

Civil Partnerships

Another
Year
On



Executive Summary

The Civil Partnership Act (2004) (hereafter referred to as the CPA) came into force on December 5th 2005 and gives same sex couples the right to legally register their relationship and experience the same legal rights and responsibilities as married couples. Village Citizen's Advice Bureau commissioned this research project a year after the introduction of the Act, in order to explore the experiences of individuals in same-sex relationships who had formed civil partnerships or who may have considered doing so. The aims of the project were to:

- Explore the impact of the Civil Partnership Act (2004) on the needs of potential advice service users;
- Make recommendations for improving advice services for lesbian gay and bisexual clients with respect to forming civil partnerships; and
- Influence policy debate regarding the legal union of same sex couples.

Twenty semi-structured interviews were conducted with individuals who had formed civil partnerships (3 males; 4 females) and individuals in long-term relationships (+ 2 years) who had not formed civil partnerships (8 males; 5 females). The age range of participants was 22 to 62 years and the average length of relationship was 17½ years for those in CPs and 6¾ years for those non-CP relationships.

Thematic analysis of the interview data revealed that the CPA had consequences for individuals in same-sex relationships at a personal, social and socio-legal level. At a social level, participants reported having difficulty with the language surrounding CPs. Social discomfort with homosexuality is brought into sharp focus as individuals struggle to communicate due to a lack of conversational terms that are easy to use and the lack of grammatical equivalents to the terms within traditional marriage discourse. The socio-legal implications of the CPA focussed on the potential for gay individuals who have formed a civil partnership to be forced into revealing their sexual orientation in any circumstances that require disclosure of marital/partnership status. The social and legal implications of these situations are discussed with reference to the advice and information needs of individuals and organisations and also in terms of the wider social debate.

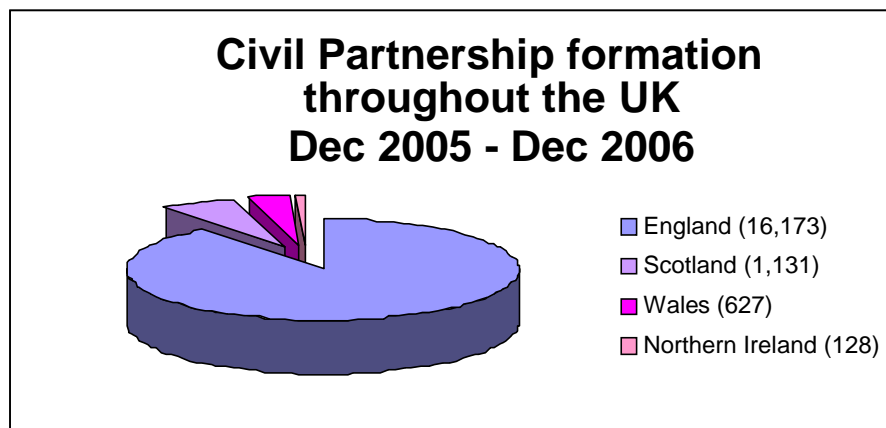
This study provides a snapshot of experiences encountered by individuals in same-sex relationships with respect to civil partnerships. It is recommended that further, quantitative research should be conducted in order to quantify the extent to which these experiences are typical of the wider gay community. Further practical recommendations are made with respect to:

- Encouraging a debate about the use of civil partnership terms with a view to developing a common language structure;
- Clarifying the legal obligations of individuals and organisations with respect to the provision of personal information; and
- Offering advice to organisations on best practice surrounding the handling of their civilly partnered associates.

Introduction

This report documents findings from a research project commissioned by the Village CAB and funded by Citizens Advice, which aimed to explore the advice and information needs of same-sex couples considering civil partnership. By way of introducing the topic, a brief review of previous research on the matter of same-sex unions is presented first. This is followed by an explanation of the method used in the current research and there is then an analysis of the findings and their implications. The final section offers recommendations for improving advice services to the gay community and for raising awareness of the wider social implications of the Civil Partnership Act.

The Civil Partnership Act (2004) (hereafter referred to as the CPA) came into force on December 5th 2005 and gives same sex couples the right to legally register their relationship and experience the same legal rights and responsibilities as married couples. Official statistics indicate that in the 12 months following the introduction of the act, there were just over 18,000 civil partnerships (CPs) formed¹. The overwhelming majority of these took place in England, with only a small number occurring in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (see below).



The Act has been hailed by many as the most significant legislation for the gay community since the de-criminalisation of homosexuality in 1967. Stonewall, one of the main protagonists of the pro-CP lobby, recognised that The Act would not only give same-sex couples in committed relationships legal rights akin to marriage, but would bring social visibility and increased acceptance for same-sex relationships:

“...Stonewall warmly welcomes the Civil Partnership Bill. We think the Bill, if passed, will remedy many of the injustices that committed same-sex couples face in a number of areas. These include inheritance, pensions, next of kin, and the right to make key medical decisions. In addition, the Bill will have a significant impact in terms of valuing lesbian and gay couples and treating their relationships with respect. It will ensure that young gay people grow up knowing that as adults they will be entitled to exactly the same respect as everyone else. If it becomes law, the Bill will have huge cultural and social significance.”²

Meanwhile, a study conducted by Manchester University demonstrated a wide variety of reasons for entering into a civil partnership. The researchers found that *“although the issue of legal rights was important (especially at certain times in the life course) the significance of entering into a CP was not driven purely by instrumental reasons, nor a preoccupation with equality”*³. The reasons given by their participants included the following:

- Love
- The recognition of mutual responsibility
- Achieving family recognition
- To obtain legal rights & recognition
- To make a public statement of commitment

This research revealed that many gay couples, even those planning their own CP ceremony, had concerns about civil partnerships being an endorsement of the patriarchal and heteronormative institution of marriage. The study concluded that despite the benefits identified by couples intent on forming a CP, there were potential costs involved as well. However, due to the early nature of this research, the study was less specific about the precise nature of these more negative outcomes.

Research that has been conducted since the introduction of the CPA has been more accurate in the identification of the more equivocal aspects of CPs. Some studies have demonstrated that there are difficulties with terminology relating to CPs; there has also been recognition of various socio-legal factors that may not have been anticipated by either the letter of the CPA or by those forming partnerships. Firstly, at the time that the CPA was introduced, there was considerable publicity in both the gay and mainstream press often focussing on the ceremonies of high profile couples. It has been suggested that while this may have proved useful in publicising this significant legal change, it is also likely to have increased the level of gossip in both workplaces and social settings about these and related issues⁴. Increased speculation about the sexual orientation of friends, relatives and colleagues is likely to be experienced as extremely uncomfortable by the target, regardless of their sexual orientation.

The second major issue relates to the potential for the forced outing of anyone who has formed a CP. A publication by the Health and Safety Laboratory points out that there are many circumstances that require marital status to be disclosed⁵. Whilst a gay individual in a committed non-CP relationship is quite within their rights to indicate “single” in response to this question, as soon as a CP has been formed this response is no longer accurate. Although this undeniably mirrors the legal position of heterosexual co-habiting and married couples, the *social* position of gay couples is quite different. There remains the unfortunate reality that in many situations, homosexuality retains a measure of social stigma. Just in case there is any question about the prevalence of homophobia, it should be said that in 2000, the British Social Attitudes Survey found that almost half (46%) of the respondents indicated a belief that sexual relationships between same-sex individuals were wrong⁶.

Thus, the social context within which the current research is conceived is highly ambivalent; there are both socio-legal advantages and disadvantages of forming a CP. The purpose of this research project is to conduct an exploration of the impact of the CPA on gay couples with a view to improving advice and information services for the gay community and generating further debate around the socio-legal implications of the CPA that have thus far been neglected.

The formalised research aims are therefore as follows:

- To explore the impact of the Civil Partnership Act (2004) on the needs of potential advice service users;
- To make recommendations for improving advice services for lesbian gay and bisexual clients with respect to forming civil partnerships; and
- To influence policy debate regarding the legal union of same sex couples.

Method

Study design

Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were selected as the most appropriate method for the particular context. Face-to-face interviews were considered more appropriate than a telephone alternative due to the potentially personal nature of the subject matter; the face-to-face format allows the interviewer to respond to non-verbal cues in a way that is not available to telephone interviewers. The semi-structured format was considered appropriate since this allows the researcher to direct the course of the interview, whilst also affording the respondent considerable freedom of expression⁷.

Firstly an interview schedule was constructed for each group of participants (those who had formed CPs; those who had not formed CPs). The interview questions were selected on the basis of the issues raised by the literature review and with the purpose of addressing the primary aims of the research project.

Consideration was given to interviewing participants as couples. However, it was thought that participants may feel inhibited discussing concerns about dissolution matters in the presence of their partner, therefore it was decided that individual interviews would be more appropriate.

Interviews were also conducted with relevant service providers, both from the public and voluntary sector. However, the data from these interviews was used for background information only, therefore a detailed analysis of these interviews will not be presented here.

Participants

It was decided that this research should focus on the experiences of potential advice-service users in committed same-sex relationships, who may or may not have formed a civil partnership. It was therefore decided to recruit individuals in civil partnerships and those in relationships of at least 2 years standing.

The participant sample was generated using a “snowballing” method, in which each interviewee is asked to suggest further potential participants. It is acknowledged that this process does have methodological flaws; in particular, the fact that each new recruit is in some way connected to the one before has the potential to generate an unrepresentative and unusually homogenous sample. However, the timescale involved in the project did not allow for the process of advertising for participants and given that participants were to be drawn from a highly specific sub-section of a minority group, it was decided that the chosen method was the most efficient.

On that basis, a total of 20 participants were interviewed; their details are as follows:

- Individuals who have formed civil partnerships (3 males; 4 females).
- Individuals who are in long-term relationships (+ 2 years) who have not formed civil partnerships (8 males; 5 females).

The age range of participants was 22 to 62 years and the average length of relationship was 17½ years for those in CPs and 6¾ years for those non-CP relationships.

Analysis & Implications of Findings

Thematic analysis has been used to identify & categorise issues emerging from the data from the interviews with potential service-users. The themes emerging from the interviews have been allocated to one of four categories:

- Personal issues
- Social issues
- Socio-legal issues
- Information issues

In each case, implications of the findings are identified and discussed with relation to advice/information services and the wider social debate.

Personal Issues

Reasons for wanting to form a CP

The reasons that individuals gave for wanting to form a civil partnership broadly divided into two main categories: 1) emotional/romantic reasons and 2) legal/practical reasons. (It is acknowledged that these categories are not necessarily mutually exclusive, however they are used here as discreet categories for the sake of clarity and brevity). Many interviewees cited both type of reasons as motivations for wanting a CP, although for most, there was a clear dominance of one type, with the other playing a secondary role.

In the following quotation, the interviewee is purely concerned with forming a CP on the basis that it felt emotionally right for him and his partner, despite the fact that as a couple with two homes, there would be significant financial disadvantages for them:

“we have already set up contracts...we don't need this [CP] for anything...this [CP] is purely something that is positive...certainly there can be negative financial implications and it actually is that in our case but that would absolutely... did not deter us at all from going ahead with it...”
Gay man, non-CP

An alternative view is put forward by one interviewee who is focussing very much on the practical aspects of the new legal status of her 8 year relationship:

“...the nightmare scenario you know in hospital where the parents suddenly reappear and take control ...that wouldn't happen in a straight relationship ninety-nine percent of the time and I really just didn't want either of us to be vulnerable to that and I suppose it was just er ...a clarification to everybody else that that was our wish that we were life partners and they should respect that in any situation that occurs.”

Lesbian, CP

Implications

The examples above demonstrate that for some individuals, forming a CP is assumed to be positive, regardless of any financial disadvantages. People in this situation are much less likely to want to know the legal details of their new status than those for whom the very purpose of CP is to achieve the rights and responsibilities that the new status would bring.

This situation has implications for advice and information providers in terms of both the type of information that is provided and the means by which it is provided. Services need to cater for those individuals who are actively seeking very detailed information about CPs *and* those who are more content to have a basic understanding of their legal standing.

Personal comparisons between CP and marriage

Discussing perceptions of differences between CP and marriage, the most commonly cited difference was the fact that whilst marriage has many religious connotations, religion is statutorily absent from the CP ceremony.

In terms of similarities between CP and marriage, most individuals declared an assumption (though few claimed to be sure) that the legal aspects of CP and marriage were the same.

Lesbian, non-CP:

"I am assuming that if you take out the religious aspect of it [marriage] then for straight people getting married it is the same as for gay people having a civil partnership and that the legal situation is the same...I don't know that they are the same, but I assume they are. "

However, as a number of interviewees pointed out, despite the social familiarity of marriage, the assumed similarity between CP and marriage does not necessarily lead to a greater awareness of the legal implications:

"Do people who do marriage know precisely what is involved? ...there is an assumption that that everything's fine...like inheritance...but people don't know anything... or about kids... do they have any rights...they don't think about it because everyone gets married."

Gay man, CP

Implications

This idea that "everyone gets married" indicates that marriage has the social status of an almost obligatory rite of passage through which everyone is expected to pass. The association between CP and marriage therefore has a number of implications. Firstly, there is the well-worn debate surrounding the notion that CP reinforces the heterosexual models of what are "normal" choices for individuals and couples and superimposes that normative model onto homosexual relationships. This inevitably divides the gay community into those who welcome CP as a step in the right direction towards social and legal equality and those who feel that this particular form of equality is one to which they do not aspire.

There are further implications that are relevant to an advice and information perspective. The fact that the concept of CP is relatively new and unfamiliar may prompt individuals to seek further information about what is involved and what the implications are. By aligning CP with marriage, the decision-making focus shifts from "What are the legal implications of undertaking a CP?" to "Do I want to spend the rest of my life with this person?". The danger is that having reached a decision on the latter, consideration of the former will not occur, with the consequence that individuals may begin to form CPs in ignorance of the rights and responsibilities that it will bring. Therefore, the challenge for advice services is to raise the general level of social consciousness surrounding the legal aspects of forming a CP, instead of assuming that individuals will continue to actively seek out that information.

Social Issues

Difficulties with the terminology around CPs

Inevitably the terminology associated with any newly constructed social entity will feel unfamiliar for a while. However, it was not merely a lack of familiarity that created difficulties for individuals in this study. Some people found the use of the word "civil" created a cold and uninviting impression, whilst others expressed concerns over the lack of obvious grammatical equivalents to traditional marriage terms:

"There's no sort of term [for married]— you can't say you are civilly partnered or whatever, it's quite a mouthful to say, so I think in informal conversation you would just say you are married or ...partnered I suppose but that's still a bit ...it doesn't trip off the tongue really".

Gay man, non-CP

"I wouldn't use the term [civilly partnered] because it is so clumsy and I wouldn't really say married, unless it was a joke ...I would say ...that I have had my civil partnership event...."

Gay man, CP

Other participants expressed a preference for using the more familiar term "marriage" or "wedding" to describe a CP, but pointed out that this creates further questions about the extent to which the traditional marriage discourse is applicable:

"I don't like the term Civil whatsit, I call it my wedding and my wedding reception....though I'm having difficulty in knowing whether to call her my wife or not...but what's she gonna call me you know...I think we need a new word...but I'm not quite sure what word"

Lesbian, CP

Did you **know** that the civil
partnership **equivalent** to
divorce is **dissolution**?
So what is the equivalent of ...

“We got divorced”

=

“We got dissolved” ???

“I am divorced”

=

“I am dissolved”

or maybe even

“I am dissolute” ??!

“I am a divorce(e)”

=

“I am a dissolve(e)”?

Variations in terms used to describe CPs

An issue linked to the previous theme is the fact that many of the interviewees stated that they and their acquaintances may use different terms in different contexts:

"I never use the term marriage; I don't align it with marriage... I don't even think I use the term civil partnership, except in formal situations ...like when I was delivering lesbian and gay awareness training to straight people...but they use the term marriage all the time 'they can get married now' that's what everybody says'.

Lesbian, non-CP

Given that the purpose of language is to aid communication, it is a strange anomaly that in the case of civil partnerships, language is actually serving as a barrier to communication. The quotations below indicate the concern that people have about choosing the "right" term for the "right" audience in the hope of avoiding offence:

"I don't like to call it marriage... but some people will call it marriage then if you don't call it marriage it's awkward..."

Gay man, non-CP

"It depends on the type of audience that you are around, if you are in quite a political audience or even in a mixed setting you might not use the word marriage because some people might find it either in the gay & lesbian world 'well it is not a marriage' or perhaps in the straight world, 'well it's not a marriage like we have a marriage – a marriage is between a man and a woman'... but in informal situations ...I think I would use the word married"

Gay man, non-CP

Implications

Social discomfort with homosexuality is brought into sharp focus as individuals struggle to communicate. Some individuals still find it difficult to discuss their same-sex relationship with friends and family, so confusion in communication compounds what is already for some, quite a delicate situation. Furthermore, the lack of a shared language continues to reinforce the privilege and legitimacy of heterosexual relationships over and above homosexual relationships. Ultimately, the inability to communicate effectively, locates civil partnerships outside of mainstream society.

Imagine you are filling out a form for a **bank loan**...You have just had your **civil partnership** ceremony. The **form** asks you to state your **marital status**, but it has not been **updated** to **include** “civil partnership” as one of the options. What do you **do**?

- a) Tick “married”
- b) Tick “co-habiting”
- c) Tick “single”
- d) Insert another box on the form stating “civilly partnered”

Socio-legal Issues

Potential for forced-outing

Since the introduction of the CPA, gay individuals may be put in a situation where the fact that they have formed a civil partnership may pressurise them into revealing their sexual orientation where they might not have chosen to do so otherwise. Any circumstances which require disclosure of marital/partnership status would inevitably lead to a personal revelation unless information is explicitly withheld or false information is given. This potential for forced outing has been termed a “socio-legal” issue on the basis that the individual has a legal duty to provide correct information in certain circumstances and yet may not want to do so due to the potential for social embarrassment.

It is interesting that very few of the individuals in this study had actually considered this issue. This could have been interpreted as a lack of concern about self revelation had the issue not been probed further. Amongst those who had already undertaken a CP, individuals’ first awareness of the potential for forced outing arose when a relevant situation was encountered:

“I found it very difficult on the phone with my insurance, just trying to get the words out, you know I’ve just had my civil partnership...but that’s one thing...face to face it would be another matter...”

Lesbian, CP

Many of those non-CP interviewees could not foresee any such circumstances without being prompted and assisted by the interviewer. However, once the issue had been raised in the interviews, with examples of potential situations where the individual might be required to divulge information they would rather keep hidden, all participants expressed some concerns over the increased potential for discrimination or harassment on the basis of CP status. This point is highlighted by the following quotation:

“...you’ve got to tell everybody that’s what I would say, that you are married- you are partnered, where it’s my decision at the moment who I tell and when I tell somebody if I’m with someone of not... I’ve worked at places where I would never dare come out and say I was gay and I’ve taken straight girls to Christmas Dos just so that no-one would know that I was gay”.

Gay man, non CP

“I can imagine there is a lot of people ...where they were going for a new job that they would fear that box [for marital status]... I think that is pretty much like putting a box saying ‘are you gay or straight’...people would feel awkward about ticking that box...it would affect people who are unemployed or already in a vulnerable position... it would be yet another reason why they wouldn’t get a job”

Gay man, non CP

Imagine you are **applying** for a job...You work in a **sector** that is not **traditionally** accepting of **homosexuality** and in the past you have always **dealt with** this by letting people get to know you and the **quality** of your **work** first, before **being open** about your sexual orientation. You have **just had** your civil partnership **ceremony** and the application form asks you to state your marital **status**...

What do you **do**?

- a) Tick “married”
- b) Tick “co-habiting”
- c) Tick “single”
- d) Tick “civilly partnered”

How comfortable do you feel about your choice?

Participants were asked to imagine that as an individual in a CP, they were applying for a bank loan and on the form was a question about their marital status. They were told that the options for their response were: married, civil partnerships, single co-habiting, divorced. Though most people said they would in many ways be pleased to tick the box for CP, all expressed reservations about how the information would be used and who it would be shared with:

“The positive statement that you were lesbian or gay seems politically very important... that you are visible to register the fact that you are ticking the box to say you have had a civil partnership seems to be important and I suppose the other side is that there is a certain residual concern about what information is being held publicly and in a society where one sees the erosion of civil liberties and one sees fascist parties securing electoral success I suppose there has to be a slight anxiety about feeling so very public.”

Gay man, CP

For a minority of the participants, the concern about revealing their sexual orientation would be sufficient to respond with an incorrect answer, in order to avoid outing themselves:

“...it’s whether you want people to know or not... so I would probably still tick single...it’s just an automatic reflex...even if I were to go through the civil partnership...”

Gay man, non-CP

Implications

The fact that many people could enter into a CP without considering the implications for self-revelation indicates a distinct lack of foresight. This may be due to the possibility that individuals considering a CP are focussed on more immediate and obvious consequences of their legal union. The benefits of considering the potential for forced outing in advance of forming a CP are manifold, and include the following:

- In full knowledge of all the social and legal consequences the individual can make an informed decision about whether forming a CP is the right choice.
- The individual can be mentally and emotionally prepared for dealing with situations that require self-revelation.
- The individual may choose which organisations to engage with on the basis of their level of “gay friendliness”.
- The individual can avoid situations where they are potentially committing fraud by giving false information due to an automatic reflex for self protection.

Furthermore, gay individuals now have legal protection against discrimination at work (Employment Equality ((Sexual Orientation)) Regulations 2003) and with respect to goods and services (Equality Act ((Sexual Orientation)) Regulations 2007). It is therefore important that the issue of forced outing is linked with information about achieving legal redress in instances where acknowledging a civil partnership status has led to discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

Do **you know** what the
consequences are *for you* of not
being **honest** about your
partnership status when you **apply**
for a **loan/apply** for a job
etc... ???

Is the law clear on this matter... ???

Organisational Responsibilities

With respect to the obligations to declare marital/partnership status in various circumstance, participants pointed out that some organisations have not updated their paperwork to include the option of "Civil Partnership":

"I'm no longer ticking single [on forms], but I can't tick married because I'm not married ...but it's difficult because not all forms and everything are up-to-date..."

Lesbian, CP

It is possible that such organisations are intending to but have not yet done so, but it is also possible that some organisations are ignorant of the need for this relatively minor bureaucratic change.

Although it was accepted that there are some circumstances where organisations would need to know someone's marital/partnership status, some of the interviewees questioned the need for this information in all circumstances:

"As a person who does HR in a company...why ask that question...there is a reason why there is a discrimination act and employers over the years have had to stop asking questions and as an employer myself I can understand why we would love to ask the question are you pregnant or are you trying to get pregnant because employing someone who then goes off pregnant it's a waste of company resources and when you are a small company it really does impact on you...but if you have the civil partnership box it's not really telling you anything...whether they have two children from a previous marriage so it doesn't really help does it..."

Gay man, non-CP

Implications

The implication of having forms that are not updated is that gay people do not know how to respond when the options given do not match their circumstances. Although individuals have a responsibility to provide correct information, organisations have a responsibility to facilitate this. There is a distinct lack of clarity regarding the legal position of individuals and organisations with respect to situations where the organisation has failed to enable the individual to be truthful.

How **comfortable** are you
with the **language**
surrounding
civil partnerships
... and what words do
you use?

*“I am married.....
I am civilly partnered.....
I am partnered....
I have a civil partner.....
I am in a civil partnership...”
or any other terms...?”*

Information Issues

As might be expected, interviewees expressed an interest in various different topics regarding the potential changes involved in forming a CP, including:

- Financial advantages and disadvantages
- Next of kin rights & responsibilities in relation to medical matters
- Rights and responsibilities upon death of a partner
- How welfare benefits would be affected
- Housing rights
- Rights and responsibilities regarding children in the relationship
- Rights on separation

Furthermore, it became apparent that the interview process itself had raised the awareness of some of the participants regarding such matters as the potential for forced outing. Indeed, it was pointed out by one interviewee that information sources should typically highlight these peripheral consequences areas as well as the primary legal changes.

All of the interviewees had come across at least some information about the legal aspects of CPs; the most commonly cited sources of information were the gay press (particularly at the time when the CPA came into force), gay organisations such as the Lesbian and Gay Foundation or Stonewall and internet resources, such as government websites. However, many people felt that the information they needed was not easy to access and reported using multiple sources in order to gain a comprehensive picture.

There was a distinct division between those individuals who wanted lots of highly detailed information on all aspects of the CPA and those who would prefer the main information to be summarised into bullet points in an easily accessible format. Regardless of individual preferences for the level of detail, it was fairly common to hear individuals say that the information that they found did not meet their particular needs:

“Everything that you get is fairly general...I’ve not come across anything that really explains for the person like me which is not interested in religion and dresses and where you’re going to have it and the photographs...I want to know something very factual and legally in-depth...I am happy to read and interpret it myself ...”

Lesbian, non-CP

Regardless of the ages of the interviewees, everyone wanted an easily accessible web-based source of information; most people stated that their first point of access would be the “google” search engine and that they would enter the term “civil partnerships” in order to begin their search.

What **responsibilities** do organisations have to **ensure** that their **procedures** are updated to allow customers/**employees/associates** to answer their questions **honestly...???**

And **what** are the consequences for organisations who ***don't*** update **their** procedures to allow for **open** and honest **answers** to their questions...**???**

Recommendations & Conclusions

In conclusion, it should be said that many individuals welcomed the CPA on the basis that it delivered legal parity for same-sex couples who have long been denied the basic rights that heterosexual couples have enjoyed. However, it was not entirely surprising to discover that many interviewees expressed difficulties with regard to negotiating this radical social change.

The implications of the findings for advice services are that in order to provide an adequate service for potential service users, information needs to be available in a web-based format, with options for both detailed and summarised content. Furthermore, information providers are currently failing to raise awareness of the socio-legal aspects of CPs and this must be addressed; one method of doing so would be to develop information sources that include case studies or hypothetical scenarios, which would illustrate the types of situations that individuals may encounter once they have entered a CP.

Also in relation to the socio-legal aspects of CPs, it is recommended that the Citizen's Advice Bureau Service seeks clarification on the legal obligations of individuals and organisations with respect to the provision of personal information. Once the position has been made clear, information sources can be updated; consideration should also be given to conducting an awareness campaign on how to handle situations of potential forced outing. It is incumbent on advice and information providers not only to raise awareness of these more peripheral, socio-legal consequences of CPs, but to draw together the implications of all the recent legislation relevant to sexual orientation. For instance, where an individual has experienced sexual orientation discrimination due to a declaration of their partnership status, it is important that information is available on how to use the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (2003) and the Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (2007) to achieve redress.

It is also recommended that the CAB develops an information source for organisations regarding best practice surrounding the handling of their civilly partnered associates. The most straightforward solution to the problem of forced outing would be to amend pro forma to include a single category of "married/civil partner", leaving the sexual orientation of *any* respondents unspecified. Perhaps more significantly, organisations should be challenged to consider whether they really need information regarding a person's marital or partnership status.

Regarding the problems encountered with CP terminology, it is suggested that the Village CAB, perhaps together with other specialist service providers, should encourage a debate on this topic within the gay community. Views and experiences of the use of civil partnership terms should be longitudinally canvassed, with a view to developing over time a common language structure that is generated by the community to which it is most relevant.

Although this study provides an overview of experiences encountered by individuals in same-sex relationships with respect to civil partnerships, participant numbers are too small to predict with any certainty how applicable the findings are on a larger scale. The final recommendation is therefore that further, quantitative research should be conducted in order to quantify the extent to which these experiences are typical of the wider gay community.

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Acknowledgements

We are pleased to present this, our first research findings report, in which early effects of the civil partnership legislation are examined. It ought to be regarded as an opening of what is likely to be an evolving debate.

That such a report, which comments on such social reform should be published in the year in which we celebrate the 40th anniversary of the decriminalisation of male homosexuality, is evidence if any were needed of the progress that has been made. We are however mindful that much is left to us, this next generation to complete.

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The Village Citizens Advice Bureau
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