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LGBTQIA Mental Health; Research Show that LGBTQIA People Have Higher Overall Rates of Depression, Anxiety, and Substance Abuse Disorders/LGBTQIA

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the continual injustices and difficulties that the LGBTQIA community faces, as well as the complicated state of mental health within that community. It clarifies the greater prevalence rates of depression, anxiety, and substance use problems among LGBTQIA people compared to their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts by a thorough analysis of the body of research and empirical data. A critical analysis is conducted on the factors that lead to these discrepancies, such as stress experienced by minorities, discrimination, social stigma, and limited availability of affirming health treatments. The piece also examines the intersections of identity within the LGBTQIA community, recognizing the connections between mental health issues and socioeconomic class, race, ethnicity, and gender identity. It's critical to comprehend these complexity in order to build inclusive and successful therapies that support LGBTQIA people's mental health. The article's main focus is on the mental health of LGBTQ community. Due to stigma, discrimination and victimization Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning or Intersex (LGBTQI) youth face particular challenges in society. With the intention of better understanding the challenges and issues that LGBTQI youth are experiencing, this systematic review explored qualitative studies with a focus on mental health services and the requisite social support service policies and programs for LGBTQI youth.

Keywords: *mental health, policies, prejudice, discrimination, violence, depression, anxiety, development.*

I. INTRODUCTION

As we all know, the previous decade has been crucial for the LGBTQIA community in India. They faced intense prejudice, discrimination and violence because of their sexual orientation.

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Prejudice and discrimination have both social and personal impacts. ²On a social level, the stereotypes and social stigmas, despite having any supportive evidence, can impact psychological health. Similarly, on an individual level, such prejudice and discrimination may also have a negative impact on their mental health, especially if the individuals attempt to deny their sexual orientation. LGBTQ+ individuals are at great risk for poor mental health across developmental stages. Research evidence has shown elevated rates of major depression, anxiety disorders, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, substance use and suicidal ideations and attempts. ³While belonging to the LGBTQI community can be a source of strength, it also brings unique challenges. For those who identify as LGBTQI, it's important to recognize how your experience of sexual orientation and gender identity relates to your mental health. People in the LGBTQ community experience mental health issues at higher rates. A recent study found 61% have depression, 45% have PTSD and 36% have an anxiety disorder. Additionally, 40 percent of transgender individuals have attempted suicide in their lifetime. This is nearly 9 times the overall rate in the United States. Many LGBTQ individuals face barriers to getting good care for mental health.

II. UNDERSTANDING LGBTQIA IDENTITY AND MENTAL HEALTH

Everybody has a gender identity and a sexual orientation. Who you are attracted to romantically or physically defines your sexual orientation. The internal sense of being male, female, both, or neither, as opposed to your biological sex, is known as gender identity. ⁴LGBTQ+ refers to those whose gender identification or sexual orientation is different from that of the majority of people. It is crucial to understand that being LGBTQ+ does not imply having a mental condition or disorder. Many LGBTQ+ people battle with their mental health, even though being LGBTQ+ community, the bisexual and transgender communities have the greatest prevalence of mental health issues of all age categories, young LGBTQ+ people experience the greatest mental health issues. ⁵Talking about this significant aspect of one's identity can be unpleasant for some due to the numerous negative misconceptions surrounding the LGBTQ+ community. People may experience rejection from friends, coworkers, and peers if they freely share this aspect of themselves, which can exacerbate feelings of loneliness.

Compared to non-LGBTQIA+ individuals, LGBTQIA+ people are more likely to engage in

² Stephen T. Russell and Jessica N. Fish, *Mental Health in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Youth*, *Annu Rev Clin Psychol.* 2016 Mar 28; 12: 465–487. Published online 2016 Jan 14. doi: 10.1146/annurev-clinpsy-021815-093153

³ Ibid.

⁴ LGBTQIA+ mental health, Available at: <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/lgbtqia-mental-health/about-lgbtqia-mental-health/>

⁵ LGBTQIA+ people's mental health, Available at: <https://mentalhealth-uk.org/lgbtqia-mental-health/>

suicide conduct and self-harm. Compared to the general population, gay and bisexual males are four times more likely to attempt suicide at some point in their lives. Individuals who identify as LGBTQIA+ have a 1.5 times higher risk of developing anxiety and depression than the general population. Transgender people said that 67% had experienced depression in the previous year and 46% had considered suicide. According to Stonewall's 'Prescription for Change' report, self-harm and suicidal thought were more common among lesbian and bisexual women than in the overall population. Bisexuals experience the highest rates of mental health issues, such as depression, anxiety disorders, self-harm, and suicide, out of all general sexual identification categories.

III. ANXIETY AND ITS IMPACT WITHIN THE LGBTQIA COMMUNITY

At some point in their lives, everyone deals with anxiety. ⁶The most fundamental type of anxiety is the uneasy or worried sensation that you have when you have to do something that could have unanticipated results, like giving a speech in front of an audience or taking a big test. Concern should not be expressed; anxiety is a natural response to these circumstances. There are certain individuals whose anxiety is severe enough to be classified as a mental illness requiring medical attention.

Anxiety disorders are one of the many mental ailments that LGBTQ people are more susceptible to. Stigma, trauma and threats, prejudice, anti-LGBTQ legislation, familial rejection, and other factors are among the causes. ⁷It is estimated by recent census findings that over 20 million Americans, or around 8% of the adult population in the country, identify as LGBTQ+. Out of those twenty million, over sixty percent of LGBTQ+ people will experience mental health issues like sadness or anxiety. The majority of LGBTQ+ individuals who have anxiety symptoms also exhibit depressive symptoms. Members of the LGBTQ+ community may be more susceptible to mental health issues, such as anxiety, as a result of their experiences. People who identify as LGBTQ+ are more likely to face prejudice or criticism because of their gender identity or sexual orientation. They might suffer high levels of anxiety as a result of their encounters. People in the LGBTQ community experiences higher rates of mental health issues, particularly anxiety, for a variety of reasons. While every individual face different difficulties, there are also a lot of commonalities that lead to heightened anxiety and anxiety disorders. One major source of concern for LGBTQ people is stigma. Stigma persists

⁶ LGBT Adults Report Anxiety, Depression at All Ages, Available at: <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2022/12/lgbt-adults-report-anxiety-depression-at-all-ages.html>

⁷ Kirti Manaktala, Understanding Depression and Anxiety in the LGBTQIA+ Community and Its Causes, Available at: <https://ijip.in/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/18.01.013.0210903.pdf>

despite changes and attitudes. This community's members continue to endure trauma and oppression in addition to prejudice, rejection, and mockery.

During the COVID pandemic, many young people had to deal with greater mental health challenges. A poll revealed that LGBTQ individuals suffered more. The pandemic made them more prone to experience anxiety and depression. Black LGBTQ adolescents were the most impacted. Many others mentioned having trouble accessing mental health services.

IV. MINORITY STRESS AND IT'S ROLE IN LGBTQIA MENTAL HEALTH

⁸According to the theory of minority stress, people who identify as sexual minorities, underrepresented gender identities, lesbians, and those who identify as LGBTQ+ frequently face particular, ongoing stress because of their gender identity and/or sexual orientation. Individuals of color who identify as LGBTQ+ report greater levels of minority stress, which may be related to the possibility of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, race, or ethnicity.

Anybody, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, race, or ethnicity, can engage in hazardous behaviors and health problems as a result of improperly managed stress. However, the lived experiences of marginalized groups and the characteristics of minority stress raise the risk of mental health issues in LGBTQ+ individuals. ⁹It's possible that LGBTQ+ individuals lack the support networks necessary to effectively manage their stress and emotions. Furthermore, the actions people do to defend themselves frequently backfire. Building walls and being cautious of danger are natural defenses when you are constantly in danger. The simplest thing to do if you're worried about being disliked by someone is to simply deny them the opportunity to reject you. If everything looks frightening, it could feel safer to stay at home by yourself. The issue is that feeling on guard all the time can exacerbate stress, despair, worry, and exhaustion. It also takes away from you the opportunity to build relationships that contribute to a happy and healthy life.

It may also make it more difficult for LGBTQ+ individuals to receive the necessary medical care. According to a Rainbow Health poll, forty percent of adult LGBTQ+ Minnesotans avoided medical appointments, when necessary, out of fear of being treated disrespectfully or unfairly. Fear is warranted because it hasn't always been simple for members of the LGBTQ+

⁸ Kiki Fehling, LGBTQ+ Mental Health and the Role of Minority Stress, Available at: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/building-a-life-worth-living/202403/lgbtq-mental-health-and-the-role-of-minority-stress?amp>

⁹ Keren Lehavot and Jane M. Simoni, The Impact of Minority Stress on Mental Health and Substance Use Among Sexual Minority Women, Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4059829/>

community to obtain medical care that respects and validates their gender or sexual orientation. The minority stress hypothesis offers important new perspectives on the differences in mental health that sexual minorities experience.¹⁰ According to this idea, sexual minorities who experience discrimination, internalized homophobia, and concealment as well as external bias events are more likely to experience psychological distress. This theory is consistently supported by a substantial body of evidence within the LGBT community, highlighting the ways in which experiences with discrimination, harassment, bullying, concealment, and internalized homophobia lead to psychological distress and conditions associated with stress, including thoughts of suicide. People who identify as LGBT+ are especially susceptible to ongoing social stress brought on by prejudice against them because of their sexual orientation.

V. LGBTQ COMMUNITY AND THEIR STRUGGLE TO FREEDOM

¹¹The struggle of LGBT people for equal rights has moved to center stage. Everywhere, in Congress, in courtrooms and in the streets the LGBT people are battling for their civil rights. As a full participant in society, gay and lesbian people are featured in movies and on television. However, LGBT people continue to face real discrimination in all areas of life. No federal law is preventing a person from being fired or refused a job on the basis of sexual orientation. The U.S. military openly discriminates against gays and lesbians. If the child is gay or lesbian then the parents lose child custody.

Through some of the strictest of laws, the Indian legal system has bound LGBTQ people in chains over the years. They don't have the simplest of rights. In order to live a life of dignity, they have to fight much bigger battles than the rest of us. As it is, our social system has always tried to victimize them ruthlessly. Day and night, they find themselves the targets of raised eyebrows.

In 1992 Colorado enacted Amendment 2, which repealed existing state laws and barred future laws protecting lesbians, gay men and bisexuals from discrimination.

The modern gay rights movement began dramatically in June 1969 in New York City's Greenwich Village. During a typical "raid", police tried to arrest people for their mere presence at a gay bar, but the patrons of the Stonewall Inn fought back and the gay rights movement was launched. Using many of the litigation strategies employed by other 20th century activists, gay

¹⁰ Ilan H Meyer, *Minority Stress and Mental Health in Gay Men*, April 1995 *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 36(1):38-56 April 1995 36(1):38-56, DOI:10.2307/2137286, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/15461517_Minority_Stress_and_Mental_Health_in_Gay_Men

¹¹ LGBTQ community and their struggle to freedom is available at: <https://www.aclu.org/other/rights-lesbian-gay-bisexual-and-transgender-people>

rights advocates have achieved significant progress:

- Ten states, the District of Columbia, many municipalities and hundreds of businesses and universities now ban employment discrimination.
- “Domestic Partnership” programs exist in dozens of municipalities and hundreds of private institutions, including many of the country’s largest corporations and universities.
- Sodomy laws, typically used to justify discrimination against gay people, once existed nationwide; they are now on the books in only 18 states and Puerto Rico.

Transgender people in India are allowed to change their legal gender post-sex reassignment surgery under legislation passed in 2019, and have a constitutional right to register themselves under a third gender. Additionally, some states protect hijras, offer welfare benefits, pension schemes, free operations in government hospitals as well as other programmes designed to assist them. There are approximately 480,000 transgender people in India.

VI. BEING LGBT IN INDIA

Today, ¹²homosexuality may be acceptable to more Indian youths than ever before, but within the boundaries of family, home and school, acceptance of their sexuality and freedom to openly express their gender choices still remain constant struggle for LGBT people. In urban India, social media have created increasing awareness of LGBT rights, the scenario looks more upbeat for gay men than for transgender people or lesbian women. While urban LGBT voices that are heard through online and real-world platforms form an important part of the diverse challenges faced by the community

In rural India families have their own ways of dealing with LGBT individuals. In some areas, they plan to kill LGBT people secretly so that the only way for a young gay man to survive is to run away in the cover of the night to some city with no money or support.

In other parts, lesbian women are subjected to family-sanctioned corrective rapes, which are perpetrated by their own family members. Even in educated urban India, suicides by lesbian women make headlines every year.

One of the major factors that results in the stigmatization of LGBT people is parental reaction towards homosexuality. ¹³The study goes on to conclude that most LGBT people are acceptable

¹² Siddhesh Patil, LGBTQIA+ and their situation in India, Available at: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/readersblog/xpresblogs/lgbtqia-and-their-situation-in-india-44668/>

¹³ Manasi Gopalakrishnan, How does India perceive homosexuality?, Available at: <https://amp.dw.com/en/how-does-india-perceive-homosexuality/a-65345146>

to family only if they agree to behave like heterosexuals. The lack of family support can prove to be a big blow to the mental and physical health of LGBT people. Many of them prefer to move to another city to stay away from the immense pressure to marry and start a family. Families that accept their identities put many restrictions in the way they choose to dress and interact with their partners. In the absence of family support, online groups and social media have offered accessible alternatives to form a community outside of family.

The human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people are coming into sharper focus around the world, with important advances in many countries in recent years, including the adoption of new legal protections. The preamble to the Indian Constitution mandates justice – social, economic, and political equality of status for all. The right of equality before law and equal protection under the law is guaranteed in Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution. **In April 2014, the Supreme Court of India ruled in ¹⁴NALSA vs Union of India** that the rights and freedoms of transgender people in India were protected under the Constitution; in September 2018, the Supreme Court also decriminalized adult consensual same-sex relationships in the Section 377 judgment review.

India is a vast and diverse country and attitudes towards this subject and experiences of LGBTI individuals vary vastly. India's LGBT citizens are not a "minuscule minority". They have a voice that is strong and refuses to be silent any longer in their efforts to reclaim equality.

VII. WHAT WE AS INDIVIDUALS CAN DO?

As a classmate

- If you witness anti-LGBTQ harassment or discrimination, report it in writing to the school principal.
- Stand up for your LGBTQ friends, and voice your support for their being treated with respect and acceptance.
- Support friends in their decision to bring a same-sex date to the prom or other social events.
- Request books by LGBTQ authors and about LGBTQ people and issues for the school library.

As Faculty and Staff

- Make your classroom a safe space where antigay language is not tolerated.

¹⁴ NATIONAL LEGAL SERVICES AUTHORITY (NALSA) VS. UNION OF INDIA AIR 2014 SC 1863

- Advocate for your school to adopt and enforce a nondiscrimination policy that includes sexual orientation and gender identity.
- Ensure school events include everyone.
- Create lesson plans about LGBT History Month.

As Parents and Family Members

- Support your children and their friends who question their sexuality or identify as LGBTQ.
- Be available to meet with school faculty or staff about discrimination or harassment.

Don't make assumptions about people's sexual orientation or gender identity. Speak out against homophobia, transphobia and anti-LGBTQ harassment and discrimination. Speak out against the use of antigay slurs. Be supportive of anyone who chooses to come out.

VIII. CONCLUSION

In this article, it is concluded that LGBT people have higher rates of mental health challenges than the general population. LGBT people often struggle with depression, anxiety, trauma and self – acceptance as a result of facing ongoing discrimination over their lifetimes. These higher rates of mental health challenges are due to heightened and long – term exposure of LGBT people to societal and institutional prejudice and discrimination. LGBT people unquestionably experience long – term stress related to their sexual orientation or gender identity. They often internalize the negative messages about being different. Moreover, LGBT people witness physical assaults against others they identify with, which further threaten their sense of physical and emotional safety.
