

BEYOND DENTAL DAMS: A CRITICAL REVIEW OF RECENT RESEARCH ON LESBIAN, BISEXUAL AND QUEER WOMEN'S SEXUAL HEALTH

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

La Trobe University acknowledges our campuses are located on the lands of many Traditional Custodians in Victoria and New South Wales. We recognise their ongoing connection to the land and value their unique contribution to the University and wider Australian society.

La Trobe University is committed to providing opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, both as individuals and communities, through teaching, learning, research and partnerships across all our campuses.







BACKGROUND – SO MANY QUESTIONS

Do we need to invest in programs to support LBQ+ women's sexual health? If so, what outcomes are we looking to achieve?



What does it mean to be sexually healthy for LBQ+ women? Is it more than the absence of HIV/STI? Is it just about clinical services?

Do we have the evidence we need to gain funding for LBQ+ women's sexual health programs? If not, what evidence is missing?

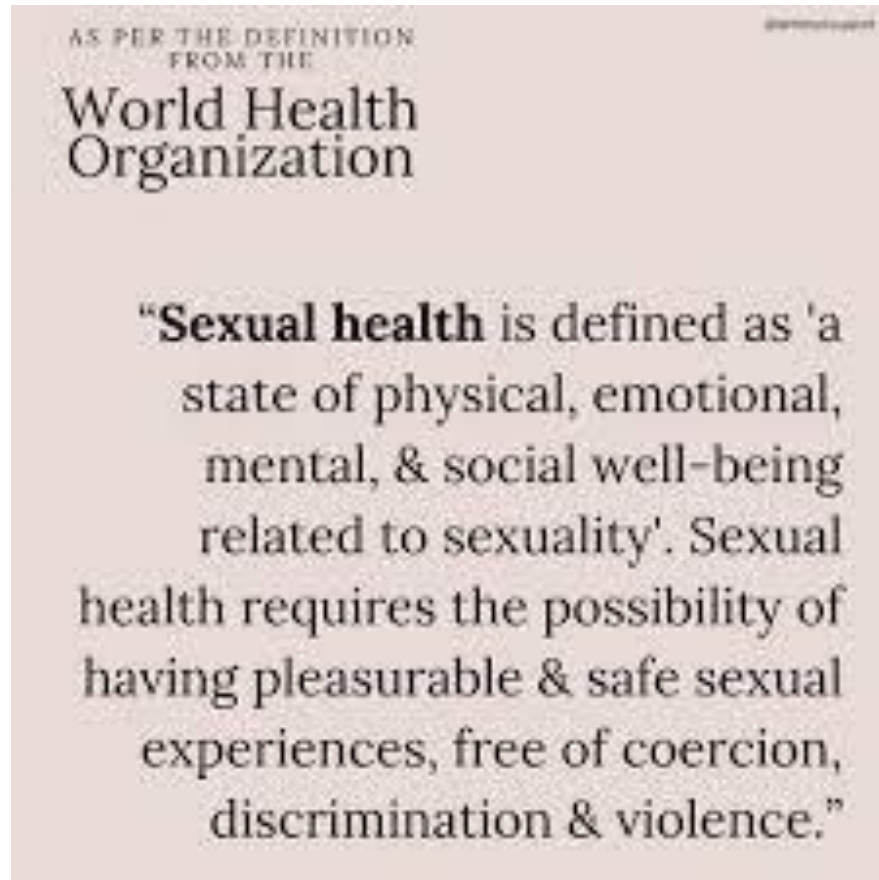
Is this a public health problem or should we be thinking more broadly? Perhaps it is about mental health, or relationships or general wellbeing?

What do sexual health projects and campaigns achieve on top of HIV/STI prevention? Can we achieve this for LBQ+ women?

Beyond dental dams: a critical review of recent research on lesbian, bisexual and queer women's sexual health

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LITERATURE REVIEW AIMS AND METHOD



Aims:

- To identify key concerns or issues for LBQ+ women's sexual health
- To identify blind spots, gaps or limitations in current research and evidence regarding LBQ+ women's sexual health
- To identify whether research on LBQ+ women's sexual health has adopted to WHO definition of sexual health

Review of **English-language publications 2012–2023** using academic databases and google scholar + 'snowball' methods using the reference lists of existing articles.

Search terms (examples): lesbians or "bi women" or "bisexual women" or "queer women" + sex +sexual health +sexual wellbeing +HPV + HIV + STI +dental dams

91 publications were identified.

Analysis involved narrative review and critical analysis.

FINDINGS

- Most available research utilises a public/population health or clinical framework
- Few studies adopt a comprehensive approach to sexual health or wellbeing
- The literature shows clear evidence of need to address barriers to sexual health care (STI screening, cervical screening, HPV vaccination, other sexual healthcare)
- Rates of BV may be higher among cis women who have sex with women so awareness of prevention should be part of sexual healthcare messaging

However:

- Lack of clarity in recommendations for action
- Lack of clarity in what sexual health means for LBQ+ women
- Limited focus on community or identity. The significance of queerness with respect to sexual experiences, decisions or health is often not considered.
- Diversity in LBQ+ women's sexual identities, experiences and partners leads to complex conclusions and recommendations .



RECOMMENDATIONS

- Future research should focus on **how LBQ+ women define and navigate safe and pleasurable sex** in different relational contexts across their life course.
- **A life course approach** may be useful to understand barriers to safe and pleasurable sex at different life stages and as women's bodies change.
- A comprehensive approach to LBQ+ women's sexual health may **draw our attention beyond STI/HIV prevention** to better understand how LBQ+ women define their sexual wellbeing and how this supports overall mental health, relationships and social connectedness.
- Sexual relationships are an important part of human life, research which **asks broad questions** about barriers and enablers of safe, respectful, pleasurable and 'healthy' sexual relationships among LBQ+ women is needed.



THANK YOU

