

## **Gender Identities, Sexual orientations, and Sexual Expressions as part of Sexual Behaviour of LGBTQ+ Individuals and their subsequent victimization - Empowering LGBTQ+ community through Social Work Interventions**

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### **Abstract**

The LGBTQ+ community encompasses a diverse range of sexual orientations, gender identities, and expressions, so there's a wide spectrum of sexual behaviors within this community. Just like any other group of people, LGBTQ+ individuals have varied sexual behaviors. Sexual behavior of LGBTQ+ individuals isn't determined solely by sexual orientation or gender identity but is influenced by various factors, including personal preferences, cultural backgrounds, and individual experiences.

Sexuality is an integral aspect of human life, encompassing physical, emotional, and social dimensions. As such, it intersects with various facets of social work practice, requiring a nuanced understanding and specialized interventions to address the diverse needs of individuals, families, and communities. Social workers play a crucial role in promoting sexual health, addressing sexual violence and exploitation, supporting LGBTQ+ rights, and advocating for reproductive rights, among other areas. This article explores the intersection of sex and social work interventions, highlighting the importance of a comprehensive approach to sexual well-being of LGBTQ+ community.

**Keywords:** *Sexuality, Sex, Social Work Interventions.*

### **Introduction**

The LGBTQ+ community is incredibly diverse and includes people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, and more. Each of these identities may have different sexual behaviors and experiences. LGBTQ+ individuals form various types of relationships, including monogamous relationships, open relationships, and polyamorous relationships. The nature of these relationships and the sexual behaviors involved can vary widely.

According to World Health Organization report (2014) resulting in suicides. The LGBT individuals are at high risk of facing violence and victimization. They often face stigma, discrimination, and prejudice, which can impact and aggravate their sexual behavior.

Deep-rooted prejudice, harassment, bullying, and victimization of LGBTQ+ also contributes to school dropouts and falling grades of LGBTQ+ individuals in schools. All these unjustified social acts have been found to be responsible for lower self-esteem, poorer academic performance, and increased truancy among LGBT youth (Ryan et al. 2010).

Due to the victimization of LGBTQ+ individuals, they show higher levels of depression, more suicidal thoughts, and attempts, increased substance use, and more sexual risk-taking (Russell, Toomey, Ryan, Diaz & Card, 2011)

This can include reluctance to seek healthcare services, fear of discrimination from healthcare providers, or internalized stigma affecting self-esteem and relationships. The LGBTQ+ individuals more often than not suffer in agonizing, suicidal thoughts, negative emotions self-abnegation, self-deprecating, depressive and destructive thoughts related to their sexual health and well-being.

Cultural and social factors influence the sexual behavior of LGBTQ+ individuals. For example, the acceptance or lack thereof within their communities, families, and societies can impact their sexual expression, relationships, and overall well-being.

Consent is a crucial aspect of any sexual behavior. All sexual activities involve mutual consent from all parties involved, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. Further, Practicing safe sex is important for everyone, including the LGBTQ+ community. This can include using condoms, dental dams, and getting regular sexual health check-ups. Many LGBTQ+ organizations and healthcare providers offer resources and information tailored to the community's unique needs.

Understanding and respecting the diversity of sexual behaviors within the LGBTQ+ community is essential. Stereotyping or making assumptions based on sexual orientation or gender identity can be harmful and perpetuate stigma. It's always best to approach individuals with openness, respect, and a willingness to listen and learn.

Psychological frustration and repression among LGBTQ+ individuals can be a significant concern due to the societal stigma, discrimination, and prejudice they often face. These challenges can have profound psychological impacts on individuals, affecting their mental health, well-being, and overall quality of life. Here's a closer look at some of the key issues:

**Internalized Stigma:** LGBTQ+ individuals may internalize negative societal attitudes about their sexual orientation or gender identity, leading to feelings of shame, guilt, and self-hatred. This internalized stigma can result in low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues.

**Identity Struggles:** Coming to terms with one's sexual orientation or gender identity in a heteronormative and cisnormative society can be challenging. LGBTQ+ individuals may experience confusion, denial, and fear as they navigate their identities, which can contribute to psychological distress.

**Fear of Rejection and Discrimination:** The fear of rejection, discrimination, and violence can be constant sources of stress and anxiety for LGBTQ+ individuals. This fear can lead to hypervigilance,

social withdrawal, and avoidance of certain situations or settings where they might face discrimination or harm.

**Family and Social Rejection:** Rejection from family members, friends, or communities due to one's sexual orientation or gender identity can be deeply hurtful and isolating. This rejection can lead to feelings of loneliness, sadness, and a sense of not belonging, further exacerbating psychological distress.

**Mental Health Disorders:** LGBTQ+ individuals are at a higher risk for mental health disorders, including depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and suicidal ideation or attempts, compared to their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts. These disparities are often attributed to the stressors associated with minority stress and discrimination.

**Access to Mental Health Services:** Despite the significant mental health challenges faced by many LGBTQ+ individuals, they may encounter barriers to accessing culturally competent and affirming mental health services. Stigma, discrimination, lack of awareness, and financial constraints can limit their access to necessary care.

**Coping Mechanisms:** While some LGBTQ+ individuals develop resilient coping mechanisms and support networks to navigate the challenges they face, others may turn to unhealthy coping strategies, such as substance abuse, self-harm, or risky sexual behavior, to cope with stress and emotional pain.

**Supporting LGBTQ+ Mental Health:** These interventions include:

**Promote Acceptance and Inclusion:** Creating an accepting and inclusive environment where LGBTQ+ individuals feel valued, respected, and safe can help reduce stigma and promote mental well-being.

**Educate and Raise Awareness:** Increasing awareness and understanding of LGBTQ+ issues, including the impact of stigma and discrimination on mental health, can help reduce misconceptions and promote empathy and support.

**Provide Accessible and Affirming Mental Health Services:** Ensuring that LGBTQ+-friendly mental health services are accessible and affordable can help address the unique mental health needs of the LGBTQ+ community.

**Build Supportive Communities:** Building supportive communities and networks can provide LGBTQ+ individuals with a sense of belonging, connection, and validation, which can be protective against mental health issues.

## **Understanding the LGBTQ+ Community's Unique Challenges**

Understanding these challenges is crucial for fostering empathy, promoting inclusivity, and advocating for meaningful change. This essay delves into the unique challenges faced by the LGBTQ+ community, shedding light on the complexities that shape their experiences and identities.

### **Historical and Cultural Stigma**

Historically, LGBTQ+ individuals have been subjected to societal stigma, discrimination, and persecution due to prevailing cultural norms and religious beliefs. This historical context has contributed to the marginalization and invisibility of the LGBTQ+ community, fostering a climate of

fear, shame, and secrecy. While progress has been made in challenging these deeply ingrained prejudices, the legacy of historical and cultural stigma continues to impact the lives of many LGBTQ+ individuals, influencing their self-esteem, mental health, and sense of belonging.

### **Discrimination and Violence**

Discrimination remains a pervasive issue for the LGBTQ+ community, manifesting in various forms, including employment discrimination, housing discrimination, and denial of services. Transgender and non-binary individuals, in particular, often face heightened levels of discrimination and violence, including hate crimes, harassment, and microaggressions. The fear of discrimination and violence can lead to social isolation, economic instability, and reluctance to access essential services, creating barriers to full participation in society.

### **Mental Health Challenges**

The cumulative effects of stigma, discrimination, and societal rejection can have profound implications for the mental health and well-being of LGBTQ+ individuals. Studies consistently indicate higher rates of depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and suicidality among LGBTQ+ populations compared to their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts. Minority stress theory suggests that these disparities can be attributed to the chronic stressors experienced by LGBTQ+ individuals due to their minority status, including the fear of rejection, concealment of identity, and internalized homophobia or transphobia.

### **Access to Healthcare**

Access to culturally competent and affirming healthcare remains a significant challenge for many LGBTQ+ individuals. Discrimination and lack of understanding from healthcare providers can deter LGBTQ+ individuals from seeking necessary medical care, including preventive screenings, mental health services, and gender-affirming treatments. Additionally, transgender and non-binary individuals often face barriers to accessing transition-related healthcare, including hormone therapy and gender-affirming surgeries, due to limited availability, high costs, and restrictive policies.

### **Family and Relationship Dynamics**

Family acceptance and support play a crucial role in the well-being and identity formation of LGBTQ+ individuals. However, many LGBTQ+ individuals experience rejection, hostility, or misunderstanding from their families, leading to strained relationships and emotional distress. The lack of familial support can exacerbate feelings of isolation, diminish self-worth, and impede the development of healthy relationship dynamics. Creating inclusive family environments and fostering acceptance are essential for promoting the emotional and psychological well-being of LGBTQ+ individuals.

### **Empowering the LGBTQ+ Community through Social Work**

Social work has long been a cornerstone in the promotion of social justice, equality, and human rights. Within the diverse tapestry of communities it serves, the LGBTQ+ community holds a unique and essential place. Historically marginalized and often subject to discrimination, the LGBTQ+ community faces numerous challenges that require both individual and systemic interventions. Social work, with its values of inclusivity, advocacy, and empowerment, plays a pivotal role in fostering positive change within this community. This essay explores the ways in which social work can empower the LGBTQ+ community and contribute to its well-being and advancement.

## **Advocacy and Policy Change**

Social workers are advocates by nature, working tirelessly to change policies and practices that perpetuate inequality and discrimination. In the context of the LGBTQ+ community, social workers can advocate for inclusive policies at local, state, and national levels. This includes pushing for anti-discrimination laws, marriage equality, and policies that protect the rights of transgender and non-binary individuals. Through grassroots organizing, lobbying, and coalition-building, social workers can be powerful agents of change, amplifying the voices of the LGBTQ+ community and fighting for their rights and dignity.

## **Counselling and Support Services**

The mental and emotional well-being of LGBTQ+ individuals can be significantly impacted by societal prejudice and discrimination. Social workers, trained in counselling and therapeutic interventions, play a crucial role in providing culturally competent mental health services to LGBTQ+ individuals. By creating safe and affirming spaces, social workers can help LGBTQ+ individuals navigate the challenges they face, develop coping strategies, and build resilience. Support groups, individual counselling, and family therapy can all be instrumental in promoting mental health and well-being within the LGBTQ+ community.

## **Education and Community Outreach**

Education is a powerful tool for social change. The members of LGBTQ+ community should have access to inclusive sexual health education and healthcare services that address their specific needs and concerns. This includes information about safe sex practices, STI prevention, and HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment. Social workers can engage in community outreach and education initiatives to raise awareness about LGBTQ+ issues, debunk myths and stereotypes, and promote acceptance and understanding. This can be done through workshops, seminars, and public speaking events aimed at schools, colleges, healthcare providers, and community organizations. By fostering dialogue and promoting LGBTQ+ visibility, social workers can help shift societal attitudes and create more inclusive and welcoming communities.

## **Building Resilience and Empowerment**

Empowerment is at the heart of social work practice. Social workers strive to empower individuals and communities to identify their strengths, resources, and potential for change. For the LGBTQ+ community, this means fostering self-acceptance, resilience, and collective action. Through empowerment-based approaches, such as advocacy skills training, leadership development, and community organizing, social workers can help LGBTQ+ individuals become agents of change in their own lives and communities. By building networks of support and fostering a sense of belonging, social workers can empower LGBTQ+ individuals to challenge discrimination, pursue their goals, and live authentically.

## **Conclusion**

The LGBTQ+ community has long faced a host of unprecedented social stigma and tortuous victimization, including ongoing discrimination, systemic inequalities, and cultural

misunderstandings. These challenges intersect and compound, creating complex barriers to health, well-being, and full societal participation.

Social work has a vital role to play in empowering the LGBTQ+ community and advancing its rights, well-being, and inclusion. Through advocacy, counselling, education, and empowerment-focused interventions, social workers can make a tangible difference in the lives of LGBTQ+ individuals. By standing in solidarity with the LGBTQ+ community and working collaboratively towards social justice and equality, social workers embody the values of compassion, respect, and dignity that are essential for creating a more just and inclusive society for all. By fostering empathy, promoting inclusivity, and advocating for meaningful change, we can work towards creating a more equitable and affirming society where all LGBTQ+ individuals can thrive, free from discrimination and prejudice.

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