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## Effects of Therapy on Religious Men who have Unwanted Same-Sex Attraction

P Santero, N.E.Whitehead, D Ballesteros

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For decades now there has been ongoing debate about the use of 'sexual orientation change efforts' (SOCE), with opponents, including the American Psychological Association (APA), claiming that they don't work and may be harmful (there is always that qualification 'may').

The backstop study for this view has been Shidlo & Schroeder (2002). That study demonstrated a fundamental underlying bias by initially recruiting participants using the slogan "Help us Document the Damage from Homophobic Therapies". They therefore had a built-in tendency to recruit people who were 'failures' and to under-represent those who were 'successes'.

Shidlo & Schroeder themselves at least recognised that "The data presented in this article do not provide information on the incidence and the prevalence of failure, success, harm, help, or ethical violations in conversion therapy. The qualitative data obtained can serve to develop rigorous quantitative measures to be validated in future studies." These cautionary comments have not always been followed by subsequent interpreters of the study, and the majority of scholars have shown little interest in undertaking the quantitative work they proposed.

This new study by Santero, Whitehead and Ballesteros (SHB) is a much-needed contribution to that task. It adds to the evidence that there is nothing inherently dangerous in using mainstream therapies and that they can lead to worthwhile results in feelings, identity and behaviors.

The study consciously compares itself with Jones & Yarhouse (2011). JY was essentially prospective, meaning that the results of therapy were not known until they transpired over a period of years. SWB differs from this in taking a snapshot at a point of time, of participants who either were currently in therapy (42%) or had completed a programme of therapy (58%). Subject to clarification, the latter group is likely to partly reflect the 'successes' while the former is more neutral.

Almost all SWB participants (97%) received professional therapy, compared with 50% for JY. All participants were described as 'religious men' (mostly Protestant).

Another recent study, Dehlin et al (2015), was somewhat similar, in that its participants were Mormon men. It suffered from the disadvantage that many of them had left the Church, however, and were thus likely to be negative towards the therapy it had offered them. This study too was retrospective and used a controversial measurement scale to assess both effectiveness and harm on a single scale.

SWB questions were framed in the light of recommendations made in APA (2009). The study identified four null hypotheses that it wished to test:

1. SOCE is ineffective
2. It produces more harm than help
3. Most reasons for therapy are cultural/family pressure

4. SOCE is much less effective and more harmful than therapies on completely different unwanted problems

Among the key findings of the study are:

- contrary to the null hypotheses, SOCE is neither ineffective nor harmful, conflicting with APA findings
- religious clients could be told that from SOCE some degree of change is likely, and
- positive change in suicidality, self-esteem, depression, self-harm substance abuse, social functioning should be moderate to marked
- degree of harm is zero to slight and about typical for therapy for other unwanted problems.

The authors argue that this therapy is not really exceptional but should be considered in the ranks of the conventional.

They say that their study is “further evidence that the APA should reconsider their position of discouraging men from seeking SOCE for their unwanted same-sex attraction”.

One wonders how long it will be before someone brings a court case against one of the leading mental health institutions on the grounds that it has denied the person his/her human rights with the result that their family has been destroyed.

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Read also: [Personal Accounts of Counselling Interventions for Unwanted Same-Sex Attractions](#)