

**WELCOMING SOCIAL WELLNESS: A QUALITATIVE  
EXPLORATION OF OLDER GENDER AND SEXUALLY DIVERSE  
WOMEN'S WELLBEING AND SENSE OF BELONGING**

Dune T<sup>1,2</sup>, Ferfolja T<sup>3</sup>, Hanckel B<sup>3</sup>, Ullman J<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>School of Science and Health, Western Sydney University

<sup>2</sup>School of Psychology, University of Wollongong

<sup>3</sup>School of Education, Western Sydney University

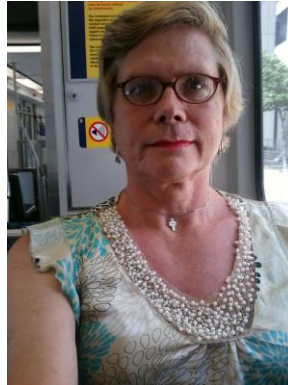
**FUNDED BY A LIVEABLE COMMUNITIES  
GRANT (2016/17)**



**Family &  
Community  
Services**

## AIM

This research sought to examine and understand GSD women's experiences and their health, aged-care and social support needs.



3

## SIGNIFICANCE

Ageing individuals are often perceived as desexualised—asexual—and, when an individual's LGBTQ identity is added to the formula, it is argued that the effects of homophobia are compounded (Hinrichs & Vacha-Hasse, 2010).

Both staff and residents of aged care can be potential sources of sexuality-related discrimination (Johnson, Jackson, Arnette, & Koffman, 2005).

Hinrichs and Vacha-Hasse (2010) found that aged care staff members tended to rate scenarios relating to same-sex couples more negatively than opposite-sex couples.

**Missing are tangible links between women's experiences with local health and social services and their overall wellbeing and social belonging, two known predictors of depression and suicidal ideation in older people.**

4

## METHOD

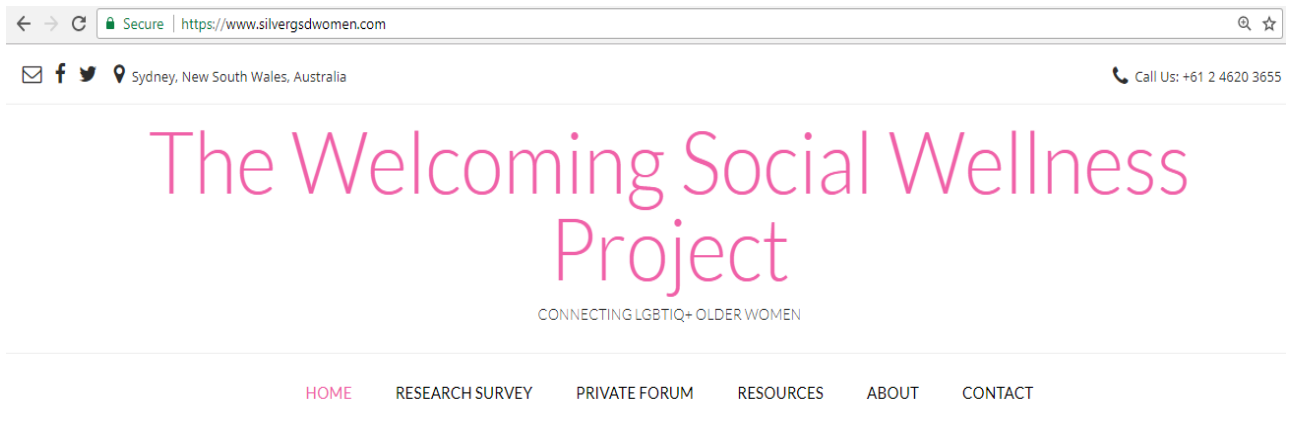
*Interviews - 1 hr phone interview*

*Online forum and Facebook comments – project website and Facebook page*

*Open-ended survey questions – within and online quantitative questionnaire*

The questions broadly explored the participants needs and experiences of engaging with health care, aged-care as well as support services.

5



The screenshot shows a web browser window with the address bar displaying "Secure | https://www.silvergswomen.com". Below the address bar, there are social media icons for email, Facebook, and Twitter, followed by the location "Sydney, New South Wales, Australia" and a phone icon with the number "Call Us: +61 2 4620 3655". The main content area features the title "The Welcoming Social Wellness Project" in a large, pink, serif font, with the subtitle "CONNECTING LGBTIQ+ OLDER WOMEN" in a smaller, black, sans-serif font below it. A navigation menu is located at the bottom of the page, with links for "HOME", "RESEARCH SURVEY", "PRIVATE FORUM", "RESOURCES", "ABOUT", and "CONTACT".



Welcome!

## RECRUITMENT



Gave out postcards at a stall at the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Fair Day -



Sent out postcards to healthcare services to display

Sent out postcards using the [AvantCard](#) displays across the state (12960 postcards were on display across 128 venues)

Advertised using LOTL (Lesbians on the Loose) newsletter's online platform - a link to the article advertising the study on LOTL can be found here: <http://www.lotl.com/News/Seeking-Supportive-Services-for-Older-LGBT-Women-1862/>

7

## SAMPLE: INTERVIEWS

	Name	Sexual Identity	Gender Identity	Location	Metro/ Suburban/Regional
1	Beth	Gay	Woman	Gynea (Sutherland Shire)	Suburban
2	Carol	Heterosexual	Transwoman	Central Coast	Regional
3	Joan	Lesbian	Woman	Sydney City	Metro
4	Linda	Lesbian	Woman	Central Coast?	Regional
5	Melanie	Lesbian	Woman	Sydney City	Metro
6	Olive	Lesbian	Woman	Summer Hill (Inner West)	Suburban
7	Penny	Lesbian	Woman	Lismore (Northern Rivers region)	Regional
8	Ursula	Lesbian	Woman	Marrickville (Inner West)	Suburban

In total 8 interviews were undertaken with S&GD women over 55 years of age.

This included participants based in suburban (n=3), regional (n=3) and metropolitan areas (n=2) of NSW.

8

# SAMPLE: ONLINE FORUM & FACEBOOK

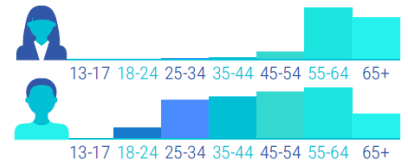
## Total page likes



## Audience by gender



## Audience by age

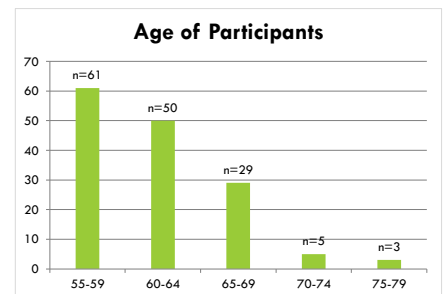


9

# SAMPLE: ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE N=148

NSW Location	Frequency	%
Central & Northern Sydney	35	23.6
Hunter & Central Coast	20	13.5
Illawarra & South East NSW	12	8.1
New England	5	3.4
North Coast & Mid North Coast	25	16.9
Riverina	4	2.7
Southern & South Western Sydney	15	10.1
Western NSW	5	3.4
Western Sydney & Blue Mountains	27	18.2

Identified Sexuality	Frequency	Percentage
Lesbian	119	80.4
Bisexual	13	8.8
Straight/Heterosexual	6	4.1
Queer	6	4.1
Questioning	1	0.7
Other (Please Specify)	3	2.0



10

## FINDINGS – MAIN THEMES

Heteronormative frameworks and practitioner comfort with GSD

Practitioners' and knowledge of gender and sexual diversity

Concerns about homophobia and aged-care services

Being and feeling connected

Social engagement



## HETERONORMATIVITY AND PRACTITIONER COMFORT WITH GSD

*Two years ago I was diagnosed with breast cancer and underwent surgery, chemo and radiotherapy. I live on the North Coast of NSW. I found that information supplied and the support network available were focused on straight women (i.e., information for partners talked [about] husbands/wives, information re sexuality talked straight sex only and so on) ... I am surprised by the general lack of acknowledgement in areas outside the major cities. – Shirley*

*I was surprised by the level of obvious discomfort some medical staff had with my sexuality and felt I had to out myself about 300 times during the process. – Dafne*

*You always end up feeling like you have to explain stuff that you don't want to have to explain. Then there's all the aging stuff which is another layer on top of that as well. - Ursula*

## PRACTITIONERS' KNOWLEDGE OF GSD

*Being a transsexual, or transgender individual, there's a profound void of knowledge out there to the extent that you may have to actually establish eye contact with the health profession[al] and say okay, this is how things have gone about, and this is how things happen, yadda, yadda, yadda. Are you on board or not? And essentially determine whether they're going to exhibit some sort of self - I wouldn't say self-deprecating, but some sort of discrimination...when they see a patient, particularly patients like me. Thinking oh, God, this is the last bloody thing I wanted to do today. We never studied bloody transgender when I was doing my RN. So, you get the vacant look of despair, and people think oh God, that's just what I needed today isn't it. You know, and you're the last one here too...You can read the expressions on their face, and you think okay, righto, it's relationship 101 is it? Okay, well let's get down and start dealing with this. A, are you interested. B, okay. - Carol*

13

## CONCERNS ABOUT HOMOPHOBIA AND AGED-CARE SERVICES

Home Based Care:

*I've know of a couple of incidents where women have felt like they have to de-dyke their house before someone comes to help them out with the cleaning or help with some basic health issue. - Joan*

Residential Aged Care Facilities:

*I have...turned my mind to this matter...as a future challenge over recent years... just in a purely speculative way. No plans are laid, but I suspect if I ever found myself needing one of these facilities it would likely go badly for me... to the extent that I currently favour removing myself from the stage [ending my own life] prior to the question even arising in earnest. Some people seem to be discomforted by talk like that, which I never understand. - Aufgegeben*

14

## BEING AND FEELING CONNECTED

*With [name of venue], I just like that there's a whole variety of people that come through, people who aren't very swishy, people who are older, people who are younger. So [name of venue] is really a complete, across the board, variety of lesbians or bisexuals or people who are just figuring themselves out. – Pru*

*I mean the Older Women's Network is a very good organisation I know. Yes ... my decision to move [closer to LGBTQ community] is based on my sexuality and also my experience of having to end what was a lovely relationship which became dreadful very quickly. So it is all related to being gay, yes. I wish I was straight. It would be much easier. - Beth*

15

## BEING AND FEELING CONNECTED

*My partner and I find it very difficult to meet other lesbians for social activities where we can exchange thoughts, ideas, experiences, have fun, dance, laugh, etc. We have several gay male friends and we love them however it would be nice to speak to other women of our age, etc. - Sally*

*The other thing is your lifestyle changes a bit because things take a bit longer to do and money's a bit shorter perhaps. You can't go out for meals so often or to the best restaurants that you might have gone to once or twice a year before. You kind of fall out of the social circles a bit. – Linda*

*Sometimes it was at the venues - I just have hearing problems now, so if something is too noisy at a venue, it's no use my going, because I can't follow a conversation. - Olive*

16



## SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

*The older you [are you] become invisible. Some of my friends have been telling me this - which is fascinating - but it's true. You can walk through - walk along somewhere and be invisible. – Melanie*

*I'm not very much a group person, so I go to these things very occasionally. So they do offer a really good social network and if you wanted any information - like, recently there's a woman at Hurstville who felt isolated, so without identifying her, she sent something into Contact saying she'd like to meet up with other lesbians in the area. So it does serve a really good, valuable social and networking role. - Olive*

*What I'm saying is I think it would do a lot of services good to have either a continuing reference group - ongoing is the term they use these days - or at least to run consultations from time to time. - Eddi*

17

# The Welcoming Social Wellness Project

CONNECTING LGBTIQ+ OLDER WOMEN

HOME RESEARCH SURVEY PRIVATE FORUM RESOURCES ABOUT CONTACT

## LGBTIQ-affirming Services

THE WELCOMING SOCIAL WELLNESS PROJECT &gt; LGBTIQ-AFFIRMING SERVICES

### Health

Organisation	Website
ACON	<a href="http://acon.org.au">http://acon.org.au</a>
BLISS - The Blacktown Lesbian Information and Social Support	<a href="http://womensandgirls.org.au">http://womensandgirls.org.au</a>
Sydney Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Psychology	<a href="http://www.sydneyglbtpsychology.com.au/">http://www.sydneyglbtpsychology.com.au/</a>
LGBT friendly Health Professionals	<a href="http://www.sydneyglbtpsychology.com.au/glb-friendly-health-professionals/">http://www.sydneyglbtpsychology.com.au/glb-friendly-health-professionals/</a>
Lesbian and bisexual friendly health professionals	<a href="http://www.doclist.com.au/lists/nsw">http://www.doclist.com.au/lists/nsw</a>
Q life	<a href="https://qlife.org.au/">https://qlife.org.au/</a>
Women's Health NSW	<a href="http://whnsw.asn.au/">http://whnsw.asn.au/</a>
Australian Lesbian Medical Association	<a href="http://www.almas.org.au/">http://www.almas.org.au/</a>
Blacktown Women's and Girl's Health Centre	<a href="http://womensandgirls.org.au/">http://womensandgirls.org.au/</a>

## CONCLUSION

There is a clear need for:

Culturally safe & LGBTIQ+ training

Visible LGBTIQ+ affirming services/practitioners

Visible LGBTIQ+ friendly facilities

Accessible Events & Social Opportunities for Older Women

Thank you – [t.dune@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:t.dune@westernsydney.edu.au) & [www.silvergsdwomen.com](http://www.silvergsdwomen.com)