



Twenty10 Counselling Service Needs Analysis

Raina Jardin
M.Psych.(Clin) MAPS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Background

The Twenty-Ten Association Inc. (Twenty10) is a non-government organisation that supports and works with young people of diverse genders, sexes and sexualities, their families and communities. Over the last year Twenty10 has assisted over 380 young people¹. This study, commissioned by the Association as part of their strategic plan implementation, aimed to examine Twenty10's current capacity to address the mental health needs presented by its clients.

A structured interview was conducted with Twenty10 client services staff. Twenty10's intake database was also reviewed over a four-week period preceding the current report to provide a brief overview of telephone based requests for assistance made to the service. A literature review was also conducted to provide background evidence for the need for adequate mental health assistance for the clients of Twenty10.

Results of the literature review highlighted that same-sex attracted and gender diverse people are at risk of higher adverse health outcomes due to minority stress. Adolescent same-sex attracted and gender diverse people are suggested to be particularly vulnerable given the biological, psychological and social changes that accompany this period of transition. The current literature review provides evidence for the need for adequate mental health services for this population.

2. Summary of finding from Interviews and Database Records

Review of information gathered through interviews with client services staff and call records over a four week period indicates that Twenty10 is currently unable to meet client demand for counselling and mental health assistance. In summary, 93% of callers contacting Twenty10 for counselling assistance were unable to have their needs met by the service due to service limitations. The current counsellor role has capacity for 12 clients, but has 20 active clients due to demand. Approximately 80 - 90% of clients who have attended drop-in and who have received case-management are reported to present with mental health concerns. 50% of clients who have attended drop-in and clients who have received intensive assistance, presenting with mental health concerns or counselling needs are currently not linked in with services to address these needs. This is reported to be either due to clients' reluctance to be engaged with services, lack of providers, wait lists and Twenty10's inability to meet these needs due to limited availability and lack of specialist mental health providers.

In view of the significant risk facing Twenty10's clients given their experience of minority stress and the process of adolescence in addition to psychosocial stressors such as homelessness, this initial examination highlights the need for further funding to be available to Twenty10 for the development of a specialist counselling service and/or to facilitate access to relevant services (e.g., community capacity building, brokerage, promotion campaign). Twenty10 promotes a holistic approach to biopsychosocial health. It is proposed that the addition of a counselling team to the services currently being provided (e.g., case-management, counselling, drop-in, groups etc) would further extend Twenty10's capacity to provide holistic mental health assistance for same-sex attracted and gender diverse young people.

¹ Sex: Female (n=196), Male (n=184). Culture: 15% Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Background, 8% Indigenous Australian, 77% Other. Age: 3.2% 10-14 years, 46.6% 15-19 years, 45.4% 20-24 years, 4.8% 25 years.

3. Recommendations

3.1 Counselling team:

Funding be obtained to increase Twenty10's capacity to address the mental health concerns and counselling needs presented by its clients through the development of a counselling team, rather than the current model of a sole practitioner and reliance on often unavailable or unaffordable external resources. It is recommended that this team be a diverse team consisting of: a clinical psychologist and/or a registered psychologist who specialises in treating mental illness and a generalist counsellor regardless of discipline.

3.2 Increase current counsellor's hours:

Funding be immediately obtained to increase the hours of the current counsellor.

3.3 Psychologist/Clinical Psychologist:

Funding be obtained to employ a registered psychologist and/or clinical psychologist with experience in working with same-sex attracted and gender diverse young people, to provide specialist assessment, diagnosis and treatment of psychological and mental health problems.

3.4 Counsellor:

Funding be obtained to employ a fulltime counsellor (e.g., social worker, psychotherapist).

3.5 Community capacity building:

Adequate funding be obtained to engage in community capacity building to:

- a) Build referral networks with specialist mental health providers with experience with same-sex attracted and gender diverse people, who can bulk-bill Twenty10 clients or who are willing to provide services for Twenty10 clients with a reduced gap between the scheduled fee and Medicare rebate, and,
- b) Provide specialist mental health training opportunities for mental health professionals without experience in order to assist them in their work with same-sex attracted and gender diverse adolescents.

3.6 Mental health promotion campaign:

It is recommended that funding be obtained or links established with an organisation/s that may assist in developing a mental health promotion campaign to let young people know that it is okay to disclose their sexuality or gender questioning to mental health providers if they want to. This campaign may include the suggestion that practitioners place a brochure or poster in their service to this effect.

3.7 Brokerage:

Due to possible obstacles and barriers to developing the recommended counselling team based at Twenty10 (e.g., space constraints and time required for recruitment and service development) it is recommended that funding be obtained for the gap between the scheduled fee and Medicare rebate to facilitate access to private providers.

3.8 Work with families:

71% of callers seeking counselling assistance from Twenty10 sought assistance with family related concerns. Counselling regarding family difficulties was also reported as one of the main requests made by young people. Thus, it is recommended that funding be obtained to increase capacity to work with families.

3.9 Staff training:

Staff to engage in training to increase knowledge and skills in providing evidence-based best practice case-management to individuals presenting with significant mental health concerns. Funding is already available for this and staff have been encouraged to make opportunity of this.

Author Note

Raina Jardin is a psychologist who has worked as a counsellor at Twenty10. Her M.Psych.(Clin) thesis examined minority stress and mental health in a sample of gay men. Email: raina.jardin@gmail.com.

The Twenty-Ten Association Inc. (Twenty10)

45 Bedford Street
PO Box 553
Newtown NSW 2042

(02) 8594 9550
info@twenty10.org.au
www.twenty10.org.au

