



## Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Me and my mental health

Depression is a significant problem in Scotland, with estimates that 1 in 5 people will experience Depression at some point in their lives. It can affect anyone at any time. While not all lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people (LGBT) will be affected, there is growing evidence to show that rates of Depression, anxiety, stress, self-harm, suicidal thoughts and substance abuse are particularly high among people who identify as LGBT. A recent survey of LGBT people in the east of Scotland, found that 69% of people had experienced anxiety, stress or Depression; far higher than the 20% national average<sup>1</sup>.

### What can cause Depression?

Often there is no one cause - it can be a complex mix of biological, psychological and social factors. But for many LGBT people, the combined effects of prejudice, discrimination, isolation, rejection and difficulties coming to terms with their own sexuality can lead to Depression and poor mental health.

Historically, homosexuality, bisexuality and transgender identity have been thought of as mental illness themselves. To some extent, these views still exist in our society. The discrimination faced through homophobia, biphobia and transphobia do impact on the mental health of LGBT people<sup>2</sup>. From an early age, LGBT people have to deal with difficult emotional situations regarding their identity when forming relationships with family, peers, neighbours and colleagues. Hiding their sexual or gender identity is one of the first things many young LGBT people learn to do<sup>3</sup>. Family disruption and rejection is a common experience for young LGBT people who reveal their identity in an unsupportive environment. Social difficulties can continue to occur throughout their lifetime, and fear of, or actual experiences of, rejection and disapproval can lead to increased social anxiety and poor self-image.

Prejudice can be expressed directly by telling jokes, name calling and physical abuse, or in much more subtle ways through exclusion and when examples of homophobia are not challenged, such as at work or in school. It also exists at a cultural level, when, for example, a same gender couple walking down the street holding hands is accused of 'flaunting' their sexuality, yet it is entirely acceptable for a heterosexual couple to do so. When faced with these



### Some Signs of Depression

Symptoms may include:-

- Feelings of hopelessness
- Feeling inadequate
- Anxiety
- Feeling negative about your life
- Not liking yourself, feeling ugly
- Feeling unable to enjoy things that you used to like doing
- Feeling guilty or bad
- Feeling agitated
- Feeling unhappy, miserable and lonely a lot of the time
- Feeling irritable or moody
- Weight loss or weight gain
- Loss of energy or motivation
- Loss of sex drive
- Disturbed sleep
- Poor concentration
- Frequent minor health problems, such as headaches or stomach-aches
- Thoughts of self-harm or suicide

If symptoms are present for more than two weeks and are affecting your life, contact one of the organisations listed on this factsheet or talk to your GP.

attitudes on a regular basis, an LGBT person may form a negative idea about their own sexuality or gender identity. Without positive messages and role models, an LGBT person may experience:

- feelings of self-disgust and self hatred, low self-esteem
- shame, guilt, defensiveness, anger
- feelings of never being 'good enough'
- patterns of obsessive thinking
- vulnerability to psychological abuse and the potential for being abusive
- increased apprehension and withdrawal from friends and relatives
- denial of sexual orientation or gender identity - to oneself or to others
- desire to alter or change one's sexual orientation

These negative experiences can prevent LGBT people from reaching out and seeking help for their Depression. Some people may not 'come out' when they use services for fear of a negative reaction. It is important that you get help for Depression as soon as possible. The column to the right has some tips on what to do if you are, or someone you know is, showing signs of Depression.



### Things I can do to help myself

- Speak to someone you trust. The sooner you get help, the sooner you can be on the road to recovery.
- In Depression, people often start thinking in an unhelpful way. Try to identify and challenge these thoughts. Ask yourself, what would you tell a friend who thought that?
- Plan activities you used to enjoy. Invite your friends to join you. Don't be too adventurous; make sure it is something that is manageable for you.
- It is common to have problems sleeping and it is tempting to turn night into day. This can make things worse, so try to have regular sleeping and eating times, even if it is initially hard to sleep. Turn off your mobile phone and don't stay up late on the computer.
- Learn to recognise your own successes. It can be easy to compare yourself with others and feel that what you are doing is not worth anything, but if you are coping with Depression, everything is much harder and any achievement is worth noting.
- Reward yourself when you overcome fears and anxieties. Keep a success checklist to encourage you to do it again!
- Joining a support or social group is a good way of meeting people. Depression Alliance Scotland run self-help groups for people with Depression and many of the organisations below can put you in touch with groups for LGBT people.

## For Help and Support

- Depression Alliance Scotland 0845 123 23 20, [info@dascot.org](mailto:info@dascot.org), [www.dascot.org](http://www.dascot.org)

### LGBT Support

- MindOut [www.lgbtmind.com](http://www.lgbtmind.com)
- Living Life to the Full [www.livinglifetothefull.com](http://www.livinglifetothefull.com)
- Your Mind Matters [www.lgbtmindmatters.org.uk](http://www.lgbtmindmatters.org.uk)
- Gay Men's Health 0131 558 9444 [www.gmh.org.uk](http://www.gmh.org.uk)
- Glasgow LGBT Centre 0141 221 7203 [www.glgbt.org.uk](http://www.glgbt.org.uk),
- LGBT Centre for Health & Wellbeing 0131 523 1100 [www.lgbthealth.org.uk](http://www.lgbthealth.org.uk)
- LGBT Youth Scotland [www.lgbtyouth.org.uk](http://www.lgbtyouth.org.uk)
- Lothian Lesbian & Gay Switchboard 0131 556 4049 [www.lgls.co.uk](http://www.lgls.co.uk)
- Metropolitan Community Church Edinburgh [www.mccedinburgh.com](http://www.mccedinburgh.com)
- Scottish Transgender Alliance 0131 467 6039 [www.scottishtrans.org](http://www.scottishtrans.org)
- Strathclyde Lesbian & Gay Switchboard 0141 847 0447 [www.sglis.co.uk](http://www.sglis.co.uk)
- Stonewall Scotland 0131 557 3679 [www.stonewallscotland.org.uk](http://www.stonewallscotland.org.uk)
- The Equality Network 0131 467 [www.equality-network.org](http://www.equality-network.org)

1. Aitken, Kealey & Adamson, 'LGBT Centre for Health & Wellbeing - Needs Assessment 2007'

2. Homophobia, biphobia and transphobia are the disapproval of LGBT people and culture or when presumed sexual behaviour does not conform to heterosexual gender-role stereotypes.

3. Towards a Healthier LGBT Scotland