

Experiences of Mothers of LGBTQ Children in Serbia: What Comes After Coming Out?

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Introduction: where do we come from?

- ▶ Legislative in Serbia:
 - same-sex partnership is not recognized
 - no legal provisions or procedures for recognizing gender indetity
- ▶ Hate crime in Serbia based on SO or GI (2017)
- ▶ Anti-Discrimination Law (2009)

Introduction: where do we come from?

- ▶ More than 70% of LGBTQ people in Serbia are exposed to violence or harassment (UNDP, 2017)
- ▶ Only 2 court sentences for hate crime against LGBTQ people
- ▶ Social distance and negative attitudes are on a high level in general population (UNDP, 2017)

Theoretical introduction

- ▶ Coming out - declaration of their sexual orientation or gender identity to their parents (Manning, 2014)
- ▶ Crucial developmental step (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005; Hammack et al., 2009)
- ▶ An important factor to mental health and well-being of LGBTQ people Ryan et al., 2015; Freitas et al., 2016)
- ▶ Family support as a most important protective factor for suicide (Srdanović, 2012)
- ▶ Parents go through different stages after coming out in order to accept child's identity (DeVine, 1984; Goodrich & Gilbride, 2010)

Present research

- ▶ Aim: to examine the experiences of mothers of LGBTQ children in Vojvodina, a norther region of Serbia
- ▶ Research question: What is the experience of coming out for mothers of LGBTQ children in Serbia?
- ▶ Interviews; 45-60 minutes; debriefing at the end; audio recorded and transcribed;
- ▶ Method: IPA (Smith, 2015) - double heremenutics; circulatiry through inteviews and emerging topics - first notes; codes, themes and subordinate themes

Participants

► 8 mothers

Participant	Mother's age	Child's age	Child's SO/GI	Time passed since coming out	Stage in the child's transition process
1	56	23	Trans man	2 years	Prior to surgery
2	47	17	Trans woman	3 years	Has not started yet
3	44	19	Gay man	2 years	/
4	51	22	Gay man	3 years	/
5	52	28	Bisexual man	6 years	/
6	77	41	Gay man	15 years	/
7	51	21	Gay man	1 year	/
8	39	17	Lesbian	2 years	/

Findings

► 4 sub-ordinate themes emerged

1. *“We started a conversation, and then he told me everything: what, how, where”* - **The context of finding out**
2. *“...and that is something very terrifying, that someone could hurt my child because he is what he is”* - **Mothers’ reactions**
3. *“I needed to see that he is completely well”* - **Process of adaptation**
4. *“Are we strong enough to bear all that?”* - **Parent and family identity**

We started talking, and then he told me everything: what, how, where” - The context of finding out

“We made a deal that he will tell his friends and that I will tell the family friends and family.”

“During that winter, spring and summer, she started turning off the monitor when I would come into the room. I’d tell her: Don’t mess with me when I know all those kids... they have all changed... And then she started to... I noticed she was much more awake at night” - mother of trans daughter

- ▶ Coming out in a conversation with a mother in most cases
- ▶ Mother have notices changes in child’s behavior prior to coming out
- ▶ Understanding those changes in the context of child’s identity after coming out

“...and that is something very terrifying, that someone could hurt my child because he is what he is” - Mothers’ reactions

- ▶ *“And so I was afraid of physical violence against him. That’s what I was afraid of. All these conversations we had, that was the only thing on my mind, I was afraid of that.”*
- ▶ *“I was afraid. I didn’t want it to happen for him that he has some kind of dissatisfaction and that it seems to him that this is the answer and solution and that he goes through everything (transition) and says: I am still not satisfied, I shouldn’t have done this, I should’ve done something else.”*
- ▶ Mothers’ reaction varied from surprise and shock, to anger and physical aggression; sadness, fear for child’s safety and fear for the child’s future, guilt, need for information,...
- ▶ The most prominent was the fear for safety, all mothers spoke about it - contextually dependent

“I needed to see that he is perfectly fine” - Process of adaptation

“And that was terrible for me because I was unable to utter it. Even today, I can’t: my son is gay. I can’t. And that’s the only thing that is bothering me, that I am afraid. I can’t talk to anyone. I can’t”

“Nobody... Nobody gave me... Nobody wanted to deal with it. Simply, it was all very complicated...uhm, unfamiliar to the. Too many things were on my shoulders and I needed help.”

“Only after I had thought about the past, I remembered he never said he had a crush”

- ▶ Mothers recognized lack of professional and social support they needed - loneliness;
- ▶ Frame of reference - negative cases they have heard of - social context
- ▶ Needing to be sure their children are happy;
- ▶ Reflecting on the „cause“ of SO - who’s fault is it?
- ▶ Parental values as the frame of reference

“Are we strong enough to bear that all?” - Parent and family identity

- ▶ *“And I couldn’t tell that to my husband, I was afraid how he will react.”*
- ▶ *“So nothing changed, I still love, tickle, kiss, and hug him, we still choose clothes and hairstyle, we do everything together”*
- ▶ *“Is he ready for it or not? Not just he, all of us. Whole family. Are we strong enough to bear that all? Then we concluded that we are the family that always somehow sticks out and that we’ve taken a couple of life hits.”*
- ▶ Co-parenting relations - acceptance from husband as support
- ▶ Child’s identity as part of the family’s identity
- ▶ Coming back to parenting goals as an important step to acceptance

Informing the practice

- ▶ Group support for parents
- ▶ The role of fathers in families
- ▶ Experience with professionals in mental health field
- ▶ Discourse around LGBTQ people in Serbia - the consequences

- ▶ The role of researcher/inteviewer: how did my lesbian indetity contribute to mothers' motivation to talk?

- ▶ Limitations: selection of participants; parental vs mothers' experience; stage of acceptance as an important factor - who is ready to talk?

▶ Thank you 😊

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