

World first survey uncovers widespread homophobia at UK sports events

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The world's first international study on homophobia in sport, "Out on the Fields," has found widespread homophobia in UK sport, prompting calls for a zero tolerance approach towards discrimination and better training for coaches, teachers and officials.

The research, on behalf of the Bingham Cup (the world cup of gay rugby) and affiliated sports groups, was conducted by the global sports market research firm Repucom and overseen by a panel of seven academics from six universities, including Brunel University London.

Participants were from the United Kingdom, Ireland, North America, Canada, New Zealand and Australia.

The results show that despite the prevalence of [homophobia](#), more young gay and lesbian athletes are coming 'out of the closet' than ever before.

Gay men in the UK under the age of 22 were nearly twice as likely to be out of the closet to their entire team (30 per cent) than in most other English speaking countries.

In the UK, spectator stands as well as reports of homophobic violence stood out as major areas of concern.

Retired Welsh rugby player, Gareth Thomas, who came out in 2009 said, "This study has cast a very bright and much needed light on the extent of homophobia in sport in the UK and around the world."

Thomas, who wrote a 'Foreword' for "Out on the Fields" added "I'm very encouraged to see that more gays and lesbians are finding the courage to come out of the closet, certainly much younger than I did while playing sport.

"It's even more impressive that they are choosing to be open about their sexuality despite the widespread homophobia that continues to be reported around sporting fields, especially among fans."

Robbie Rogers, who came out when he left Leeds United, becoming the first openly gay male professional athlete to join any of the five major American sports leagues when he signed with the LA Galaxy soccer team, said, "It's very disappointing to see that the overwhelming majority of people who took part in the study, including the many straight people, thought an openly gay, lesbian or bisexual person would not be very safe as a spectator.

"This is not acceptable. Everyone should be able to enjoy sports. It's time that all sports enforce a zero tolerance of hateful language on and off the fields."

Rogers added that he strongly supported "immediate venue bans for anyone using homophobic, racist or any other form of discriminatory language." He also said that players should receive penalties for using this language.

Review panel member Professor Ian Rivers from Brunel University London, said, "In the UK we have recently invested significant resources to address discrimination in sport but it's very clear from this study that much more needs to be done, particularly around homophobia.

"This form of discrimination is not only affecting lesbian, gay and bisexual people but the study shows many straight men are also being

targeted.

"I strongly hope that sport governing bodies, organisers of major sporting events, coaches, referees and even athletes take this report away and consider what we each can do to ensure lesbian, gay and bisexual people feel safe and welcome."

Data were collected through an anonymous 10-15 minute online survey promoted through social and traditional media and by sporting organisations, professional athletes, corporations and government.

The survey, the largest of its kind, comprised nearly 9500 participants, including 1796 from the UK. About one-quarter of participants described themselves as heterosexual.

'Out on the Field' also found:

- More than half of gay men (60 per cent) and lesbians (54 per cent) and 24 per cent of heterosexual men said they have personally been targeted with homophobia.
- 30 per cent of UK gay youth and 27 per cent of lesbian youth said they were out of the closet to their entire team (under 22).
- 85 per cent of UK participants (including those describing themselves as heterosexual) believe an openly gay, lesbian or bisexual person would not be very safe as a spectator at a sporting event.
- Nearly half (48 per cent) of gay men who didn't play team sports were discouraged by homophobic experiences in school PE class.
- Gay and lesbian youth in the UK are much more likely to report being personally targeted than previous generations.
- Of those who had personally experienced homophobia: 81 per cent of gay men and 80 per cent of lesbians have received verbal slurs such as "faggot" or "dyke."

- Violence was also common with 21 per cent of gay men and 14 per cent of lesbians reporting physical assaults and 26 per cent of [gay men](#) and 18 per cent of lesbians reporting threats of harm.

More information: The results of the study can be viewed online:
www.outonthefields.com

Provided by Brunel University

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