

A Narrative Review on the Psycho-Social Challenges Faced by LGBTQA+ Community

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Abstract: *The LGBTQA+ community continues to face a broad spectrum of psycho-social challenges stemming from systemic discrimination, cultural stigma, lack of social support, and unequal access to health and legal services. This narrative review aims to explore these challenges in depth, analysing literature from multiple disciplines including psychology, sociology, and public health. By synthesizing existing research, this review identifies recurring patterns of mental health issues, social marginalization, and resilience mechanisms within the community. It also emphasizes the need for inclusive policy frameworks and further research to address these disparities.*

Keywords: LGBTQA+, psycho-social challenges, stigma, discrimination, mental health, social support, minority stress, Trans phobia, substance abuse, Asexuality Sexual identity Sexual orientation

1. Introduction

The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Asexual, and other sexual and gender minority (LGBTQA+) community continues to experience significant psychological distress due to societal stigma, discrimination, marginalization, and limited access to inclusive mental health services. The mental health disparities are closely linked to minority stress theory, which postulates that individuals from stigmatized groups experience unique, chronic stressors that influence their well-being. Psychological challenges such as anxiety, depression, substance abuse, suicidal ideation, and low self-esteem are prevalent within this population. Research identifying substance use behaviours and substance use disorder epidemiology among lesbian, gay, bisexual (LGB), and sexual minority individuals is relatively new, as it was only in the past two decades that large-scale epidemiological studies started to ask questions about sexual orientation.

Estimates of substance use among the sexual minority population vary depending on how sexual orientation and substance use have been measured, in addition to variability based on other aspects of research methodology (Green & Feinstein, 2012). Transgender and gender diverse people are part of a socially marginalized group. Because of chronic marginalization and isolation, individuals can feel lonely. Even in the absence of social separation, the feeling of loneliness may result from an unfriendly environment that lacks affectionate care and help. Social isolation is associated with increased mortality and several illnesses, for example, cardiovascular and mental health diseases. Objective social isolation is defined as having a low quantity and quality of contact with others. It can be measured using the number of persons in an individual's social network.

Perceived social isolation refers to a feeling of not belonging to the society. Loneliness is the feeling of discrepancy between actual and desired social relations. Actual and perceived social isolation are both associated with increased risk for mortality and morbidity. Thus, loneliness is associated with several negative health outcomes including coronary heart disease and stroke, dementia, poor mental health, and metabolic syndrome.

The adoption of a sexual orientation that is inconsistent with heteronormative expectations can constitute a threat to the maintenance of a stable and coherent identity (Coyle & Rafalin, 2000; Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010; Prause & Graham, 2007). In the case of asexuality, one source of tension between self-identification and social acceptability arises from its position relative to heterosexual relationship forms and sexual practices. Whereas identifying as sexually active and gay entails a divergence from heterosexual norms in the script for sexual expression, asexual differ through omission, by identifying with not engaging in sex. Asexuality therefore constitutes a unique threat to the sexual identification component of the self-concept, given the nature of its departure from the accepted societal norm. This review aims to provide a narrative synthesis of literature concerning the psycho-social challenges faced by LGBTQA+ individuals/community.

Global Prevalence

On average, across the 27 countries surveyed, 4% population identify as other than male or female vs. 1% among all adults. On average, globally, 80% identify as heterosexual, 3% as gay, lesbian or homosexual, 4% as bisexual, 1% as pansexual or Omni sexual, 1% as asexual, 1% as "other", and 11% don't know or won't say. Globally, 7% say they are only or mostly attracted to the same sex, 4% equally to

the sexes, 83% only to the opposite sex and 6% don't know or prefer not to say.

Prevalence in India: Approximately around 10% of India's population, or roughly 135 million people, identify as LGBTQ+, though only 2% identify as gay.

Psychological challenges faced by LGBTQA+ community

The LGBTQA+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, and Asexual) community often faces unique psychological challenges. These challenges are often intensified by external stressors such as bullying, family rejection, social isolation, and even violence. Internally, individuals may grapple with identity-related stress, internalized homophobia or Trans phobia, and fear of coming out. These experiences can contribute to a higher prevalence of depression, anxiety, substance use disorders, and suicidal ideation within the community. Addressing these issues requires not only individual support but also broader societal changes to promote inclusion, understanding, and mental health equity.

Social challenges faced by LGBTQA+ community

LGBTQA+ continues to face a range of social challenges despite growing awareness and advocacy for equal rights. These challenges often stem from deep-rooted societal norms, cultural beliefs, and legal structures that have historically marginalized non-heteronormative identities. Discrimination, lack of acceptance, limited access to healthcare, and social exclusion are just a few of the obstacles that LGBTQA individuals encounter on a daily

basis. Understanding these social challenges is crucial in fostering a more inclusive, respectful and supportive society for all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

2. Methodology

The present study is a narrative review to assess the psycho-social challenges faced by LGBTQA+ community. Literature from 2009 to 2024 was searched using electronic database from PubMed, Cochrane, Research gate, SCOPUS, Google Scholar and Elsevier clinical library. The study is a Methodological study to assess the psycho-social challenges faced by LGBTQA+ community by assessing the effectiveness of digital app.

Electronic database search was done to extract the articles related to the theme of research problem and related terms using the keywords -“Psychological challenges” AND “Social challenges” OR “Substance abuse” AND “LGBTQA+ community”

A total of 12 articles were reviewed, that includes cross sectional surveys (incidence and Prevalence studies), Randomized controlled trials, Clinical trials and conclusion was drawn based on the review of articles findings.

Supportive literature related to Psycho-social challenges faced by LGBTQA+ community

Author/ Year	Title	Method	Sample/ Sampling Technique	Result
Wei Huang 2021	Analysis on Depression Among LGBTQ Population: A Qualitative study	The Hamilton Depression Scale is used to test the depression	41 Homosexual 40 Normal people (Control Group) using Purposive sampling technique	It is found that the LGBGQ population has a higher tendency for depression compared to normal people
Helen Oetjen, Esther D. R et.al. 2022	When Lesbians Aren't Gay: Factors Affecting Depression among Lesbians: A Descriptive study	The Centre for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D)	167 Lesbians using Snowball sampling technique	Lesbians had 17.8% variance in depression compared to gay
André Hajek et.al, 2022	Prevalence and Determinants of Depressive and Anxiety Symptoms among Transgender People: Results of a Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patient health questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9) for Depression • Generalized anxiety disorder-7 (GAD-7) to assess Anxiety 	104 Transgender using Purposive sampling technique	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 33.3% transgender had probable depression • 29.6% transgender had probable anxiety • 21.4% transgender had both probable depression and anxiety
Karine J. Igartua, et.al, 2009	Internalized Homophobia: A Factor In Depression, Anxiety, And Suicide In The Gay And Lesbian Population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BAI (Breck Anxiety Inventory) • BDI (Breck Depression Inventory) • Structured questionnaire for suicidality 	220 using Purposive sampling technique	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 18% had variance of depression • 12% had variance of anxiety • 60% had suicidal ideation • 10% attempted suicide
André Hajek, et.al, 2023	Loneliness and Social Isolation among Transgender and Gender Diverse People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • De Jong Gierveld Loneliness tool was used to assess loneliness • The Bude and Lantermann tool was used to measure perceived social isolation • Lubben Social Network Scale to 	96 using Probability sampling technique	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevalence rate of loneliness was 83.3% • Perceived social isolation 77.7% • Objective social isolation 34.4%

		assess objective social isolation		
Pa'draig M, Aisli M., 2014	Freedom, Invisibility, and Community: An exploratory Study of Self-Identification with Asexuality	AVEN (Asexual Visibility and Education Network forum)	66 using Purposive sampling technique	31 participants identified as female, 15 as male, 18 gave a different label such as gender queer or androgynous, and 2 did not provide information on gender
Maria J. A. et.al, 2020	Experiences with stigmatization among transgender individuals after transition: A qualitative study in the Netherlands	Face-to-face semi-structured interviews	20 (10 Trans women and 10 Trans men)	Trans women appeared to experience stronger social stigma than trans men. Trans women also experienced lower social status after their transition compared to trans men
Margaret M. et.al, 2024	Experiences of and recommendations for LGBTQ+-affirming substance use services: an exploratory qualitative descriptive study with LGBTQ+ people who use opioids and other drugs: An exploratory study	Interview technique	23 using Purposive sampling technique	Out of 23 participants, 21 had used opioid in the past 1 year and the remaining 2 participants are undergoing in patient detox treatment
Annesa Flentjie et.al, 2015	Substance Use Among Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Clients Entering Substance Abuse Treatment: Comparisons to Heterosexual Clients	California Outcome Measurement System (CalOMSTx)	LGB-1441 Hetrosexual-11770 using Purposive sampling technique	Prevalence of Methamphetamine was found to be the primary substance of abuse 44.5% and 21.8% respectively. 34% were addicted to Heroin.
Cesar A G et.al, 2017	Demographic Characteristics, Components of Sexuality and Gender, and Minority Stress and Their Associations to Excessive Alcohol, Cannabis, and Illicit (Non-cannabis) Drug Use Among a Large Sample of Transgender People in the United States	Risk Behavioural Assessment to assess alcohol, cannabis, and illicit drug use in the past 3 months	1210 680 Transgender Women and 530 Transgender men	21.5% of participants reported excessive alcohol use; no significant differences were found on the rates of excessive alcohol use between transgender women and men. Cannabis use among our sample was 24.4% ; transgender men reported significantly higher rates of cannabis use compared to transgender women. Illicit drug (non-cannabis) use among our sample was 11.6% ; transgender men
Weber, G. N. 2008,	Using to numb the pain: Substance use and abuse among lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals	Schedule for Heterosexist Events (SHE), Internalized Homophobia Scale (IHP), Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT), and the Drug Abuse Screening Test (DAST)	824 lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) individuals using Purposive sampling technique	Gay males and lesbians reported experiencing more heterosexism than bisexuals, and gay males and bisexuals reported experiencing more internalized homophobia than lesbians. Participants who were classified as having at least one alcohol or drug use disorder were significantly more likely to have experienced heterosexism and internalized homophobia than those who were not classified as having a substance use disorder
Gina M. S, et.al, 2021	Transgender Youths' Perspectives on Telehealth for Delivery of Gender-Affirming Care	Semi Structured Interview	204 using Survey	(47%) of the youth expressed interest in receiving gender care via telemedicine and (45%) were interested in receiving gender care in the primary care setting

3. Limitations of the Study

- This narrative review is limited to English-language publications, potentially excluding relevant findings from non-English-speaking regions.
- It is not a systematic review; hence, it may not capture all relevant studies.

- The diversity within the LGBTQA+ community may not be fully represented in the selected literature.

4. Future Scope

1) Mental Health and Well-Being

- Longitudinal studies on the mental health impact of discrimination and stigma.

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- Effects of inter-sectionality (e.g., race, disability, socioeconomic status) on mental health in LGBTQA+ individuals.
- Culturally sensitive mental health interventions tailored for different LGBTQA+ subgroups.
- The impact of minority stress and resilience strategies in diverse LGBTQA+ populations

2) Family and Social Relationships

- Parental acceptance and rejection of LGBTQA+ individuals and its long-term effects.
- The role of chosen families in supporting mental well-being.
- Effects of social media on identity formation and mental health.

3) Workplace and Educational Challenges

- Inclusive workplace policies and their effectiveness in reducing discrimination.
- Psychological effects of workplace micro-aggressions on LGBTQA+ employees.
- The impact of LGBTQA+ inclusive curricula in schools on students' mental well-being.

4) Legal and Policy Implications

- Psychological impact of legal recognition of same-sex marriage and gender identity rights.
- Comparative analysis of policies across different countries and their effects on LGBTQA+ well-being.
- Effects of anti-LGBTQA+ legislation on mental health and community resilience.

5) Aging and Elderly LGBTQA+ Populations

- Challenges faced by aging LGBTQA+ individuals in accessing healthcare and social support.
- Experiences of older LGBTQA+ individuals in nursing homes and assisted living facilities.
- Mental health outcomes of lifelong discrimination and resilience in elderly LGBTQA+ individuals.

5. Conclusion

The LGBTQA+ community faces significant psychological challenges rooted in societal stigma, discrimination, and exclusion. Although resilience and support systems mitigate some of these effects, substantial disparities remain. This review underscores the necessity of culturally competent, affirming mental health care and broader societal changes to reduce stigma and promote equality.

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