

Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) people are likely to be at higher risk for depression. The reason for these disparities is most likely related to the societal stigma and resulting prejudice and discrimination that GLBT face on a regular basis, from society at large, but also from family members, peers, co-workers and classmates.

## Special Considerations

### *Dual or Double Stigma*

Mental illness is regrettably still stigmatized in our society. So, too, is being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered. A GLBT person with depression may be in the unfortunate position, then, of having to contend with both stigmas. They may also have to deal with additional job stress or the loss of friends. This societal stigma can contribute to and exacerbate existing mental health problems. Rather than be stigmatized, some GLBT may choose to keep their sexuality a secret, which also causes psychological stress.

### *Family Support*

It is helpful for people with depression to rely on family for support. However, for some GLBT people, families are not accepting of their sexual orientation or gender identity. In extreme cases, GLBT people are disowned or kicked out of their homes, which leaves them without an important source of support. Such situations may contribute to more vulnerability among this population. Research released by Caitlin Ryan, PhD, Director of the Family Acceptance Project at the César E. Chávez Institute at San Francisco State University in early 2009 has established a predictive link between specific, negative family reactions to their child's sexual orientation and serious health problems for these adolescents in young adulthood—such as depression, illegal drug use, risk for HIV infection, and suicide attempts.

### *Violence*

The societal stigma and prejudice against GLBT people takes many forms. Too often, they can take the form of verbal or physical violence. Experiences of violence can have significant and enduring consequences for mental health. A recent study found that 25 percent of gay and bisexual men and 20 percent of lesbian and bisexual women had experienced victimization as an adult based on their sexual orientation. In turn, these groups also reported more symptoms of depression.

### *Internalized Homophobia*

Homophobia refers to irrational fear or hatred of gay people. Sometimes, GLBT people turn society's negative view about them inward, or internalize it. This can affect psychological well-being and can have consequences for healthy development, particularly among youth.

## Treatment Considerations

Self-acceptance of sexual identity is one factor that has been shown to predict recovery from depression and/or substance abuse in gay men.

It is often the case that GLBT people experience a mental health care system that is not comfortable with or sensitive to issues related to sexual orientation. At the same time, the GLBT community may not be sensitive to or educated about serious mental health issues. Mental health providers need to be aware of GLBT issues like stigma, family support, violence and internalized homophobia and how they may affect mental health and well-being among their GLBT clients and patients.

In sum, GLBT people have to contend with societal stigma and negative experiences that may contribute to an increased vulnerability to mental illnesses like depression. It is important to note, however, that despite this, most GLBT people ultimately live happy and healthy lives.

For more information, visit NAMI's Multicultural Action Center's GLBT mental health resources section at:

[www.nami.org/Template.cfm?Section=Resources&Template=/ContentManagement/HTMLDisplay.cfm&ContentID=28243](http://www.nami.org/Template.cfm?Section=Resources&Template=/ContentManagement/HTMLDisplay.cfm&ContentID=28243)

## Web Resources

- [www.therainbowbabies.com/Depression.html](http://www.therainbowbabies.com/Depression.html)
- [www.healthplace.com/gender/depression-and-gender/depression-and-mental-health-emerge-as-major-concerns-for-the-community/menu-id-59](http://www.healthplace.com/gender/depression-and-gender/depression-and-mental-health-emerge-as-major-concerns-for-the-community/menu-id-59)
- [www.glna.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Page.viewPage&pageID=692](http://www.glna.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Page.viewPage&pageID=692)
- [www.gay.com/news/roundups/package.html?sernum=1355&navpath=/channels/health/special](http://www.gay.com/news/roundups/package.html?sernum=1355&navpath=/channels/health/special)
- <http://familyproject.sfsu.edu>