



## World First Study Uncovers Widespread Homophobia among UK Sport Fans

- Spectator stands most homophobic sporting environment in UK; 85% fear for the safety of openly gay fans
- 3 out of 4 people witnessed or experienced homophobia in sport, including many straight men
- UK gay youth most likely to be “out of the closet” but then experience more abuse

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**Online editors: Infographics and country rankings available**

The first international study on homophobia in sport, “Out on the Fields,” found widespread homophobia in UK sport, prompting calls for a zero tolerance approach towards discrimination and better training for coaches, teachers and officials. This is the first study to answer a common question of ‘how does the UK compare to other countries for homophobia in sport?’

The research was conducted on behalf of a coalition of LGBTI sporting groups including the Bingham Cup (world cup of gay rugby) and the Federation of Gay Games and You Can Play. The data was collected and analysed by global sports market research firm Repucom, which was overseen by a panel of seven international experts from six universities, including Brunel University London. The study is the largest ever conducted on homophobia in sport, with nearly 9500 participants, including 1796 from the UK (216 were straight). It focused on the comparing the six major English speaking countries.

While the study found UK sporting culture is rife with homophobia, there were also signs of progress. The study found **more young lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) athletes in the UK are coming ‘out of the closet’ than ever before**. Gay male youth in the UK were the most likely to be ‘out of the closet’ to their entire team (30%), **nearly double the number** in other English speaking countries. Lesbian youth were the second most likely to be out of the closet (after the USA).

However, this increased visibility comes with a cost. **Youth participants (under 22) reported many more personal experiences of homophobia than older people**. For example, 57% of gay adults said they had been personally targeted with homophobia compared to 71% of gay youth.

Openly gay Welsh rugby legend **Gareth Thomas**, said, “This massive international study has cast a very bright and much-needed light on the extent of homophobia in sport in the UK and around the world. I’m very inspired to see that more gays and lesbians are gaining the courage to come out of the closet in youth sport. It is even more amazing that they are doing this despite the widespread homophobic behaviour that continues to be reported around sporting fields and among fans.”

Discriminatory language, in particular slurs such as ‘faggot’ or ‘dyke,’ was the most commonly reported form of homophobia. Former Leeds player, **Robbie Rogers**, who now plays for the LA Galaxy, is one of the world’s only current, openly gay male professional athletes. He said “It’s very disappointing to see that the overwhelming majority of people, including many straight people, had experienced homophobic discrimination. This is not acceptable; everyone should be able to enjoy sports.”

“It’s time that all sports enforce zero tolerance of hateful language on and off the fields. I strongly support immediate venue bans for anyone using homophobic, racist or any other form of discriminatory language. Players also need to receive stiff penalties for using this language. It is also important that international governing bodies, including FIFA, make committed and determined efforts to ensure LGBTI people feel welcome.”

### **Key Findings:**

- 30% of UK gay youth/27% of lesbian youth (under 22 years of age ) said they were out of the closet to their *entire team*
- UK participants were the most likely to believe spectators stands are the most homophobic sporting environment, followed by school PE classes
- 85% of UK participants (including straight) believe an openly gay, lesbian or bisexual person would not be very safe as a spectator at a sporting event
- Nearly half (48%) of gay men who didn’t play youth team sports were turned off by experiences in school PE
- 77% of participants (including straight) said they witnessed or experienced homophobia in sport
- More than half of gay men (60%) and lesbians (54%) and **24% of straight men** said they have personally been targeted with homophobia.
- *Of those who had personally experienced homophobia (around half):* 81% of gay men 80% of lesbians have received verbal slurs such as “faggot” or “dyke.” Violence was also common with 21% of gay men and 14% of lesbians reporting physically assaults.

**Professor Ian Rivers**, from **Brunel University London**, was one of seven internationally respected experts on homophobia in sport who sat on the study's review panel. "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."

Aside from collecting information about homophobia in sport, the study also asked participants for their views on how to end discrimination. An overwhelming majority said change must start early with education of young people and a zero tolerance approach by PE teachers, coaches and officials towards homophobia. Many also said PE teachers need training on supporting LGB youth, something not currently provided.

### **About the study**

Out on the Fields is the first international study and largest conducted on homophobia in sport. The study focused on issues of sexuality which is why LGB is used rather than LGBTI or LGBTQ. It also focused on team sports and the English speaking countries (USA, UK, Ireland, Canada, New Zealand and Australia). Global sports market research firm Repucom conducted the research (pro bono), while the study was initiated by organisers of Bingham Cup Sydney 2014 (the world cup of gay rugby) in partnership with a coalition of sports organisations, including the Federation of Gay Games, You Can Play, International Gay Rugby and the Australian Sports Commission. The study methodology and results were reviewed by a panel of seven academics from six universities including Victoria University (Australia), Penn State University, University of Massachusetts (USA); Brunel University London (UK); University of Winnipeg and Laval University (Canada). Data was collected through an anonymous 10-15 minute online survey which included multiple choice questions and an option to submit more lengthy details of personal experiences. It was promoted through social and traditional media and by sporting organisations, professional athletes, corporations and government. Around 25% of participants were heterosexual.

### **Full Report, Info Graphics (including art files), Country Summaries and Country Comparison/Rankings**

**After embargo:** [www.outonthefields.com](http://www.outonthefields.com)

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