Health Issues of LQBTQIA++

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 strucking 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

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