The impact of marriage equality and marriage denial on the health of LGBTIQ people:

A statement from Dr Di Stow
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Counselling and psychotherapy are aimed at supporting the mental health and wellbeing of all members of the community, including members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer/questioning (LGBTIQ) community.

PACFA is committed to the principles in PACFA’s Code of Ethics. The Code states that counsellors and psychotherapists value and respect the diversity of clients, which reflects the diversity of the Australian community. We do not discriminate against clients on the grounds of their lifestyle, gender, age, ability, culture, religion or sexual identity. We respect the human rights of clients and follow accepted human rights standards in the services we provide and in the way we communicate. We respond to and treat clients as fully and equally human for who they are, accepting without judgement all forms of human diversity.

Relationships are of central importance for the wellbeing of children, adults, couples, families and communities. It is important to recognise the right of every person to form a supportive relationship with the partner of their choice, regardless of sexual or gender identity.

In the Australian society, members of the LGBTIQ community are often subject to stigmatisation and discrimination based on their gender or sexual identity. This should not be the case under Australian law. By being denied the right to marry, LGBTIQ people are denied access to the same rights, privileges, responsibilities and institutions as the rest of the Australian community.

Research evidence shows that same-sex attracted people experience high levels of discrimination (Hillier et al, 2005). In particular, the perceived devaluing of LGBTIQ peoples’ relationships has negative impacts on their psychological well-being (Dane et al, 2010).

There is significant evidence of poorer health and mental health outcomes for LGBTIQ people (Kolstee & Hopwood 2016) compared with the broader population. LGBTIQ people have the highest rate of suicide and are more likely to engage in illicit drug use and alcohol abuse (Beyond Blue, 2012; Robinson et al, 2014; McNeil, Bailey et al, 2012).

A review of evidence by Kolstee & Hopwood (2016) found a range of negative health impacts for LGBTIQ people who are denied marriage equality.

By contrast, there are known health benefits to marriage, including improved mental health (Wood, Goesling & Avellar 2007). Research in the USA found that measures which reduce discrimination, including marriage equality, improve overall health outcomes for LGBTIQ people, while on the contrary, LGBTIQ people have worse health outcomes, with higher rates of suicide, homicide/violence and cardiovascular disease in States that do not recognise marriage equality (Hatzenbuehler et al, 2012).

PACFA acknowledges there are diverse views on the issue of marriage equality and the impact of marriage denial, and as PACFA President I make this personal statement in support of the LGBTIQ community's mental health and wellbeing.

- Government policies and therapeutic services should be inclusive of all members of the Australian community and respect their relationships. This is consistent with the diversity in the Australian community.
• All people should have the same rights under the law, including the right to marry. This means removing all legislative discrimination on the basis of a person’s gender or sexual identity.

• There are health and mental health benefits of marriage for all members of the Australian community. This includes members of the LGBTIQ community.

• There is a need to promote and support the mental health and wellbeing of LGBTIQ people.

• Marriage equality in Australia could be an effective public health strategy to improve the health of LGBTIQ people and to reduce the stigma and discrimination they experience. Marriage equality should therefore be supported, as denying this right would see the continuation of negative impacts on the wellbeing and mental health of the LGBTIQ community.

References


