

Young LGBTQ people with disability are more likely to experience workplace sexual harassment and mental distress than those without disability

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Background:

Young LGBTQ people with disability are more vulnerable to workplace sexual harassment (WSH) because of multiple and intersecting individual and structural disadvantages.

Methods:

The #SpeakingOut@Work study comprised a cross-sectional survey, interviews and photo stories with LGBTQ youth aged 14-30. Chi-square tests and multiple logistic regressions examined the association of categorical closed-ended items, and multiple linear regressions examined factors associated with feelings of distress. Interview transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis.

Results:

Of 1001 survey participants, 785 completed questions related to disability. 43.4% (n=341) of survey participants were cisgender, and 56.5% (n=444) were trans and gender diverse (trans). 30 of 40 interviews and 6 of 8 photo stories were undertaken with participants with disability. 422 participants (53.9%) reported having any disability, of which mental health disabilities accounted for the greatest proportion (26.6%), followed by neurodevelopmental disabilities (24.1%). Among cisgender participants, 35% reported having a disability compared to 66.1% of trans participants.

For cis and trans participants, a higher proportion of previous WSH was reported amongst those with a disability (69% and 66.2%), compared to those without (51.2%, 52.7%). Disability was associated with a significant increase in the probability of reporting WSH (OR 1.85 (CI 1.33 – 2.58), $P < 0.001$).

Previous WSH was associated with an increased impact on a participant's employment, financial situation, relationships, self-esteem, and health if they had a disability. Multiple regression analysis of the impact of disability, WSH, gender and sexuality showed that only disability was associated with increased distress measured by Kessler 5 (2.2 (CI 1.02-3.38), $p < 0.001$). Some interview participants with autism and/or mental health conditions reported difficulty identifying sexual harassment behaviours.

Conclusion: Young LGBTQ people with disability are more likely to experience WSH and mental distress than those without disability. This has implications for their health and wellbeing and must be addressed in policy and interventions.

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