

September 21st 2009

In the context of the most recent claims of ingrained homophobic intolerance in sections of the Jewish Community in Australia I'm writing to share the findings of Australian research about homophobia and young people.

I have been involved in research with marginalised young people over the last 15 years and over this time have learned much about the lives of young people who are sexually attracted to those of the same sex. We know from many national studies with thousands of young people that around one in ten young Australians is same sex attracted. We know that the majority of them are subjected to discrimination, harassment and abuse because of their sexuality. We also know that there is a significant positive relationship between these young people having been abused and negative health outcomes such as drug abuse, self harm, depression and suicide.

Homophobic abuse is insidious for a number of reasons. First, many of the beliefs that fuel it have a long history in powerful institutions such as psychiatry, psychology, the law and religion. Though most of these institutions have now recanted those beliefs and homosexuality is no longer regarded as a mental illness or a crime, the beliefs remain pervasive in the community. Second, it is harder for young people to access support because they need to 'come out' to do so. Third, workers and teachers with young people are often afraid to address homophobia because they don't know if they will receive support from their employers or communities. Finally, homophobic abuse is particularly alienating because unlike other minorities, these young people are unlikely to gain support from their parents who are overwhelmingly likely to be heterosexual.

In Australia, same sex love is legal and relationships are protected in law. It is also regarded as a natural part of the diversity of human sexuality by the Australian and American psychiatric and psychological associations. Some churches now embrace same sex love as part of God's creation. We, as a society have a responsibility to our young people to protect them from all bigotry, particularly homophobic abuse and the terrible damage it wreaks.

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