

Health Issues of LGBTQIA++

What is the issue?

The mental illnesses and challenges that India's LGBTQIA++ people face need comprehensive and long-term solutions.

Who are LGBTQIA++?

- The "L, G" and "B" refer to sexual orientation, meaning those to which one is attracted, most often referring to *lesbian* or *gay*.
- *Bisexual* is an attraction to both males and females.
- *Transgender* refers to one who identifies as a sex other than was named at birth.
- The Q indicates *questioning* and *queer*.
- Questioning is a label one might use to convey they are exploring their identity and may not want to label themselves while Queer is often used to identify oneself as a member of the LGBTQIA++ community.
- The "I" speaks to *intersex* in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male.
- 'A' refers to *asexual* who do not have sexual feelings.
- '++' suggests openness and inclusivity.

A Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court has unanimously decriminalised homosexuality by striking down [Section 377 of Indian Penal Code](#).

Why LGBTQIA++ communities remain at risk of life-long mental illnesses and challenges?

- The Raahat Project that has been working on through participatory methods has opened a host of issues that LGBTQIA++ communities face in leading colleges on an ongoing basis.
- **Reasons for mental illness**
 - Life-long dissonance
 - Deep-rooted stigma
 - Discrimination
 - Abuse
 - Pressure to accept gender roles and sexual identities
- **Effects of stigmatizing**
 - Internalised homophobia
 - Anxiety and loneliness
 - Substance use
 - Extreme distress and poor self-worth
 - Self-hate and suffering
 - Gender dysphoria

LGBTQIA++ youth are likely to suffer 1.75 times more anxiety and depression while the transgender community s suffer 2.4 times higher anxiety and depression than the rest of society.

What are the health concerns?

- Affirmative mental health services are hardly available.
- A majority of the psychiatrists in India still consider diverse sexual orientations and gender identities as a disorder and practice 'correctional therapy'.
- The situation is same in case of general health care.
- The government health care is less preferred because of the harassment and stigma.

How to sustain the mental health of LGBTQIA++ communities?

- **Multistakeholder approach-** There is a need for comprehensive long-term solutions that must engage with all stakeholders - educational institutions, communities, health-care providers, mental health professionals, police personnel and families who are often a key source of mental health stress.
- **Building self-care skills-** A key aspect is building self-care skills among queer adolescents and youth.
- **Movement on queer mental health-** There is a need for a movement on queer mental health guided by non-discrimination and public awareness in order to change social attitudes.
- **Community building-** Community building is an important part of improving the mental health for LGBTQIA++ people.
- **Safe spaces-** We need to create supportive, safe and educative spaces, access points for health care and information on mental health.

References

1. <https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-opinion/a-community-and-a-health-issue-of-concern/article65614270.ece>
2. <https://www.amle.org/lgbtqia-what-do-the-letters-mean-and-how-do-i-support-my-students/>