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Mental health disparities in the lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender community: The role of stigma

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It is widely known that people who identify themselves as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender (LGBT) face systematic oppression and devaluation due to social stigmas. The purpose of this integrative review was to explore the impact of stigma on mental health outcomes in the LGBT community. A literature search was performed utilizing several electronic databases resulting in 15 primary and secondary sources for analysis. The sources provided data from several countries including England, Ireland and the United States, as well as, study participants aged adolescents through older adults. Current research indicates LGBT people experience higher rates of mental health problems, substance abuse, suicide and poor physical health compared to their heterosexual peers. Despite increased rates of stigma and victimization, studies indicate the older LGBT population has learned to cope with these negative experiences and many report their current mental health as “good.” Additionally, a shortage of health care providers properly trained to provide non-judgmental and compassionate is a common complaint by members of the LGBT community which may delay individuals from seeking treatment or from being forthcoming during examinations. Based on these findings, nurse practitioners should perform a culturally sensitive, biopsychosocial assessment including family and peers supports, recent stigmatization, discrimination and victimization within the past year, access to and participation in LGBT community resources and appropriate medical screenings. A thorough mental health evaluation should also be completed at each yearly screening including alcohol and substance use with referral to appropriate mental health services as needed. Future research on these trends is needed to develop specialized assessments and treatment guidelines to obtain the best patient outcomes for this vulnerable population.

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