



Perspective/Opinion

Mental Health for Members of the LGBTQ Community During the COVID 19 Pandemic

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Annie Lakatos reflects on mental health and the pandemic for the LGBTQ community.

The balancing act of taking care of our physical and emotional well-being has been significantly strained during the COVID 19 pandemic. This is particularly true for members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning (LGBTQ) community given historical marginalization and challenges associated to accessing equitable, affirming healthcare.

Anxiety and depressive symptoms can be an anticipated response to stress, loss, and other events in life. When these symptoms become intrusive and persistent, people may struggle to maintain relationships, complete work-related responsibilities, and preserve routines that are important for keeping afloat. Members of the LGBTQ community who already live with anxiety and depression may have experienced a loss of their typical support systems as everyone addressed new stress and strain related to the pandemic. Physical distancing can translate to social distancing, and this can increase the impact on individuals as well as the community.

Finding time to care for oneself may not be enough. Maintaining social connections to friends, supportive family members, and social groups can help mitigate the negative impact of the pandemic. Online resources, such as the PACT-NOW series developed by the Inclusion Health Clinic and FORGE Wisconsin in 2020, provided virtual social events that focused on specific topics pertinent to the LGBTQ community. The creation of social bubbles can also ensure people feel connected to important people in their lives without greatly increasing their risk of COVID exposure. As the pandemic continues, people may feel increasingly exhausted and the burden of anxiety and/or depression may intensify. Members of the LGBTQ community who already have limited social connections may feel this increased burden. It is important to reach out to health care providers who can discuss the best options available to help navigate these

feelings and circumstances while devising a specific plan of care which may involve therapy, medication, or both.

Traditionally, the medical community has separated each body system into its own specialty to advance knowledge and provide focused care. However, our bodies work as a symphony and when one part is not working at its potential, it can affect the entire system. Supporting mental health IS supporting physical health. Akre, et al. (2021) found higher rates of anxiety, depression, and alcohol use in the LGBTQ community as compared to cis-gender, straight individuals during the COVID-19 pandemic. People who identify as LGBTQ can benefit from seeing clinicians who are familiar with the unique challenges faced by members of the community; this is especially true during this pandemic. Clinicians can create a space to hear their patients, take time to understand their needs, and support their journeys towards better health and well-being.

Anxiety, depression, and other symptoms may be a part of the human condition and the pandemic has intensified these factors for some. For members of the LGBTQ community, access to affirming healthcare not only facilitates connecting people with the right resources and care but ensures continued growth and well-being for the years to come.

Akré, E. R., Anderson, A., Stojanovski, K., Chung, K. W., VanKim, N. A., & Chae, D. H. (2021). Depression, Anxiety, and Alcohol Use Among LGBTQ+ People During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *American journal of public health, 111*(9), 1610–1619.
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