



# The Prominence of Mental Illness in the LGBTQ+ Community



## Introduction

Even though the world has progressed significantly regarding public support for the LGBT community, there is still an unfortunate stigma surrounding social regulation of gender and sexuality. Due to a history of persecution leading to years of backlash, and constant social pressures presented by society, the people of the LGBT community are dealing with unfair consequences such as prominent mental health issues. Throughout history, simply being anything other than heteronormative was an illness, and at some points in time, even a crime. The presence of bullying, hate crimes, and invalidation creates an aura of pain surrounding the identities of these people. This hatred and violence bestowed upon the LGBT community can lead to severe emotional trauma and namely mental illness. Research suggests that through support and de-stigmatization of anti-LGBT communities, there is hope of a brighter future for these individuals.

## Defining Mental Illness

- Up until very recently, homosexuality had been classified as a fetish-like mental illness in the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) (Perone 768).
- The DSM also regarded gender identity issues as fetish disorders. The DSM IV, our most current version of the publication, focuses on “gender dysphoria” (defined as persistent discomfort with gender role or identity) instead of “gender identity disorder”. Some might note this as a positive move towards focusing on the actual issue of incongruence with gender identity rather than the unease with the incongruence (Perone 769).
- Gender dysphoria and other gender related subjects are still categorized in the DSM, right along with mental disorders relating to sexual deviance. Because of this correlation, many transgender individuals face problems living as a member of society due to issues such as job termination or losing custody of their children (Person 770).
- Interestingly enough, despite the fact that certain identities are still classified as mental illness, there is a stigma surrounding even this. Even though gender identity issues are still regarded to a similar level of “other” mental illnesses that are eligible for disability assistance, there is no funding for that whatsoever. Angela Perone of the University of Michigan exemplifies this: “an unemployed single [individual] living in poverty may qualify for federal disability benefits up to \$721 in 2014 if [they are] 65 or older, blind, or determined to have a disability (Social Security Administration, 2014). Moreover, a poor transgender [individual] who seeks hormone treatment or surgery, or a transgender child who seeks hormone blockers, may lack necessary insurance coverage (Perone 770).” The classification of mental illness is not wanted, however, there is a double standard even within the stigma.

## Statistical Research

Because of factors such as discrimination and isolation, LGBT individuals are more vulnerable to mental health problems.

- ONS quality of life metrics (based on life satisfaction, happiness and perception that things they do are worthwhile) reports that the LGBT population scored lower on the scale compared to the general population (Mental Health Statistics 4).
- 60 percent of LGBT youth reported feeling so hopeless that they stopped doing some of their usual activities (Human Rights 3).
- According to the Journal of Child and Psychiatric Nursing, LGBT youth who cannot find support and acceptance with their families are three times as likely to consider and attempt suicide than those who can (Human Rights 3).
- In 2014, a study found that LGBT people living in less accepting and more prejudiced communities die about twelve years earlier than those living in less stigma-driven ones (Kidd 5).

When one is living in a world where they are chastised for being the person that they are, it only makes sense that their quality of life will diminish, thus leading to depressive states and possibly even suicide.

- A 2016 study showed that transgender students who were denied appropriate access to their bathrooms on campus were 45% more likely to attempt suicide (Human Rights 5).
- On the same path, “after states began passing bans on marriage equality, the prevalence of mood disorders increased more than 30 percent among LGBT respondents in these states, compared with a 20 percent decrease in states without such bans” (Human Rights 16). Dismissing someone’s needs such as using their appropriate bathroom or rights such as marriage equality definitely contributes to the confining feeling the LGBT community feels on a day to day basis, and for that reason, there is an overall increase in mental health issues within the LGBT community.

## Addressing the Debate

There is some debate that the number of LGBT individuals in mental health care is similar to those in the general population. This is based on survey claims and reported statistics.

- Many LGBT individuals seeking clinical help will not disclose their identity out of fear.
- A study funded by the Center for Mental Health Services found that many LGBT patients reported that mental health clinicians regard “exploration or expression of their sexual or gender identity is further evidence that they are mentally ill” (Huygen 7).
- Some who have been in psychiatric hospital programs reported that they have been faced with derogatory and threatening behavior by both the staff and other patients. For these reasons, most “reported” data is inaccurate due to the overwhelming amount of LGBT patients that hide their identity. It can be clearly interpreted that this prejudice can disrupt the benefits of the treatment itself, possibly leading to an individual deeming seeking medical treatment in the future pointless (Huygen 7).

## Conclusion

There is still an unfortunate stigma surrounding social regulation of gender and sexuality, despite all of the positive movements forward. Due to the history of persecution that has led to years of backlash for the LGBT community, and the constant social pressures of our society, the people of this community are facing unfair consequences such as prominent mental health issues. There is a direct association between discrimination and mental illness, and most statistics point towards the belief that acceptance and positive reinforcement goes a lot way in preventing these mental health issues. In the meantime, through advocacy and education, hopefully, in the near future, the mindsets behind the stigma will cease, and the people of the LGBT community can experience the pursuit of happiness that is held dear in the hearts of many.

## References

1. Human Rights Campaign Foundation. Mental Health and the LGBTQ Community. (n.d.) Retrieved from [https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/LGBTQ\\_MentalHealth\\_OnePager.pdf](https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/LGBTQ_MentalHealth_OnePager.pdf)
2. Huygen, C. (2006). Understanding the Needs of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender People Living With Mental Illness. MedGenMed. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1785208/>
3. Mental health statistics: LGBT people. (2020, January 16). Retrieved from <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/statistics/mental-health-statistics-lgbt-people>
4. Perone, A. K. (2014). The social construction of mental illness for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons in the United States. Qualitative Social Work: Research and Practice, 13(6), 766–771. doi: 10.1177/1473325014543544
5. Kidd, S. A., Howison, M., Pilling, M., Ross, L. E., & McKenzie, K. (2016). Severe Mental Illness in LGBT Populations: A Scoping Review. Psychiatric Services, 67(7), 779–783. doi: 10.1176/appi.ps.201500209