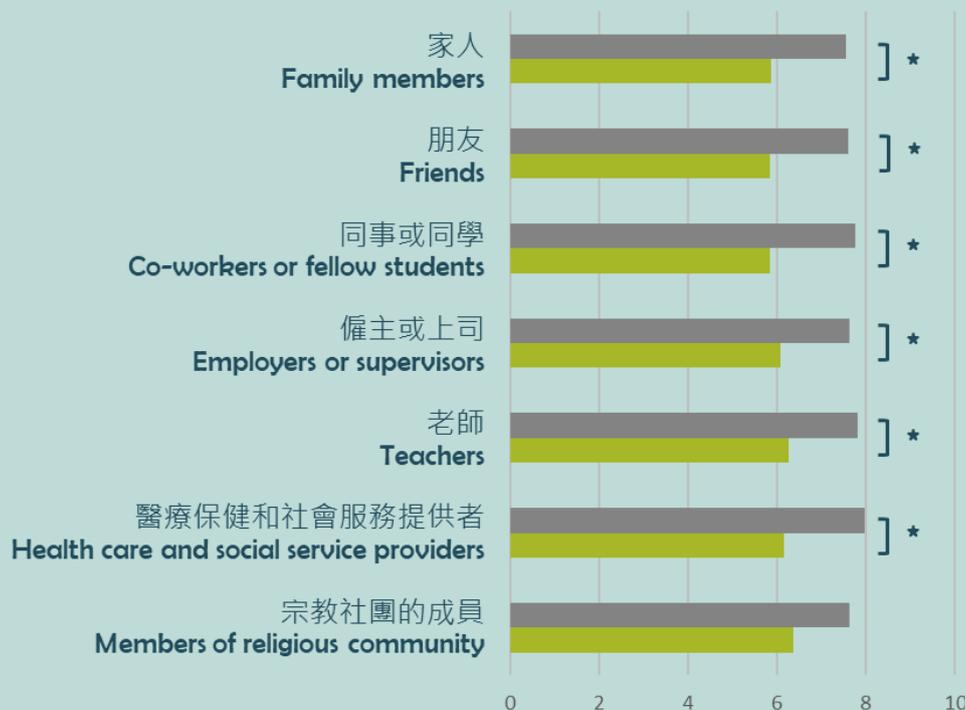
# RESEARCH FINDINGS

## 3. Anxiety Symptoms

Results indicated that LGBT individuals who have been rejected or treated unfairly by (1) family members, (2) friends, (3) co-workers or fellow students, (4) employers or supervisors, (5) teachers, and (6) health care and social service providers reported a significantly more severe level of anxiety symptoms, as measured by the 7-item measure on Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD-7) [4], than those who have not experienced.

曾經及未曾因性傾向受到拒絕或  
不公平對待的 LGBT 人士的焦慮症狀程度

Level of anxiety symptoms between LGBT individuals who have and have not been rejected or treated unfairly because of sexual orientation



\* 兩個組別之間有顯著差異 ( $p < .01$ )  
Significant difference between the two groups ( $p < .01$ )

■ 曾經受到拒絕或不公平對待

Have been rejected or treated unfairly

■ 未曾受到拒絕或不公平對待

Have not been rejected or treated unfairly

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# WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

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## KEY MESSAGES

- ◆ More than half of the LGBT respondents reported experiences of sexual orientation-based rejection and unequal treatment in the past year.
- ◆ Family was found to one of the most LGBT-unfriendly spheres, where 1 in 3 LGBT individuals faced rejection from their family members.
- ◆ About 1 in 3 have experienced rejection from their friends, and/or unequal treatment from co-workers or fellow students, which were positively associated with their loneliness.
- ◆ About 1 in 5 reported being treated unfairly by their employers/supervisors, teachers, and/or health care and social service providers.
- ◆ Experiences of rejection and unequal treatment emanated from multiple sources and were contributing factors of poor mental health among LGBT individuals.
- ◆ Social acceptance is one of the determinants of mental health among LGBT individuals. Mental health is determined by multiple and interacting psychological, social, and environmental factors. The research findings on other protective and risk factors will be discussed in other reports in this series.

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# WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

- ◆ LGBT youth organizations should be resourced to work with the parents of LGBT young people to increase acceptance and provide guidance on how best to support their children [5].
- ◆ Peer support groups can be set up in educational and social service settings to strengthen social connection and support networks for LGBT individuals.
- ◆ Sexual and gender diversity education [6] should be provided to students and teachers to reduce prejudice and bullying towards and foster greater acceptance of LGBT students in schools.
- ◆ Anti-discrimination legislation on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) should be introduced to ensure LGBT individuals have equal opportunity in education, employment, and receiving health care and social services [7].
- ◆ Trainings should be implemented in workplace [8] as well as health care and social service settings [9] to promote greater understanding of and sensitivity to LGBT employees, colleagues, and clients.
  - ◆ Provide standard induction training for new staff
  - ◆ Develop refresher workshops for existing staff at regular intervals
- ◆ Organizations should enact policies and procedures [10] to ensure fair and equal treatment for LGBT employees, colleagues, and clients
  - ◆ Establish guidelines to prohibit discrimination and unequal treatment
  - ◆ Set up a dispute resolution mechanism to handle SOGI-based harassment and discrimination when they occur
- ◆ An inclusive, safe, and supportive space should be created in all settings in which individuals of diverse sexualities and gender identities feels respected and comfortable with being who they are.

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