Background

- The Graying of America: the population at the age of 65 and over is approximately 40 million, which takes up 13% of the total population in America.
- LGB Population Is Aging: 3.5% of adults in the United States identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual.
- Approximately 1.76 million LGB adults are ages 65 and over.

Main Issues

Older LGB Adults Face

Same as their heterosexual counterparts, older LGB adults face:
- Economic Hardship
- Loss of Friends and Families
- Policy Change in Healthcare and Medicare

They also face LGB specific issues:
- Legal Issues
- Health/Mental Health
- Aging Care Services
- Social Network and Support

Legal Issues

- Same-sex Relationship Recognition
- Related Rights and Benefits

Possible Solutions to Legal Issues

- LGB couples married in states where same-sex marriage is legalized are eligible for federal rights and benefits after the unconstitutionality of Section 3 of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), yet they could not enjoy state-level benefits as couples in Pennsylvania.

- For older LGB adults, reciprocal beneficiary agreements could be applied to better protect their rights without disclosure of their sexual orientation. Yet, proper campaigning is needed to bring reciprocal beneficiary agreements to state.

Health/Mental Health

- The current status of physical and psychological health of older LGB adults:
  - worse physical and psychological health status than heterosexual counterparts.
  - greater risk of disability and mental distress
  - increased likelihood of overconsumption of alcohol and smoking
  - less likely to be married or partnered
  - higher rate of depression, anxiety, and alcohol dependency

- The examination of access for older LGB adults to health care
  - Difficulties to high quality health care because of heteronormativity and homophobia in current health care system
  - For high quality health care, there should be:
    - Changes from the LGB individuals
    - Changes from the healthcare system
    - A combination of both

Aging Care Services

- The potential discrimination from aging care services is the main factor that hinders older LGB adults from accessing services and resources or forces older LGB adults to be back to the closet again in order to get services.

To promote older LGB adults’ aging experience in terms of aging care services:

- Aging care agencies should take programs and trainings related to LGB issues.
- Have affordable LGB friendly/exclusive aging care facility
- Set up legislations to further protect older LGB adult against discrimination: amendment in the Fair Housing Act, the Public Accommodations provisions of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Older Americans Act

Social Network and Support

Facts about older LGB adults’ social network and support:

- Influenced by both sexual orientation and age (ageism within the LGB community)
- Intertwining oppression resulting from racism, ageism and heterosexism for minority older LGB adults
- Friend-centered social support
- Support from friends rather than family predicts higher quality of mental health, lower depression, anxiety and internalized homophobia for older LGB adults

Based on the facts, aging services and local LGB organizations should create a social network or events for older LGB adults to provide socialization opportunities in which LGB adults are more likely to find friends.

Lehigh Valley Applications

In Lehigh Valley, at an individual level, LGB elder related services indeed exist. However, at an organizational level, there are no organizations focusing on LGB elders, web updates focused on posting LGB elder related services, and no retirement homes or health care facilities state being LGB friendly. Under such circumstances, with the lack of support and LGB-friendly environment, LGB elders might be forced to be in the closet or to leave the Lehigh Valley area. Thus, it is necessary to raise more awareness and focus on the needs of LGB elders in Lehigh Valley.

References

Please contact me or Dean Kelly for reference list and bibliography

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