

Why are mental health issues important to bisexuals*?

Research suggests that bisexuals suffer worse mental health outcomes than heterosexuals, lesbians, and gay men. These outcomes include:

- Higher rates of anxiety, depression, and other mood disorders.
- Higher reporting of self-harm, suicidal thoughts, and suicide attempts.
- Lower levels of social support.
- Being less likely to be comfortable with their sexuality or be "out" to friends and family compared to lesbians and gay men.
- Higher rates of substance use, including cigarette smoking and heavy drinking.

What causes these poor mental health outcomes in bisexuals?

While the exact reasons may differ from person-to-person, research suggests that there are two common elements involved:

- Biphobia, and
- Bi erasure or invisibility

More research is needed to better understand the scope and depth of mental health issues in the bisexual community. More action and resources are also needed to address these issues.

* The BRC uses "bisexual" as an umbrella term for people who recognize and honor their potential for sexual, emotional, and romantic attraction to more than one gender (pansexual, fluid, omnisexual, queer, and all other free-identifiers).

REFERENCES

San Francisco Human Rights Commission. (2011). "Bisexual Invisibility: Impacts and Recommendations." <http://sf-hrc.org/reports-research-investigations>

The Open University. (2012). "The Bisexuality Report: Bisexual Inclusion in LGBT Equality and Diversity." <http://www.open.ac.uk/>

NATIONAL RESOURCES

Bisexuality-Aware Professionals Directory
<http://www.bizone.org/bap/>

BiNet USA
800-585-9368 www.binetusa.org

The GLBT National Help Center Hotline
1-888-843-4564

The Trevor Project Lifeline (for youth ages 13-24)
1-866-488-7386

IT'S NOT A PHASE,
IT'S MY LIFE.

©BRC

Bisexual Resource Center

P.O. Box 170796
Boston, MA 02117
617-424-9595
brc@biresource.net
www.biresource.net

The Bisexual Resource Center is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) educational organization incorporated in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The BRC is primarily funded through the generosity of its donors.

Mental Health
in the Bisexual
Community:
Biphobia,
Bi Erasure,
& Getting Help



The BRC has been raising awareness about bisexuality and providing resources and support to the bi community since 1985.

Biphobia

Despite making up half of the lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) community, bisexuals often describe unique experiences of stigma and exclusion. Biphobia is one form of this discrimination.

Biphobia is the fear of, hatred towards, or discrimination against bisexuality. Common stereotypes associated with biphobia include:

- Bisexuals are sexually greedy, promiscuous, and carriers of sexually transmitted infections (STIs).
- Bisexuals are untrustworthy or traitors to the LGBT community, because they can take advantage of “heterosexual privilege.”
- Bisexual women only aim to seek sexual attention from heterosexual men.
- Bisexual men are too afraid to fully “come out” and therefore are “really just gay.”

Biphobia isolates bisexuals from both heterosexual and LGBT communities. It also prevents bisexuals from feeling positive and open about their sexuality, which in turn contributes to the higher reporting of anxiety, depression, and self-harm as described earlier.

There's hope.

There's help.

So reach out today.

Bi Erasure or Invisibility

Another form of discrimination that many bisexuals experience is called bi erasure or invisibility.

Bi erasure is ignoring, removing, or re-explaining the evidence of bisexuality. Common examples associated with bi erasure include:

- Denying that bisexuality exists as a real orientation, such as stating that it's “just a phase” or simply for experimental purposes as one “eventually” labels oneself as gay/lesbian or heterosexual.
- Assuming that a bisexual person is heterosexual if paired with a different-sex partner, or gay/lesbian if paired with a same-sex partner.
- Stating that your organization is LGBT-inclusive, but you don't offer bi-specific programs and resources.
- Mislabeling bisexuals as lesbian/gay or heterosexual even when they are openly “out” as bisexual.

Like biphobia, bisexual erasure has profound effects on mental health in that it also invalidates and isolates bisexuals.

Seeking Help and Support

It is important for bisexuals who are experiencing anxiety, depression, and/or suicidal thoughts to seek professional help as soon as possible. Locating a bi-positive mental health provider may take time, but they are out there. (See the resources on other side of this brochure.)

Additionally, pilot research from the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in Ontario, Canada discovered that bisexuals associate positive mental health outcomes with social

support, self-acceptance, volunteering, and belonging in a bisexual community. Over the past decade, more bisexuals are fortunate to have access to a bi-specific group in their local community and online websites for social support. Some groups are involved with spreading awareness about bisexuality, including combatting biphobia and bi erasure. You can locate a group near you through the BRC or BiNet USA websites.

Self-Care Tips

Bisexuals can also improve their mental health by practicing self-care. Self-care techniques include:

- Taking mindful walks, practicing meditation, or doing yoga.
- Expressing yourself through writing, such as journaling your feelings or writing poems.
- Boosting your self-esteem with positive, daily affirmations (“I am bisexual and proud!”).
- Practicing healthy habits, such as eating nutritious meals, exercising regularly, and limiting the intake of tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs.
- Celebrating bisexuality through relevant movies, books, culture, and history. After all, the bisexual community's contributions to media, science, education, sports, and politics have always been strong!
- Wearing bisexual pride colors or incorporating them into your life, whether through home decorations, car bumper stickers, or office furnishings. Let your creative energies shine!