

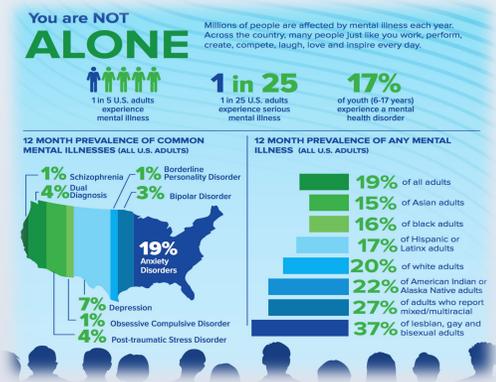
# Mental Health Distress and Protective Factors among Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Adults

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## Abstract

- Lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) adults experience higher prevalence of mental illness and psychological distress, including anxiety and depression, compared to many other demographic groups (National Institute of Mental Health, 2021).
- Minority stress theory explains that experiences of marginalization and oppression predict higher levels of mental health distress among LGB adults, but less is known about protective factors and LGB resilience (Meyer, 2015).
- Implications for this study can be applied across macro, mezzo, and micro levels.



## Significance of Study

- Psychological distress can lead to early mortality, substance use, and suicide (NIMH, 2019). This study provides evidence that social wellbeing and social support can protect against psychological distress.

## Purpose of Study

- To increase knowledge related to protective factors that buffer against psychological distress among LGB adults.

## Research Question

- What is effect of social wellbeing, social support, and community connectedness on psychological distress symptoms among LGB adults?

## Hypothesis

- Higher levels of social wellbeing, social support, and community connectedness will indicate lower levels of mental health distress.

## Literature Review

### Social Wellbeing

- Defined as feeling connected to society, the ability to trust in others and navigate society, a sense of purpose and hopeful outlook (Keyes, 1998).
- Social wellbeing has predicted lower rates of depression and suicide (Magyar & Keyes, 2019).
- Social wellbeing has predicted greater immune functioning, cognition, and delayed mortality.

### Social Support

- Defined as the subjective feeling of being supported emotionally, financially, etc. by friends, family, and other loved ones.
- Social support has been found to mediate disclosure of suicide attempts and depression symptoms (McClay et al. 2020).
- Social support in the form of chosen family and queer kinship can be a dynamic and adaptive way for LGB adults to get their needs met (Prasad, 2020).

### Community Connectedness

- Defined as the feeling of closeness to, affinity with, and shared experience with the broad LGB community.
- Connectedness with LGBTQ+ centers after tragedies such as the Pulse massacre has increased coping (Jackson, 2017).
- LGB community connectedness correlated to lower levels of anxiety and depression (Perruzella et al. 2019).

### Gaps in Research

- There is no overarching theory of LGB resilience.
- There is limited research in the effectiveness of interventions that aim to increase community connectedness.

## Methods

### Research Design

- Secondary data analysis of the Generations Study, which examined the life and health of three generational LGB cohorts.
- Current study used data which specifically examined social wellbeing, social support, community connectedness, and psychological distress.

### Sampling Method of Generations Study

- Utilized probability sampling from Gallup daily poll which included people in all 50 states and Washington D.C.
- Initial screening was 366,644, of those screened 3.5% identified as LGBT.
- Wave 1 data included responses from 1518 LGB adults, with a response rate of ~39%.
- Individuals who failed to completely respond to all social wellbeing, social support, community connectedness, and psychological distress questions were excluded from the study. This resulted in a final sample size of 1,379 LGB adults.

### Measures

- The independent variables are cumulative scales for social wellbeing, social support, and community connectedness.
- The dependent variable is psychological distress defined as anxiety and depressive symptoms within the past 30 days.
- Psychological distress was measured using the Kessler-6 scale.



## Results

### Regression Model for Psychological Distress

Predictor	B (SE)	B (SE)
Constant	20.553 (.777)***	25.627 (.792)***
Age	-.098 (.010)***	-.086 (.009)***
Sex at Birth	.132 (.272)	-.141 (.253)
Binary Gender Identity	-2.471 (.533)***	-2.220 (.495)***
Lesbian/Gay Sexual Orientation	-1.515 (.297)***	-1.261 (.276)***
College Graduate	-1.318 (.270)***	-.585 (.255)*
Social Support	-1.035 (.099)***	
Social Wellbeing		-2.524 (.135)***

Reference groups: Male, Non-Binary, Not Lesbian or Gay, Not a College Graduate  
\*\*\*p < .001; \*\*p < .01; \*p < .05

- There is a statistically significant and negative relationship between social wellbeing and psychological distress  $r_s(1,379) = -.476, p < .001$ .
- There is a statistically significant and negative relationship between social support and psychological distress,  $r_s(1,379) = -.283, p < .001$ .
- There was no significant relationship between community connectedness and psychological distress  $r_s(1,379) = .010, p = .355$ .
- Multiple linear regressions indicated younger, binary, lesbian and gay, college graduates with higher levels of social support and social wellbeing had lower levels of psychological distress, when compared to other study participants; in these models, sex at birth was not a significant predictor of psychological distress.

## Conclusion and Implications

### Conclusions

- Study supported part of the initial hypothesis: social wellbeing and social support were moderately correlated to lower levels of psychological distress.
- Surprisingly, community connectedness was not predictive of levels of psychological distress within this study.

### Implications

- Micro implications** - Mental health providers can partner with clients to identify and develop affirming social support networks outside of treatment, and integrate family and other loved ones into treatment and recovery process.
- Mezzo implications** - Organizations and employers can actively recruit LGBTQIA+ staff, provide cultural humility trainings on LGBTQIA+ topics/terminology, and develop programs based on a recovery model.
- Macro implications** - Expand policy that prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation in realms of employment, housing, accommodation, credit, etc. Fund and implement integrated care models and recovery-based treatment to avoid fragmentation. Establish universal healthcare to close racial, gender, etc., health disparities.



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