

Stress Levels in Lesbians: An Update

Jabir PK^{1*}, Sai Sailesh K. Goothy,² Namit Garg,³ Ramaprabha Prabhakar,⁴ Rajeev Gandham,⁵
Sadgunothama Goud⁶

Lesbians experience stress for several reasons, including violence, harassment, and discrimination. Lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) people are more likely than heterosexual people to suffer from mood and anxiety disorders, and this stress can result in mental health issues. To explain the mental stress that sexual minorities face, the better theory put forward is the minority stress theory. It was Meyer who forwarded it in 2003 for a comprehensive explanation of different aspects of mental stress in sexual minorities, such as social, psychological, and structural factors. According to this theory, different stressors integrate into the culmination of sexual minority stress

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Dear Editor,

Hans Selye described stress in the light of “general adaptation syndrome,” and the concept evolved drastically. Even though optimal stress is important for biological processes, bad stress or distress can compromise physiological functions.¹ Lesbians experience stress for several reasons, including violence, harassment, and discrimination. Lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) people are more likely than heterosexual people to suffer from mood and anxiety disorders, and this stress can result in mental health issues. In order to explain the mental stress that sexual minorities face, the better theory put forward

is the minority stress theory. It was Meyer who forwarded it in 2003 for a comprehensive explanation of different aspects of mental stress in sexual minorities, such as social, psychological, and structural factors.² According to this theory, different stressors integrate into the culmination of sexual minority stress. Here, unlike general stress, these groups fall into the interplay of prejudice and stigma. On the other hand, critiques lurk around this theme, stating that researchers focused only on the lack of social safety.³ Internalized homophobia, discrimination, concealment, and prejudicial incidents put LGB people at higher risk of psychological distress. Internalized homophobia is a homosexual person’s direction of negative social attitudes towards the self. Those mentioned above can result in a dilemma regarding the homosexual desire versus the feeling of being heterosexual. Moreover, internalized homophobia can slowly drift the individual into depression and relationship problems.

The following are a few instances of stressors that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people could encounter: coming out as a couple, concealing

¹Department of Physiology, Saveetha Medical College and Hospital, Saveetha University, SIMATS, P.O Thandalam, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India.

²Department of Physiology, NRI Institute of Medical Sciences, Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, India.

³Department of Physiology, R. D. Gardi Medical College, Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh, India.

⁴Basic Medical Sciences Department, College of Medicine, Shagra University, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

⁵Department of Biochemistry, NRI Institute of Medical Sciences, Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, India.

⁶Department of Pharmacology, NRI Institute of Medical Sciences, Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, India.

Correspondence to: Jabir PK, Department of Physiology, Saveetha Medical College and Hospital, Saveetha University, SIMATS, P.O Thandalam, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India..
E-mail: jabspk@gmail.com

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their relationship's nature, anticipating rejection, internalized stigma, gender role negotiation, inequitable legal standing, obtaining advantages, and attempting to conceive. Researchers found out that disclosure of their sexual orientation itself is stressful, especially for sexual minority youth. Indeed, there is a need for supporting sexual minority youth to provide necessary support in this regard throughout adolescence to avoid long-term mental sequelae.⁴ Recently, it has been noticed that sexual and gender minorities suffer from eating disorders and are concerned with disordered eating and body image.⁵ A study reported that sexual minority adolescents have elevated minority stress, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as compared to their urban counterparts. But culture, ethnicity, and aging do have a pivotal role in the perception of stress among lesbians, as these influence the sexual identity of an individual.⁶

Minority stress is related to poorer quality of life and increased risk for psychiatric disorders. Measuring minority stress among lesbians can be done by different questionnaires like the daily heterosexist experiences questionnaire.⁷ For better mental health of lesbians, the institutes should bring actions such as anti-bullying policies. A healthcare professional can improve lesbian women's psychological well-being and health by encouraging lesbian confidence. Lesbian confidence may

be fostered and coping and health may be improved by open lesbian women in the community who are viewed positively or as normal.

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