



BISEXUALITY

What does bisexual mean?

Bisexual people, often referred to as “bi”, are emotionally, romantically and/or sexually attracted to people of more than one gender. Being bisexual does not necessarily mean a person is equally attracted to all genders - commonly, people who have a distinct but not exclusive preference for one gender over another can also identify as bisexual.

For some bisexual people, the degree and ways in which they are attracted to people of different genders may change during their lifetime. Some people who are attracted to more than one gender use other terms such as pansexual, polysexual, fluid or queer, or prefer not to label themselves at all. People of any gender may identify as bisexual.

How do people know they are bisexual?

Some people have always known, while others may find their scope of attraction changes during their life, and/or realize they are bi later in life. Everyone’s life experience of being bisexual is unique and valid.

Can you be bisexual if you haven’t dated people of more than one gender?

A person can be bisexual even if they have only dated people of one gender or have not dated anyone at all. People can also be attracted to and/or have sex with people of more than one gender without identifying as bisexual. Every person has the right to decide for themselves whom they find attractive and how they identify.

How common is bisexuality?

While numbers vary from study to study, surveys from the United States suggest that between 2 and 4 per cent of respondents within the general population identify as bisexual. A 2021 survey suggested that 6 per cent of women and 2 per cent of men identify as bisexual. The same survey found that 57 per cent of lesbian, gay, bi, and trans (LGBT) adult Americans indicated they were bisexual, accounting for 4 per cent of all US adults. A 2015 study from the United Kingdom found that almost half of young adults surveyed indicated that their sexuality was not exclusively heterosexual.

What is biphobia?

Biphobia is any form of prejudice or hostile attitude toward bisexual people. It can take the form of harmful stereotypes about bisexual people, including myths that they are looking for attention, just experimenting, immoral, greedy, unfaithful or unstable. These harmful myths contribute to the heightened risk of violence experienced by bisexual people, including in intimate partner relationships. Biphobia can also take the form of denial that bisexuality is a real sexual orientation (bisexual erasure). It can be expressed consciously or unconsciously like any form of prejudice. Biphobia can be perpetuated by people of any sexual orientation, including gay and lesbian people.

Bisexual people may also experience homophobia or homophobic violence.





CONSEQUENCES OF BIPHOBIA

Violence

Bisexual people face an increased risk of violence as a result of their sexuality. A literature review published by the World Health Organization indicated that around a quarter of bisexual people reported having experienced physical violence.

*Sexual and family violence are major concerns for bisexual women in **Japan, Malaysia, Pakistan, and the Philippines***

Data from a 2010 survey in the United States revealed that bisexual men faced a higher risk of sexual violence and almost half of those surveyed experienced some form of sexual violence in their lifetime, double the rate of heterosexual men. Moreover, bi men were more likely to experience intimate partner violence than their heterosexual and gay peers.

receiving social assistance for low-income people compared to heterosexual women. Another study from the United States found that bisexual youth were overrepresented among young people experiencing homelessness, with 20 per cent of all homeless youth identifying as bisexual.

***United States:** 20 per cent of youth experiencing homelessness identify as bisexual*

***Globally:** more than a quarter of bisexual people surveyed report experiencing physical violence*

Bisexual women are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence, including rape. A study from the United States showed that almost half of bisexual women had experienced rape, which was three times higher than the rate for heterosexual and lesbian women. The same study showed that two in three bi women had experienced other forms of sexual violence. They were also twice as likely as heterosexual women to experience rape, physical violence and/or stalking by an intimate partner. Reports from Japan, Malaysia, Pakistan, and the Philippines also indicated that sexual and family violence are major concerns for bisexual women.

Due to biphobia, particularly bierasure, researchers often face difficulties when documenting violence specifically targeting bisexual people, as data often conflates bi people with either heterosexual or gay/lesbian people.

Workplace discrimination may be part of the problem as bisexual people face discrimination both when applying for work and in the workplace. Research from the European Union and the United States found that up to 24 per cent of bisexual people reported experiencing discrimination at work. Research from the Philippines found that bisexual women were the least likely to be employed, at only 57 per cent, compared to their lesbian and heterosexual peers.

***Philippines:** almost half of bisexual women surveyed were unable to find employment*

Poverty and workplace discrimination

Research from the United States indicated that rates of poverty among bisexual people may be higher than their gay, lesbian, and heterosexual peers. The same study also found that a greater proportion of bisexual women were





Poor health outcomes

Bisexual people face discrimination based on their sexual orientation in healthcare, including sexual comments, negative stereotypes or even outright denial of services. Such discrimination makes it less likely that they can access the health services they need. Bisexual people also experience higher rates of depression, anxiety, self-harm and thoughts of suicide than their straight, gay and lesbian peers, which is linked to increased risk of homelessness, abuse and violence.

Thailand: over 68 per cent of bisexual men surveyed have contemplated suicide.

More than a quarter of bi people surveyed in Australia had attempted suicide at some point in their lives. In Thailand, a third of bisexual men reported having encountered discrimination in healthcare settings and over two thirds reported having contemplated suicide. Research from Bolivia found that 80 per cent of bisexual people surveyed were not fully aware of their sexual and reproductive health rights. A study from the United States found that bi people were at increased risk for mental health and substance use problems. 37 per cent of bisexual women and 29 per cent of bisexual men surveyed in the European Union reported having a long-standing illness or health problems which have lasted, or are expected to last, for 6 months or more.

Bolivia: 80 per cent of bisexual people surveyed were not fully aware of their sexual and reproductive health rights

Facing multiple forms of discrimination

Bisexual people may face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination on the basis of their age, migration status, disability, HIV status, sex, gender, gender identity, religion, ethnicity or other factors. For example, a young, black and bisexual woman may experience discrimination because of her age, ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender.





TAKE ACTION!

- 1 Educate yourself on the experiences of bisexual people, their specific issues, and concerns.
- 2 Make sure you and those around you have zero tolerance for biphobic language, myths and negative stereotypes.
- 3 Speak out and report violence and discrimination against bisexual people.
- 4 Respect the privacy of others and do not make assumptions about their sexual orientation.
- 5 Share our online and social media content to spread the word among your friends and social networks.
- 6 Celebrate and affirm bi people if and when they choose to come out, for instance through marking Bisexuality Day on 23 September and supporting your local bi organizations.

GOVERNMENTS SHOULD:

- 1 Investigate, prosecute and provide remedy for acts of violence, torture and ill-treatment against bisexual people and those who defend their rights.
- 2 Provide police, judicial officials and shelter providers with training to respond to the needs of bisexual survivors of sexual, domestic and other forms of violence.
- 3 Repeal laws that criminalize same-sex conduct between consenting adults and other laws used to arrest, punish, detain, harass or discriminate against people based on their sexual orientation.
- 4 Prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and adopt anti-discrimination policies that are inclusive of bisexual people, including in education, health, employment, housing and public services.
- 5 Sensitize healthcare providers and ensure that bisexual people and their families have access to safe, non-discriminatory health services that address their specific concerns.
- 6 Raise awareness about bisexuality through the education system and dispel negative stereotypes and prejudice through public awareness campaigns.
- 7 Protect and promote bisexual people's freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association.
- 8 Ensure that bisexual people and organizations are meaningfully consulted and actively participate in the development of research, legislation and policies that impact their rights.
- 9 Support research that produces disaggregated data on the specific situation of bisexual people including in relation to poverty, employment, housing, health, education and access to public services.

MEDIA SHOULD:

- 1 Feature bisexual voices and positive representations of bisexual people in newspapers, television, radio, and social media coverage.
- 2 Avoid discriminatory language and combat myths and harmful stereotypes about bisexual people.

