

Unique Concerns Among Black LGBTQ+ Youth and Adults



The Mecca of Black Wellness



Updated February 2020

The Black lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ+) community encounters unique mental health concerns due to the intersectionality of their race and sexual identity. Specifically, they are members of multiple groups (i.e., racial and sexual/gender identity groups) that have experienced significant discrimination, prejudice, and bias. This increases their risk of further oppression and may create additional barriers to mental health care. This fact sheet will provide a brief summary of the unique challenges of the Black LGBTQ+ community and identify strategies for creating change to improve the lived experiences of this under-supported population.

Did you know....

Black LGBTQ+ youth and adults experience greater discrimination, bullying, harassment, and violence ^(1,2). The Black LGBTQ+ community is more likely, compared to the White LGBTQ+ population, to report discrimination while applying for housing and jobs, interacting with law enforcement, receiving health care services, and attending school. In fact, LGBTQ+ youth of color are more likely to receive harsher consequences in school which increases their likelihood of dropping out of high school before graduating. These harsh experiences that the Black LGBTQ+ population are more likely to encounter can negatively impact their quality of life and overall well-being (e.g., mental and physical health).

How you can help? It is important that community agencies (e.g., health care facilities and schools) provide education to their staff on the harmful effects that discrimination can have on Black LGBTQ+ people and identify and follow through on consequences for discriminatory behavior. Policy makers, educators, and community members are encouraged to evaluate and reform policies and procedures that support unjust systems and bring awareness to ongoing discriminatory practices (e.g., policies restricting transgender individuals from accessing public restrooms, unfair disciplinary practices within the legal and school systems). Also, clinicians, can help LGBTQ+ individuals process their experiences with discrimination, bullying, harassment, and violence and help them identify adaptive coping skills and strategies to manage these experiences.

Black LGBTQ+ youth and adults report less support from family, friends, and peers ^(1,2). Black LGBTQ+ youth report less support from peers and teachers due to perceived biases and unfair treatment at school. They also report experiencing less support from their family due to family members' limited involvement and understanding of the LGBTQ+ community and negative remarks about their lifestyle and beliefs. Also, Black LGBTQ+ people tend to report limitations in the support that they receive, such that individuals in their lives may offer support in one area, but not another. For example, friends from a church community may be able to offer spiritual support and/or closeness, but may not support their sexual or gender identities, which may cause conflict and distress between their religious and sexual and/or gender identity.

How you can help? As educators and clinicians, it is important to provide psychoeducation to the community and family on the benefits of supporting Black LGBTQ+ people and increase awareness of the harmful effects that feeling isolated and alone has on these individuals. As a parent it may be beneficial to attend family therapy with your family member who identifies as LGBTQ+, to better understand their unique experiences and to learn how best to support them. Attending family therapy may allow for your family member to feel heard and improve a sense of closeness. Parents and family members could also support their family member who identifies as LGBTQ+ by learning more about their experiences and the LGBTQ+ community and attending events specific to the LGBTQ+ population.

Black LGBTQ+ youth and adults report limited access to culturally competent mental health services ^(1,2). Black LGBTQ+ youth and adults are less likely to receive culturally competent mental health treatment from providers who are skilled in addressing mental health issues impacting both of their marginalized identities (i.e., racial and sexual/gender identities). In fact, only 10% of Black youth reported feeling comfortable discussing their LGBTQ+ concerns with a counselor because of the limited understanding that counselors may have regarding their intersecting identity experiences.

How you can help? As mental health providers it is important to receive regular continuing education training and information on the intersection between race and racism and anti-LGBTQ+ attitudes while reflecting on one's own biases, as they may impact the treatment that is provided to this population. Clinicians should attend trainings on culturally competent practices and become aware of the unique issues impacting Black LGBTQ+ people. Clinicians can then identify and create additional mental health services and resources (e.g., groups and mental health referrals) that are culturally appropriate for this population. Also, graduate/training programs should provide additional trainings on this specific population to increase cultural competence for providers who encounter Black LGBTQ+ youth and adults in mental health treatment facilities.

References

1. Human Rights Campaign Foundation. (2019). 2019 Black & African American LGBTQ youth report. Retrieved from https://assets2.hrc.org/files/assets/resources/HRC_2019_Black_and_African_American_LGBTQ_Youth_Report-FINAL-web.pdf
2. National LGBT Health Education Center. (2019). Understanding and addressing the social determinants of health for Black LGBTQ people: A way forward for health centers. Retrieved from https://www.lgbthealtheducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/TFIE-33_SDOHForBlackLGBTPeople_Web.pdf.

RESOURCES

To learn more about the LGBTQ+ population:



The Trevor Project

<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/get-help-now/>

Trans Lifeline

[1-877-565-8860](https://www.translifeline.org/)

SAGE LGBT Elder Hotline

[1-888-234-SAGE](https://www.sageusa.org/lgbt-elder-hotline/)

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