

## Background

Engagement in alternative sexuality (alt-sex) practices, such as kink, fetish, BDSM (bondage/discipline, domination/submission, sadomasochism), or consensual non-monogamy (CNM) are increasingly common. Previous research has estimated at least 30% of adults in the United States have engaged in some kink activity (Herbenick et al., 2017) and 20% have engaged in consensual nonmonogamy (CNM; Hauptert et al., 2017).

Individuals who engage in these activities face stigma and discrimination from health professionals (Bettinger, 2002; Bowling et al., 2022; Dunkley & Brotto, 2019). One survey of alt-sex practitioners found that approximately 11% of respondents reported discrimination from professional or personal service providers (Wright, 2008). Since one-third of American adults may engage in alt-sex practices, it is important that professionals address their potential biases and obtain education for culturally-responsive care and harm reduction.

## Research Objectives

The aim of the study was to identify differences in professionals who are alt-sex "aware" and/or "friendly" compared to those who are not in terms of demographics, experience, personal practices, attitudes, training, and clientele.

- ✓ **Kink and CNM Friendly** - Open to working with clients without pathologizing alt-sex behaviors or interests
- ✓ **Kink and CNM Aware** - Trained in the needs and practices of Kink and Non-monogamy practitioners

## Stigma Affects Health Professionals

Nearly 1/3 of the surveyed health professionals experienced stigma due to serving kink and non-monogamy clients. They reported discrimination affecting their person (e.g. aggression) and work (e.g. loss of job/referral).

## Method

### Research Design

In collaboration with UNC Charlotte, the National Coalition for Sexual Freedom (NCSF) conducted a cross-sectional survey, mixed method survey via Qualtrics. The Attitudes section was made up of the Attitudes Towards BDSM Scale (Kelsey et al., 2013) and the Attitudes Towards Polyamory Scale (Johnson et al., 2015). The UNC Charlotte's institutional review board approved all protocols and procedures.

### Participants

752 participants identified as working in a Health Profession

### Data Collection

- Alt-sex professional listservs in the U.S. that also serve international professionals (e.g. NCSF, American Psychological Association, American Public Health Association Reproductive and Sexual Health Section)
- Non-alt-sex specific professionals internationally (e.g. therapeutic practices, medical groups)

### Data Analysis

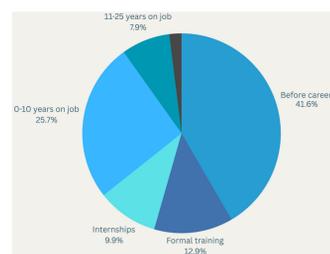
- Chi-Squared Test of independence
- One-Way ANOVA
- Independent Samples t-Test
- Data was analyzed using SPSS v. 29
- Open-ended responses were analyzed in Dedoose using content analysis

## Result & Discussion

### Alt-sex Awareness

Kink & CNM Aware (29.3%)  
Aware & Friendly (37.7%)  
Neither (23%)

When did the professionals become alt-sex aware or friendly:



### Attitudes

Professionals who identified as kinky or non-monogamous showed more positive attitudes toward alt-sex practices.

- 61% of those who are alt-sex aware advertise themselves that way
- 69% of those who are alt-sex aware report that their employer knows

### Alt-sex Clients

There was not a significant correlation between the percentage of clients practicing alt-sex and the professionals' attitudes towards alt-sex.

### Training Received

Only 54% of health professionals were aware of kink aware cultural competency guidelines.

- 68% received formal and informal training
- 16% received formal training
- 16% received formal training
- 15% received informal training

### Endorsement of Alt-sex

Mental health professionals were more likely to endorse alt-sex, while the majority of medical professionals did not approve of or support alt-sex.\*

Previous research suggests that medical professionals equate alt-sex with risky sex. (Bettinger, 2002; Bowling et al., 2022; Dunkley & Brotto, 2019).

## Recommended Training

- ✓ Participants reported that the following training types should be required:
  - Alt-sex community group workshops
  - Continuing education workshops
  - Experience with clients
- ✓ To be alt-sex aware, the most important topics are:
  - Consent
  - Communication
  - Acceptance of others
- ✓ To serve alt-sex clients, the most important topics are:
  - Consent
  - Navigating stigma/discrimination
  - Navigating one's own privilege/biases.

## Demographics

Cisgender Woman (47%)	White (70%)	Heterosexual (47%)	Urban (60%)
Cisgender Man (39%)	Multiracial (16%)	Sexually Diverse (28%)	Suburban (23%)
Gender Diverse (14%)	BIPOC (14%)	Lesbian/Gay/Bi (25%)	Rural (11%)

## References

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