

## Press outlets should beware the Ozanne Foundation Faith & Sexuality Survey

Dr. Carys Moseley, Public Policy Researcher  
First Published by Christian Concern: March 5th, 2019

*After the recent release of results from the Ozanne Foundation Faith and Sexuality Survey, members of the press were quick to report on the 'shocking' statistics, which allegedly showed that a fifth of homosexual people who try to change their sexuality attempt suicide. Carys Moseley explains why that, and other findings, are hugely inaccurate and concludes that the press must be careful to report the truth.*

Last week the Ozanne Foundation published its Faith & Sexuality Survey<sup>1</sup> which it had launched at the end of 2018. The publicity said this:

*"The 2018 Faith & Sexuality Survey was designed to examine the role religious belief has on people's understanding and acceptance of their sexual orientation in the UK.*

*It was promoted through a range of social media platforms and national newspapers, and ran from 9th – 31st December 2018.*

*The survey was open to all individuals over 16 currently resident in the UK."*

The results<sup>2</sup> and Executive Report<sup>3</sup> make for interesting reading. Numerous prestigious press outlets reported on the survey with sensational headlines. These included Reuters, the Guardian, Channel 4 and the Daily Mail. Unfortunately, those press outlets that have reported on the results have misrepresented them, especially by failing to note that the survey sample was not representative of the UK population; not one single one of them bothered scrutinising the survey's methods. In this article I shall look critically at the most relevant aspects of the questionnaire and survey results.

The following analysis reveals how the survey cannot be relied upon to provide accurate or comprehensive information on the topic under consideration. Accordingly, those press outlets should take the trouble in future to subject surveys on the topic of sexual orientation change to much greater scrutiny. Otherwise they will be guilty of peddling disinformation as 'news'.

### **The survey sample was not representative of the UK population**

Take for example the screaming headline published by Reuters: 'Fifth of gay Brits who try to change sexuality attempt suicide, survey

1

says'.<sup>4</sup> Is this really what the survey found? No, it isn't. The survey found that one fifth of those who answered this survey who had tried to change their sexual orientation had attempted suicide. However, the single biggest problem with the survey is that the respondents did not constitute a representative sample<sup>5</sup> of the UK population. This is below the standard that a polling or survey company would require. Just under one in ten of the sample (8.86%) of respondents had voluntarily considered changing their sexual orientation. Unfortunately, we are not told what their original sexual orientation was, and so a more precise picture of the change – or lack thereof – was missing. This would have required more detailed multivariate analysis than was published in the survey.

Regarding the fact that the survey was not demographically representative of the UK population, the Ozanne Foundation itself admitted the following:

*"The survey attracted a higher than average level of white, English and Christian responses compared to UK census data, and a lower than average participation rate amongst those from minority ethnic, racial or religious groups."*

There is a likely reason for this which the Foundation does not consider, which is that BAME people hold more conservative attitudes towards homosexuality, according to the third wave of the National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles, the largest random representative sample-based survey in the UK on sexual attitudes.

### **Did the questionnaire aim to discover objective truth?**

There are very basic problems with the questionnaire<sup>6</sup>. It clearly did not aim to discover the truth about a person's biological sex – a highly relevant piece of information when considering research into sexual orientation. Question 3 is phrased "Which of these best describes your gender", whilst no question is asked about respondents' biological sex. This makes for poor quality data, because it is impossible to tell whether any respondents are people who consider themselves transgendered but do not indicate this.

Compare with the fact that official government statistics ask about sex, which is a protected characteristic under the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Equality Act 2010. There is a legal requirement to ask about sex in the census according to the Census Act 1920.

Question 4 is “What was your assigned sex at birth?”. There is no warrant for jumping from asking “Which of these best describes your gender” to asking about sex that is ‘assigned at birth’. This question shows basic ignorance of medicine and midwifery. Midwives do not assign sex to babies when they are born, they perceive it. It is shocking that such ridiculous ignorance of how the facts of life are handled has not been criticised by any press outlet reporting on this survey.

### **Religiosity needs to be better measured**

The religiosity of those who receive some type of pastoral care to leave homosexuality behind is of interest, given the current stereotype about them being mostly Christians. How helpful are the survey questions in yielding evidence about this? Bear in mind that the best social survey in the UK, the British Social Attitudes Survey, has three different ways of measuring religion: religious affiliation (asking people their cultural religious background, just like the Census does), the religion they currently belong to, and how often they attend worship in that religion. In addition, every ten years a suite of questions on religious beliefs are also asked.

Question 8 is “How active/committed were you in this religion/belief during each of the following age groups?”. The problem is that ‘active’ and ‘committed’ are left undefined. Contrast this with the annual British Social Attitudes Survey, which asks how often someone attends worship in their religion. The options given there range from “more than once a week” to “once a week”, “twice a month”, “once a month”, etc. This would at least give a measurable picture of the kinds of people under consideration.

### **Why no mention of ‘conversion therapy’?**

Section 8 of the questionnaire is about people’s experiences of undergoing attempts to change sexual orientation. This really is the core reason for launching the survey. Question 20 asked “Have you ever considered, been advised or been forced to go through attempts to change your sexual orientation (please tick all that apply)?”. Question 21 asks primarily by whom the respondent was advised to change sexual orientation, and Question 22 asks

primary by whom the respondent was forced to do so. The options given for both questions are “parent”, “other family member”, “religious leader”, “religious friends”, “secular friends”, “prefer not to say”, and “other” with a box to specify who was responsible.

It is very revealing that these options do not include “counsellors” or “therapists”. This is important given that neither the survey nor the Executive Report use the term ‘conversion therapy’. It is possible that Jayne Ozanne and her colleagues realise that ‘conversion therapy’ is not a term that is actually used by either mental health professionals or by pastoral counsellors and clergy in the churches. What is not clear is whether she and her colleagues realise or care that it is a nonsense term invented by gay activist psychologist Douglas Haldeman back in 1994 to discredit all talking therapy related to moving away from same-sex attraction. <sup>7</sup>

### **Lack of clarity about what change efforts involved**

Therapists do appear in the optional answers to Question 26, “Who (if anyone) did you talk to for advice [on changing sexual orientation]?”. One of the options is “NHS Psychotherapist”. Again, however, it is very odd that there is no option for “private practice psychotherapist or counsellor”. Confusingly, there is an option for “Professional psychotherapy (private)” in response to Question 28, “What form(s) did this attempt to change your sexual orientation take?”. Inconsistencies like this tend to mar the quality of the survey.

No questions are asked about the age at which individuals started any of the specified options to try to change sexual orientation, or how long such attempts lasted. Likewise, the survey results include no breakdown of types of change attempts in relation to the options listed under results in Question 31, or the options listed under impact in Question 32 and mental health problems in Question 33.

Some sectors of the press made much of the finding that a small number of respondents said they had been ‘forced’ to undergo sexual relations with a member of the opposite sex as part of efforts to change sexual orientation. However, there is no elaboration at this point as to what ‘forced’ means. Rape and sexual assault are already crimes for which any alleged perpetrator can be arrested, charged and convicted. It is not clear whether ‘forced’ sexual relations refers in some instances to the expectation to have relations, e.g. with a

spouse of the opposite sex. Expectation can still have a coercive and abusive edge to it but failing to make this kind of distinction is nevertheless a problem.

### **No questions asked about deceiving opposite-sex partners**

There is no discussion in the survey about the degree of honesty and openness of respondents regarding change. Some said they had had 'voluntary' sexual activity with a member of the opposite sex to try to change sexual orientation. Here, the question needs to be asked whether those opposite-sex partners were informed of what their intentions were, and did they consent to be part of this or were they deceived into it?

This question needs to be asked because some people hostile to therapy for change tend to argue that people who claim to have experienced change in sexual attraction and married are lying. Their claim is that these people typically used their spouses as fronts for their continued secret same-sex attraction, hiding the fact from them. When it suits them, however, gay activists are perfectly capable of treating such situations as the ones where they have been the 'victims' (presumably of 'societal homophobia').

### **Attitudes to change efforts**

Oddly Question 31 included among the answers two options: "It did not work for me but I do believe it does work for others", and "It did not work for me and I do not believe it works for others". These are not 'results' in the objective sense. They should have been included in a separate question on respondents' outlook.

Question 35 asks why respondents think that 'Sexual Orientation Change Therapy' should be made a criminal offence. The list of options for responses makes for interesting reading. It includes the following: "It is damaging to a person's mental health"; "It causes self-hate"; "It undermines a person's religious faith"; "It costs a lot of money".

These are very poor reasons to criminalise a form of therapy, as the first three options are essentially undefinable. Mental health is not well-defined any more in our western culture. Many things that in the past would have been considered signs of mental ill-health, such as hearing voices, are being normalised. Banning anything and everything individuals believe undermines their beliefs. So freedom of religion would then be lost.

3

### **'Strong evidence of harm' of change efforts not proven**

Given that the Ozanne sample is not a representative sample, its results cannot be held to be "*strong evidence of the harm that attempts to change sexual orientation are reported to inflict*". On the contrary, it is perfectly reasonable to suppose that many people who have benefited from proper counselling or therapy would not have written into this survey. This is especially likely given Jayne Ozanne's expressed and public hostility to all such therapy and her refusal to engage in dialogue on the matter.

- 
- <sup>1</sup> <https://ozanne.foundation/faith-sexuality-survey-2018/>
  - <sup>2</sup> [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1CzY3fcar74T\\_8eJiUrL-ioV9g7koKAob/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1CzY3fcar74T_8eJiUrL-ioV9g7koKAob/view)
  - <sup>3</sup> [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1NpGW3PtZTnT21O4PbwuD\\_rkvk6aG99iv/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1NpGW3PtZTnT21O4PbwuD_rkvk6aG99iv/view)
  - <sup>4</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/?edition-redirect=uk>
  - <sup>5</sup> <https://archbishopcranmer.com/faith-sexuality-conversion-therapy-research/>
  - <sup>6</sup> <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1aUO0wogF-EuJVeNmGb6GqrQagdU7ApKs/view>
  - <sup>7</sup> <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/1994-34347-001>