Life satisfaction of homosexual and bisexual men is highest in Denmark, Iceland, and Luxembourg

Online survey with over 85,000 participants examines the connection between victimization experiences and life satisfaction in 44 European countries

Homosexual and bisexual men’s satisfaction with life depends significantly on social climate and the personal self-acceptance of the individuals. In an online survey, researchers at Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz (JGU) and Erasmus University Rotterdam analyzed the responses of 85,301 men in 44 European countries to examine the connections between victimization experiences, low self-acceptance, social tolerance, and life satisfaction. They found that gay and bisexual men in Denmark are most satisfied with their lives, immediately followed by Iceland and Luxembourg in joint second place. Among the 44 countries studies, the Czech Republic, the only Eastern European country among the top ten, was in 7th place. Germany landed in 9th place.

On a scale from 0 to 6, the life satisfaction in the top ten countries was ranked at 4.0 to 4.3, with Serbia and Montenegro in last place with 2.45. “Our data also includes other variables involving social tolerance. As expected, there is a more open climate in the Scandinavian countries, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and Switzerland,” said Richard Lemke of the Department of Communication at Mainz University.

Victimization experiences, such as insults, threats, or physical attacks, naturally have a significant influence on the level of life satisfaction. “Homophobic insults, whether in the form of remarks in passing or explicit abuse, are still very widespread even today,” added Lemke. Thus 25 percent of those surveyed in Russia and even 17 percent in Germany said that they had been the subject of verbal insults in 2014, the year before the survey. Even worse: 15 percent of the homosexuals and bisexuals in Kosovo taking part in the survey had experienced serious physical attacks in 2014, which is by far the most negative result.

Victimization experience in tolerant societies even more serious

Communication researcher Richard Lemke and his co-author, psychologist Dr. Paraskevas Petrou of Erasmus University Rotterdam, considered two factors to be particularly relevant for their study. “We have known for a long time that there is a close connection between victimization experiences and life satisfaction. But this is determined to a large extent by whether the person integrates the negative view of the outside world in his or her own self-image,” Lemke pointed out. Here we speak of internalized homonegativity. The new study looks at this effect for the first time on the basis of a wider body of data, and it would seem that those participants with a high level of internalized homonegativity also suffered more severely when they were exposed to verbal or physical victimization. However, those satisfied with their sexual orientation and who accept their situation are more psychologically robust when dealing with hostility, developing a kind of Teflon character to which abuse fails to stick.
The second and rather surprising finding is related to the national levels of tolerance. In essentially tolerant countries, the influence of victimization experiences on life satisfaction is greater than that in intolerant environments. "A positive social climate in no way immunizes individuals against the negative effects of victimization experiences. In fact, the opposite is true." According to Lemke, verbal or physical attacks are rather unexpected in tolerant countries and thus have a greater effect on the affected individual. In contrast, attacks in a homophobic environment are seen as a reflection of society and less as personal attacks.

The results are taken from the Gay Happiness Monitor global survey, which was undertaken between December 2014 and February 2015 with the cooperation of a social online network for gay and bisexual men. The survey has put together one of the largest collations of data on the reality of life of these groups. In the case of the discipline of Communication Studies, it is of particular interest to discover what effects public opinion has on the life satisfaction of gays and bisexuals and if there are intercultural differences in this respect.

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http://www.uni-mainz.de/bilder_presse/02_publizistik_viktimisierung.jpg
Life satisfaction of homosexual and bisexual men in Europe
Ill./©: Richard Lemke

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