Umbrella Summary

Workplace Supports for LGBT Employees

A Summary of Workforce Research Evidence Relevant to the Child Welfare Field

What are workplace supports for LGBT employees?

Workplace supports for LGBT employees are organizational policies and practices that are thought to improve the work experiences of LGBT employees and foster diversity within an organization. Although there isn't one set of specific workplace supports for LGBT employees, one way of summarizing the contextual supports in the workplace is to categorize them as (a) formal LGBT-supportive policies and practices, (b) LGBT-supportive climates, and (c) supportive workplace relationships (Webster, Adams, Maranto, Sawyer, & Thoroughgood, 2017). Formal policies and practices that are supportive of LGBT employees include things like same-sex benefits coverage, LGBT resource groups, active recruitment of LGBT employees, and organizational commitment to the LGBT community (e.g., Button, 2001; Ragins & Cornwell, 2001). In general, climate refers to workers' perceptions and interpretations about their work environment; an LGBT-supportive workplace climate indicates that employees perceive their work environment as accepting and affirming of LGBT employees (Liddle, Luzzo, Hauenstein, & Schuck, 2004). Supportive workplace relationships are thought to impact the experiences of LGBT workers by creating interpersonal resources that provide acceptance and support of LGBT workers (Webster et al., 2017). These relationships can be with a variety of coworkers, including subordinates, peers, supervisors, or top management (Webster et al., 2017).

The existence of formal policies is measured through single or multiple items, completed by individual employees or organization representatives. Example items include, "Does your organization include sexual orientation in the definition of diversity?" and "Does your organizational welcome same-sex partners at company social events?" The most common way to measure LGBT climate is through the *LGBT Climate Inventory* (Liddle et al., 2004). Employees are asked to indicate how well each statement describes their workplace. Example items include, "LGBT people consider it a comfortable place to work" and "Coworkers make comments that seem to indicate a lack of awareness of LGBT issues." Finally, LGBT-supportive relationships are assessed through a variety of measures that tap supportive relationships at various levels (Webster et al., 2017). Thus far, these measures are about support in general, rather than LGBT-specific support, and include items such as, "My coworkers are hostile towards me" (Griffith & Hebl, 2002) and "My supervisor takes pride in my accomplishments at work" (Rabelo & Cortina, 2014).

Why are workplace supports for LGBT employees important?

The most recent national data show that 4.5% of adults in the US identify as LGBT, 91% of whom are employed in the workforce (LGBT Demographic Data Interactive, 2019; Newport, 2018). Given recent population estimates, that is nearly 10.5 million people. Even that number is likely an underestimate, however, given the general stigma associated with identifying as LGBT and the risk of facing unfair treatment and discrimination at the workplace. Until the very recent decision by the Supreme Court to protect LGBT employees from discrimination based on sex, 30 states had no legislation protecting LGBT employees from discrimination. With the absence of legislation to protect LGBT workers from discrimination, workplace supports may offer other forms of protection.

LGBT workplace supports are important because they are associated with LGBT employees' (a) work attitudes (e.g., job satisfaction organizational commitment), (b) psychological strain (e.g., anxiety, depression, and burnout), (c) perceived discrimination, and (d) disclosure of their LGBT identity at work (Webster et al., 2017). The research does not allow for conclusions of causal connections, but any factors that have the potential to improve work attitudes, reduce psychological strain, and reduce perceived discrimination among LGBT employees are important to further examine. Though LGBT identity disclosure is not necessarily a goal for employers to pursue, it may be a behavioral indicator of psychological safety and comfort, which may be valuable in its own right.

- Formal policies and practices are moderately associated with lower perceived discrimination and a higher likelihood of disclosure of LGBT identity. They are only modestly connected with job satisfaction and organizational commitment and very minimally associated with psychological strain.
- An LGBT-supportive climate is strongly associated with lower perceived discrimination, a higher likelihood of disclosure, and higher job satisfaction and organizational commitment. It is moderately associated with lower strain.
- Supportive workplace relationships are strongly associated with higher job satisfaction and organizational commitment and moderately associated with lower psychological strain. Note that these findings are already known to be generally true, independent of LGBT factors, but these findings indicate that they are also true of people who identify as LGBT. In terms of more LGBT-specific factors, supportive relationships are moderately associated with higher likelihood of disclosure and lower perceived discrimination.

Having all three types of supports is better than fewer, but the strongest relationships are between (a) an LGBT-supportive climate and both disclosure and perceived discrimination and (b) workplace relationships and both work attitudes and psychological strain. Note that the more LGBT-specific supports (policies and climate) are most strongly connected to LGBT-specific outcomes (disclosure and perceived discrimination), whereas the more generic support type (workplace relationships) is most strongly related to more generic outcomes (e.g., job satisfaction, burnout). More research is needed to explore other types of potential outcomes and to examine the effect of interventions that improve LGBT workplace supports.

QIC-WD Takeaways

▶ Workplace supports for LGBT employees include (a) formal LGBT-supportive policies and practices, (b) an LGBT-supportive climate, and (c) supportive workplace relationships.

▶ Formal policies and practices are (a) moderately associated with lower perceived discrimination and a higher likelihood of disclosure of LGBT identity, (b) modestly connected with job satisfaction and organizational commitment and (c) very minimally associated with psychological strain.

▶ An LGBT-supportive climate is strongly associated with lower perceived discrimination, a higher likelihood of disclosure, and higher job satisfaction and organizational commitment. It is moderately associated with lower psychological strain.

▶ Supportive workplace relationships are (a) strongly associated with higher job satisfaction and organizational commitment (b) and moderately associated with lower psychological strain, higher likelihood of disclosure, and lower perceived discrimination.

▶ There are no meta-analyses assessing the connection between LGBT workplace supports and turnover.

▶ Research is needed to test the effects of interventions to improve LGBT workplace supports.

▶ The most common way to measure LGBT climate is the *LGBT Climate Inventory*.

References

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