

SECTION
1.0

INTRODUCTION

Background, Rationale & Aims

In 2011, the Hong Kong Psychological Society (HKPS) took a pioneering role in addressing sexual diversity in Asia. It established a Work Group to research and publish a position paper and background supplement for psychologists working with lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals in Hong Kong (Hong Kong Psychological Society, 2012a, 2012c). Spearheaded by the Division of Clinical Psychology, the Work Group also invited representatives across other HKPS Divisions, including the Division of Counselling Psychology (DCoP), Division of Industrial-Organisational Psychology (DIOP) and Division of Educational

Psychology (DEP), which ensured relevance to sub-disciplines within Psychology. The paper's 11 statements, as endorsed by the Hong Kong Psychological Society on August 1, 2012, sat in solidarity with positioning across various global psychological and medical associations, were supported with accumulative research evidence, and promoted an affirmative stance to mental health practice (Hong Kong Psychological Society, 2012a, 2012c). The implicit message underscoring the HKPS's pledge for psychologists to uphold ethical practice and professional standards, which serve to:



Protect the welfare of service users and society at large.



Endorse evidence-based interventions at individual and community levels that promote wellbeing and enhance mental health.

(Hong Kong Psychological Society, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c).

The past decade has witnessed a growth in local and international research efforts relevant to gender and sexually diverse individuals. Accordingly, in 2021, another cross-divisional work group was established by Hong Kong's

Representative for the International Psychology Network for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex Issues (IPsyNet), with the charge to review and update the existing position paper.

Position Paper's Review – Timely in 2021?

Three questions inspired the review of the HKPS's (2012) position paper:

01

How relevant are the paper's content and positioning considering the proliferation of local and international research during the past decade, which has informed knowledge and practice related to gender and sexually diverse populations? (American Psychological Association, 2021a; Chan & Mak, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c; Chan & Mak, 2020, 2021; Chan et al., 2020; Cochran et al., 2014; Drescher, 2015; Drescher et al., 2012; Fingerhut & Frost, 2020; Hatzenbuehler, 2014; Hatzenbuehler, 2016; Hatzenbuehler & Link, 2014; Horne, 2020; Huang & Chan, 2022; Huang et al., 2020; Hung & Chan, 2022; Jowett & Drescher, 2020; Kwok, 2016; Kwok & Wu, 2015; Victor & Nel, 2017; World Health Organization, 2019).

02

How aligned are the language and terminologies with that employed by other psychology and mental health-related associations, which have published papers embracing an affirmative approach to psychological practice? (American Psychological Association, 2009a, 2009b, 2015, 2021a; Australian Psychological Society, 2014a, 2014b; British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, 2019; British Psychological Society, 2019a; Psychological Association of the Philippines, 2020a, 2020b; Psychological Society of South Africa, 2013, 2017; Victor & Nel, 2017).

03

Is it timely to strengthen and delineate the HKPS's stance against conversion therapies, a set of practices that aim to change or alter an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity?



Work Group Processes

Research, Aims and Drafting

To ensure representation and applicability across various psychology specialisations, the cross-divisional workgroup comprised representatives from each of the HKPS's Divisional EXCOs:

- » Counselling Psychology (DCoP)
- » Clinical Psychology (DCP)
- » Educational Psychology (DEP)
- » Industrial Organisational Psychology (DIOP)

Work Group members attended 19 meetings between May 2021 and October 2022, exclusively using synchronised video conferencing software as a requisite adaptation due to public health restrictions linked with the COVID-19 global pandemic in Hong Kong.

Topics and content domains were assigned per work group members' academic or practice-based specialisation, subject matter knowledge and professional experience. Between May 2021 and April 2022, members independently researched and drafted content for specific sections of the paper, while monthly meetings provided a space to:

- » Share news, findings, and knowledge from existing and emerging academic literature, studies and non-academic surveys and publications,
- » Voice observations, opinions, ideas and concerns,

- » Collaboratively review and make decisions on structure and content areas, language and terminologies, and incorporation of appendices and notes to facilitate psychologists' ongoing education and understanding,
- » Agree on action points and ongoing processes, mobilising the paper's various iterations.

In line with conceptual foundations adopted by the HKPS's existing paper (HKPS, 2012), the revised position paper has been grounded in the following:

- » An affirmative psychological practice which views gender and sexual diversity as natural and nonpathological (Pachankis, 2018; Pachankis et al., 2015; Pachankis et al., 2019; Parrish, 2017)¹,
- » Minority stress theory acknowledges the impact of structural, societal and interpersonal prejudice and stigma on gender and sexually diverse individuals' mental health and wellbeing (Flentje et al., 2020; Frost et al., 2015; Meyer, 2003; Meyer et al., 2017)²,

Content has also been informed with developing standards of practice in psychology, and topics covered in exemplary publications, authored by other psychology and mental health-related associations (American Psychiatric Association, 2020; American Psychological Association, 2015, 2021a, 2021b, 2021d; British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy,

¹ Refer to **Appendix F: The Premise for an Affirmative Stance**

² Refer to **Appendix E: Systemic and Cultural influences on Mental Health – Minority Stress Theory**

2019; British Psychological Society, 2019b; Canadian Psychological Association, 2015; HKPCA, 2011; Nel, 2014; New Zealand Psychologists Board, 2019; Psychological Association of the Philippines, 2020a, 2020b; Psychological Society of South Africa, 2013, 2017; Victor & Nel, 2017).

Three key observations underpinned the revised position paper's aims:

1. A Need for Expansion, Considering Advances in Empirical Evidence, Knowledge, and Standards of Practice in Psychology, Including the Growth of Studies in Hong Kong.

It was deemed timely and important to expand on the existing paper's breadth of topics and issues³ to ensure the currency of psychological practice with gender and sexually diverse individuals in Hong Kong.

The revision is structured with the HKPS's positioning clustered against six domains of practice and/or topics, considering:

- » Advancement of local research efforts with documented evidence of discrimination and stigma experienced by gender and sexually diverse individuals⁴,
- » Applicability for psychologists working across various settings,

- **Scientist-practitioner** (Chan, 2022; Chan & Leung, 2022; Chan & Mak, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c; Chan & Mak, 2020, 2021; Chan et al., 2020; Suen et al., 2018; Suen, Chan, & Wong, 2020; Suen et al., 2021a; Suen et al., 2016),
- **Research and public education** (Chan & Mak, 2018c; Chan & Mak, 2021; Chan, Wong, et al., 2022; Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute, 2022),
- **Conversion therapies** (Chan, Leung, et al., 2022),
- **Youth, school, and education** (Chan & Mak, 2018a, 2018b; Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau Hong Kong, 2015; Kwok, 2016; Kwok et al., 2012; Kwok & Wu, 2015),
- **Fostering safe and inclusive workplaces** (Chan & Mak, 2018a, 2018b; Community Business Limited, 2012; Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau Hong Kong, 2015; Equal Opportunities Commission, 2021; Lau & Stotzer, 2011),
- **Family and relationship systems** (Chan & Mak, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c; Chan, Wong, et al., 2022; Huang & Chan, 2022; Suen, Chan, & Wong, 2020; Suen et al., 2021a; The Boys and Girls' Clubs Association of Hong Kong, 2009; The Boys' and Girls' Clubs Association of Hong Kong, 2020a, 2020b).

³ The HKPS's (2012) position paper, had not explicitly addressed issues relevant to youth, school, and education; workplaces and diversity in relationships and family systems.

⁴ It remained beyond scope and timelines, to support the paper's revision with an in-depth and systematic literature

review. Various sources of information and evidence have been consolidated, ensuring that positioning statements are supported with an empirical backbone of international and local citations, of relevance to gender and sexually diverse individuals' mental health and wellbeing.

2. A Call for Inclusive and Representative Language and Terminologies.

The existing paper's use of initialism LGB, represents lesbian, gay and bisexual, but remains exclusive of transgender, and all non-heterosexual or gender non-conforming individuals, more recently recognised by researchers and professional associations (British Psychological Society, 2019a; Psychological Society of South Africa, 2013, 2017). Accordingly, it was resolved to employ inclusive and non-essentialist terminology, gender and sexually diverse individuals, rather than the abbreviation and acronym LGBTQIA+, which tends towards more discrete or categorical labels (e.g. lesbian, gay, transgender, queer, intersex,

asexual, etc.)⁵. Therefore, the proposed position paper was subsequently titled Position Paper for Psychologists Working with Gender and Sexually Diverse Individuals⁶. As Practitioners upholding a professional duty towards autonomy and self-determination, this decision was underpinned by the recognition that some individuals may not identify or wish to employ an existing term or label (Hong Kong Psychological Society, 2012b)⁷.

Decisions linked with the position paper's use of language acknowledged that terminologies have a powerful impact on the lives of all individuals, sought to recognise current trends in science, research and psychological practice, and remained considerate towards Hong Kong's cultural context⁸. **Appendix A** includes a glossary to familiarise readers with emerging nomenclature.



⁵ The favour for non-essentialist language, and decision to move away from acronyms (e.g., LGBTQIA+), which categorise preferences, orientations, and identities into labels, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, intersex, or asexual, rests on social constructionist philosophies, which recognises that reality is dynamic, continuous, and changeable, heterogeneous, and with blurred boundaries (Nathan, 2015). It is also an implicit dismissal of Plato's philosophy of essentialism, which underpins the positivist philosophy of science, positing that every person, place, or thing has an essence that's static, fixed, deterministic, and lends itself with stereotyping of individuals, defining and constraining behaviours according to fixed and homogenous categories (DeLamater & Hyde, 1998; Nathan, 2015).

⁶ While the position paper cites or quotes historical research and studies, which employed language such as homosexuality or homosexual, the intention is to move away from terminologies, previously used to pathologise sexually diversity

⁷ Where cited literature has referred specifically to lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender populations, the abbreviations LGBTIA or LGBT or LGB have been documented.

⁸ The work group's conversations and decisions linked with the use of words and phrases, rested on the postmodern and dialogic notion that language matters and constructs reality, and shifts in mindset and behaviours, result when people are offered renewed frameworks or ways of talking and thinking about things (Bushe, 2013; Marshak, 2015; Marshak & Bushe, 2013).

The paper employed the terminologies “gender identity” or “gender identity and expression”⁹ to address gender diversity in consideration of:



Unanimity in thinking across psychiatry and psychology has described gender as a non-binary construct. The two fields acknowledge that a person’s gender identity may not align with the sex assigned at birth and present in a variety of ways as part of the human condition (American Psychiatric Association, 2018, 2020; American Psychological Association, 2009b, 2015; Australian Psychological Society, 2014b; Cameron & Stinson, 2019; Hyde et al., 2019; Richards et al., 2016).



Researchers across scientific and social science disciplines have challenged the notion that humans can be understood as belonging to only two discrete categories: women and men (Hyde et al., 2019; Richards et al., 2016)¹⁰.



The duty of ethical psychologists, in striving for accuracy with the conceptualisation and operationalisation of constructs when involved in research, education and practice. Accordingly, the use of two categories for gender, “man” or “woman”, has been posited as inaccurately representing psychologists’ developing understanding of gender, potentially resulting in gender misclassification and infringing on ethical principles as scientists (Cameron & Stinson, 2019). Apropos, in 2015, the American Psychological Association (APA)’s guidelines for psychological practice with transgender and gender nonconforming people described gender identity as “a person’s deeply-felt, inherent sense of being a boy, a man, or a male; a girl, a woman, or a female; or an alternative gender (e.g., genderqueer, gender nonconforming, gender neutral) that may or may not correspond to a person’s sex assigned at birth or to a person’s primary or secondary sex characteristics” (p. 832).

⁹ For information on the evolution of thinking on gender diversity, including the depathologisation of diversity in gender identity and expression by key mental health authorities, see [Appendix D issue 1](#).

¹⁰ Hyde et al (2019) adroitly summarised evidence from various scientific and social science disciplines, which has challenged the notion that humans can be understood as belonging to only two discrete categories: women and men

- Neuroscience that refutes gender/sex dimorphism of the human brain,
- Behavioural endocrinology challenging the notion of biologically fixed, gender dimorphic hormonal systems,
- Psychological research underscoring the similarities between males and females,
- Developmental studies suggesting that a tendency to view gender/sex as binary is culturally entrenched.

3. The Necessity to Strengthen and Delineate the HKPS's Stance Against Conversion Therapies.

Considering psychologists' ethical duty to address misconceptions and promote evidence-based practices, the revised paper delineates the HKPS's positioning against practices aimed at changing sexual orientation and gender identity, more commonly described as "conversion therapies"¹¹. The above is timely, given advances in empirical evidence accentuating the adverse impact of conversion

therapies on psychological health (Blosnich et al., 2020; Glassgold, 2022; Haldeman, 2022; Przeworski et al., 2021) and recent empirical evidence that has highlighted the prevalence of such practices across Hong Kong's local communities (Chan, Leung, et al., 2022).

Review and Endorsement

In May 2022, the position paper's initial draft entered a consultative and staged review process, inviting feedback from various stakeholders at the HKPS:



Members of the Executive Committee (EXCO) from the HKPS's four Divisions, including the Division of Clinical Psychologists (DCP), Division of Educational Psychologists (DEP), Division of Industrial and Organisational Psychologists (DIOP) and Division of Counselling Psychologists (DCoP).



Professor Winnie Mak, a professor in the Department of Psychology at The Chinese University of Hong Kong who has published numerous empirical studies relevant to gender and sexually diverse individuals' stigma and wellbeing.



Doctor Randolph Chan, Associate Professor and Associate Head of the Department of Special Education and Counselling at The Education University of Hong Kong who has authored or co-authored various local empirical studies related to minority stress and mental health among gender and sexually diverse individuals.



HKPS Council Members including President, Vice President, Divisional and Committee Chairs, and Council Members Elect.

¹¹ The practice to change an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity has been documented as Conversion Therapies, Reparative Therapies, Sexual Orientation Change Efforts (SOCE), Gender Identity Change Efforts (GICE) or Sexual Orientation Gender Identity Change Efforts (SOGICE) by other Psychology Associations, Mental Health Authorities, and researchers in the field. The term

"conversion therapies", has been employed, since it is more widely adopted and recognised by Hong Kong society, and the term sexual orientation change efforts (SOCE), as employed throughout the HKPS's (2012) existing position paper, doesn't address the prevalence and impact of change efforts perpetrated amongst individuals with non-binary or non-conforming gender identity.

For consistency, reviewers were provided guidelines covering the initiative's background, aims, work group's processes, why the position paper matters to psychologists, key criteria for consideration and feedback, and the proposed publication plan.

A fundamental premise underpinning the work group's consultative approach to editing the paper's structure and content was ensuring a final publication remained relevant, culturally appropriate, and widely accepted. This approach aligns with the philosophy and practices of dialogic organisational development,¹² an assumption that sustainable change most often occurs through changing the conversations in a

system (Bushe & Marshak, 2015, 2016). Reviewers' feedback and diversity of opinions opened discourse about matters which may not have surfaced or been considered otherwise. Importantly, this review and feedback cycle enriched conversations, editing, and critical reflection on addressing emerging issues that warrant the attention of psychological science and practice in the most inclusive and sensitive manner. In November 2022, the position paper's revised structure and content were presented to all HKPS Council Members, stimulating further revisions. On January 20, 2023, the position paper was unanimously endorsed by HKPS Council Members for publication on the Society's website.



¹² In solidarity with notions from post modernistic, dialogic organisational development (OD), the work group's aims, rested on an epistemological notion that reality is socially constructed, with language, social interaction, and shared assumptions, pertinent to how people interpret experience, or make sense of the world (Marshak & Bushe, 2013). Relevantly, social constructivism, or anthropological view

that perception is formed through the conceptual and linguistic structures of culture, with meaning formulated through interaction, shared assumptions, and guiding rules, sits at the root of discrimination, a well-recognised minority specific stressor (Cheung-Judge & Holbeche, 2011; Meyer, 1995, 2003; Peterson, 2012).

Evidence-Informed Approach to Research and Practice

The revision, titled, Position Paper for Psychologists Working with Gender and Sexually Diverse Individuals, has been underpinned by an integration of various sources of evidence and factors:

Local and Global Empirical Efforts.

Research efforts, which have illuminated risk and protective factors linked with gender and sexually diverse individuals' mental health and wellbeing across Asian and Western regions internationally, including but not limited to Hong Kong, China, Taiwan, the Philippines, India, Australia, the United Kingdom, Europe, South America and the United States of America (USA; (Chan & Mak, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c; Chan & Mak, 2021; Hatzenbuehler, 2014; Hatzenbuehler, 2016; Hatzenbuehler et al., 2009; Hatzenbuehler & Link, 2014; Hatzenbuehler et al., 2010; Kwok, 2016; Kwok & Wu, 2015; Lau & Stotzer, 2011; Meyer, 1995, 2003; Suen, Chan, & Wong, 2020; Suen et al., 2021a).

Initiatives By Global Mental Health Authorities.

The HKPS showed solidarity with position papers or guidelines published by various psychology or mental health-related associations around the globe, including psychology, psychiatric and counselling associations, which uphold respect for the dignity and worth of all people and remain affirmative of sexual and gender diversity (American

Psychiatric Association, 2020; American Psychological Association, 2015, 2021a, 2021b, 2021d; British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, 2019; British Psychological Society, 2019b; Canadian Psychological Association, 2015; HKPCA, 2011; McLachlan et al., 2019; New Zealand Psychologists Board, 2019; Psychological Association of the Philippines, 2020a, 2020b; Psychological Society of South Africa, 2013, 2017; Victor & Nel, 2017).

Positioning of the APA's IPsyNet.

To remain informed of research and scientific advancements across the field, the HKPS joined International Psychology Network for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex Issues (IPsyNet). The network is housed at the LGBT Concerns office of the APA, comprising 21 psychological associations across the globe. The HKPS, an active member of the IPsyNet global network, will align itself with the collective vision of ensuring that "all psychological organisations are effective leaders in ensuring that all persons fully enjoy health and human rights, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics, by incorporating the goals of celebrating and valuing the full range of human diversity, including diversity in gender, sexual orientation and sex, and into their structure, programs and activities" (American Psychological Association, 2020).

Recognition and Respect For Hong Kong's Local Context and Legal Remit of Practice.

The HKPS, as a learned society, expects its members to:

1. Remain abreast of scientific, ethical and legal developments relevant to their professional activities with gender and sexually diverse individuals, as well as ongoing shifts in the broader cultural, social, political and organisational context in which they work (Hong Kong Psychological Society, 2012b, Ethical Principle B:Competence),
2. Display cultural sensitivities while building competencies that best address the needs of individuals from diverse, marginalised and at times intersectional groups, including but not limited to diversities based on gender, sexuality, ethnicity, age, race, religion, dis/ability¹³, language and socio-economic status¹⁴.

3. Drive educational efforts that identify and call out biased, discriminatory or stigmatising practices against sexually and gender-diverse minorities (Barrow, 2020; Chan & Mak, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c; Hatzenbuehler, 2016; Kwok, 2016; Kwok & Wu, 2015; Suen et al., 2016; Tang & Stephanie, 2019).

Refer to **Appendix B** to review legislation relevant for psychologists working with gender and sexually diverse individuals in Hong Kong.

Refer to **Appendix C** for a summary of empirical studies which have examined the experience and mental health outcomes of gender and sexually diverse individuals in Hong Kong.

Please refer to the full version of the position paper for all references and appendices.

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https://www.hkps.org.hk/en/publications/public_statements/



¹³ The authors acknowledge that the use of “disability” frequently entails undue negative connotation and ignores the individual’s abilities despite their impairments. The term “dis/ability” is spelled with a slash intentionally to represent the various levels of physical and mental abilities and disabilities of that any individuals possess.

¹⁴ For gender and sexually diverse individuals, the concept intersectionality has been applied across literature to describe how a person’s experience and expression of gender and sexuality, is intrinsically bound up with factors including but not limited to their race, culture, religion/faith, class, disability, nationality, age etc.