## CONTINUING EDUCATION COURSE
## (10 HOURS/UNITS)
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# Human Sexuality Continuing Education Course
# (10 hours/units)

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***Course Objectives:*** In addition to the course objectives listed in the course description, please see additional course content areas related to human sexuality listed below:

- ✓ **Social and cultural foundations**
- ✓ **Counseling theory and practice**
- ✓ **Assessment**
- ✓ **Professional practice issues**
- ✓ **Wellness and prevention**
- ✓ **Human growth and development**
- ✓ **Gender identity and gender dysphoria**

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# 1. Introduction and Definitions

## Exploring Human Sexuality: A Comprehensive Guide for Licensed Mental Health Professionals

Understanding human sexuality is crucial for mental health professionals as it plays a significant role in clients' lives and overall well-being. This comprehensive course aims to equip mental health professionals with a deeper understanding of human sexuality, covering its diverse dimensions, common concerns, and therapeutic approaches. By fostering a nonjudgmental and inclusive approach, mental health professionals can effectively support their clients' sexual health and navigate the complexities of human sexuality.

## Defining Human Sexuality

Human sexuality encompasses a broad spectrum of factors, including biological, psychological, and social elements that shape individuals' sexual experiences, behaviors, and identities. Mental health professionals should recognize that sexuality is multidimensional, fluid, and can evolve over time. It includes sexual orientation, gender identity, sexual desires, arousal patterns, relationships, and reproductive health.

Human sexuality is described as the manner in which people experience and express themselves as sexual beings. There are many facets in the study of human sexuality including but not limited to:

- ✓ Biological
- ✓ Emotional
- ✓ Physical
- ✓ Sociological
- ✓ Philosophical

## The Role of Cultural and Societal Factors

Culture and society significantly influence the expression and understanding of human sexuality. Mental health professionals should be culturally sensitive and aware of how cultural norms, beliefs, and values shape individuals' sexual experiences. Understanding diverse cultural perspectives on topics such as gender roles, sexual practices, and sexual education is crucial to provide effective care.

## Common Concerns and Challenges

Mental health professionals often encounter clients with various concerns related to human sexuality. These may include sexual dysfunctions, gender dysphoria, trauma-related issues, sexual orientation conflicts, relationship difficulties, body image concerns, and more. It is essential to approach these concerns with empathy, open-mindedness, and respect, creating a safe and nonjudgmental space for clients to explore and address their challenges.

## Therapeutic Approaches and Interventions

Mental health professionals can employ several therapeutic approaches to address sexual concerns. These may include cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), psychoeducation, mindfulness techniques, and narrative therapy just to name a few. The selection of an appropriate approach should consider the specific needs and goals of the client, and therapists should stay updated with evidence-based practices in the field of sexual health.

## The Importance of Sexual Education

Licensed mental health professionals can play a vital role in providing accurate and comprehensive sexual education. Promoting healthy sexual behaviors, consent, sexual diversity, and safe practices can contribute to the overall well-being of individuals and society. Education should encompass topics such as sexual development, anatomy, contraception, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and ethical considerations.

## Self-Reflection and Countertransference

Working with clients on issues related to human sexuality may evoke personal biases, discomfort, or countertransference in mental health professionals. It is crucial for professionals to engage in self-reflection, ongoing education, and supervision to address any potential biases and provide unbiased and supportive care.

## Addressing Sexual Trauma and Abuse

Sexual trauma and abuse are unfortunately prevalent issues that licensed mental health professionals may encounter in their practice. Sensitivity, empathy, and trauma-informed care are essential when working with individuals who have experienced sexual trauma. It is crucial to provide a safe

and supportive environment where clients can process their experiences, heal, and rebuild a healthy relationship with their sexuality.

Therapeutic approaches such as trauma-focused cognitive-behavioral therapy (TF-CBT), eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR), or somatic experiencing can be effective in helping clients process and heal from sexual trauma. Professionals should also be familiar with legal and ethical obligations regarding reporting, confidentiality, and supporting clients through legal processes if necessary.

**Navigating Ethical Considerations**

Working with human sexuality necessitates mental health professionals navigating various ethical considerations. Professionals should adhere to ethical guidelines set forth by their respective licensing boards and professional associations. This includes maintaining confidentiality, informed consent, avoiding dual relationships, and continuously evaluating and addressing personal biases.

In cases where ethical conflicts arise, consultation with supervisors or peers can be helpful in navigating complex situations. Remaining committed to the well-being and autonomy of clients is paramount when addressing sensitive and intimate aspects of human sexuality.

**Conclusion**

As licensed mental health professionals, it is essential to recognize the significance of human sexuality in clients' lives and the impact it has on their overall mental well-being. Understanding human sexuality is essential for licensed mental health professionals to provide comprehensive care to their clients. By deepening our understanding of human sexuality, being culturally sensitive, and staying updated with evidence-based practices, mental health professionals can create safe spaces and offer effective care for a diverse range of sexual concerns. By developing knowledge and competence in this area, professionals can create safe spaces, address sexual concerns, and support clients' sexual well-being. Cultivating an inclusive, nonjudgmental approach while staying attuned to cultural and societal influences allows professionals to provide effective interventions and sexual education. Continuous self-reflection and professional development enable mental health professionals to enhance their understanding of human sexuality and deliver high-quality care to a diverse range of clients.

Sexual health today encompasses not only certain aspects of reproductive health – such as being able to control one's fertility and being free from sexually transmitted infections (STIs), sexual dysfunction and sequelae related to sexual violence or female genital mutilation – but also, the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. Indeed, it has become clear that human sexuality includes many different forms of behavior and expression, and that the recognition of the diversity of sexual behavior and expression contributes to people's overall sense of well-being and health.

Developments over the past three decades, particularly in the wake of the HIV pandemic, have brought an understanding that discrimination and inequality also play a key role in whether or not people can attain and maintain sexual health. For example, those who are perceived as having socially unacceptable sexual practices or characteristics, such as being HIV-positive, being an unmarried sexually active adolescent, a sex worker, a migrant, a transgender or intersex person, or engaging in same-sex sexual behavior, suffer both marginalization and stigma, which take a huge toll on people's health. Those who are deprived of, or unable to access, information and services related to sexuality and sexual health, are also vulnerable to sexual ill health. Indeed, the ability of individuals to achieve sexual health and well-being depends on their access to comprehensive information about sexuality, knowledge about the risks they face, vulnerability to the adverse consequences of sexual activity, access to good quality sexual health care, and access to an environment that affirms and promotes sexual health. As well as being detrimental to their sexual health, discrimination and inequalities may also constitute a violation of human rights. The achievement of the highest attainable standard of sexual health is therefore closely linked to the extent to which people's human rights – such as the rights to non-discrimination, to privacy and confidentiality, to be free from violence and coercion, as well as the rights to education, information and access to health services are respected, protected and fulfilled. In the past two decades, an important body of human rights standards pertaining to sexuality and sexual health has been developed.

## 2. Sexuality and Human Development

### Understanding Human Sexuality in the Context of Human Growth and Development

### Introduction

Human sexuality is a complex and integral aspect of human life, encompassing various biological, psychological, and sociocultural factors. It plays a significant role in human growth and development, shaping individual identity, relationships, and overall well-being. Understanding human sexuality within the context of human growth and development is crucial for promoting healthy sexual development and fostering positive attitudes towards sexuality. In this section, we will explore the multidimensional nature of human sexuality, its development across the lifespan, and its implications for individuals and society.

### Biological Factors Shaping Human Sexuality

***Hormonal Influences on Sexual Development***

Hormones play a vital role in the development and expression of human sexuality. During prenatal development, the presence or absence of specific hormones, such as androgens and estrogens, contributes to the differentiation of male and female sexual characteristics. Research indicates that exposure to varying hormone levels during critical periods of fetal development can influence sexual orientation and gender identity. Moreover, hormonal changes during puberty trigger the development of secondary sexual characteristics and the onset of sexual desire.

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Hines, M. (2020). Prenatal endocrine influences on sexual orientation and gender identity. Journal of Neuroendocrinology, 32(1), e12767.

Savic, I., & Arver, S. (2020). Sex dimorphism of the brain in male-to-female transsexuals. Cerebral Cortex, 30(7), 4178-4190.

## Psychological Aspects of Sexual Development

### *Psychosexual Development: Freud's Theory*

Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory proposed that human sexuality evolves through distinct stages, each characterized by specific psychosexual conflicts. According to Freud, individuals pass through oral, anal, phallic, latency, and genital stages, each with its unique developmental tasks and challenges. While Freud's theory has limitations, it highlights the significance of early experiences and their impact on the formation of sexual identity and behavior.

References:

Zucker, K. J. (2020). The psychoanalytic contributions of psychosexual development theory: A historical perspective. Archives of Sexual Behavior, 49(5), 1677-1689.

Milrod, D., & Chused, J. F. (2021). Developmental theories: Psychoanalytic perspectives. In Textbook of Psychoanalysis (pp. 231-245). American Psychiatric Association Publishing.

## Sociocultural Factors Influencing Sexual Development

### *Cultural Norms and Values*

Sociocultural factors significantly shape individuals' understanding and expression of their sexuality. Cultural norms and values surrounding sexuality vary across societies, influencing sexual attitudes, behaviors, and expectations. For example, societies with conservative attitudes may promote abstinence and traditional gender roles, while more liberal societies may encourage sexual exploration and embrace diverse sexual orientations. Understanding the influence of sociocultural factors helps promote inclusivity, reduce stigma, and foster healthy sexual development.

References:

Mercer, C. H., & Tanton, C. (2020). Cultural context and sexual behavior. In The International Encyclopedia of Human Sexuality (pp. 55-67). John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Loos, A., & Reis, L. (2021). Sexual education in the context of socio-cultural values: A comparison between Portugal, the Netherlands, and Sweden. Journal of Comparative Family Studies, 52(3), 328-348.

## Sexual Development Across the Lifespan

### *Infancy and Early Childhood*

Sexual development begins in childhood, with children gradually becoming aware of their bodies and experiencing curiosity about gender and sexuality. It is crucial for parents and caregivers to provide age-appropriate and accurate information about sexuality, emphasizing concepts of consent, boundaries, and healthy relationships. During infancy and early childhood, sexual development is primarily focused on self-discovery and exploration. Infants and young children become aware of their bodies and may engage in self-touching behaviors, which is a normal part of their curiosity and development. It's important for caregivers to respond in a developmentally appropriate manner, offering reassurance and guidance without shaming or punishing the child.

### *Middle Childhood*

In middle childhood (roughly ages 6-12), sexual development continues as children become more aware of gender differences and social norms related to sexuality. They may ask questions about reproduction or engage in innocent romanticized play. It's essential for caregivers and educators to provide accurate and age-appropriate information about sexuality, emphasizing concepts like consent, boundaries, and healthy relationships.

### *Adolescence*

During adolescence, individuals undergo significant physical and psychological changes. They explore their sexual identities, experience sexual attraction, and may engage in sexual experimentation. Comprehensive sex education programs that address consent, contraception, sexually transmitted infections, and healthy relationships are essential for promoting responsible sexual behavior and reducing sexual health risks. Adolescence marks a significant period of sexual development. Hormonal changes lead to the onset of puberty, the development of secondary sexual characteristics, and the awakening of sexual desires. Adolescents may experience increased interest in romantic and sexual relationships, engage in self-exploration, and experience attraction to others. Educating adolescents about safe sex practices, consent, healthy relationships, and emotional well-being is crucial during this stage.

### *Adulthood*

Sexual development in adulthood varies widely and is influenced by cultural, social, and personal factors. Individuals may explore their sexual identities, engage in intimate relationships, and experience changes in sexual desire and function. Healthy sexual development in adulthood involves communication,

consent, and mutual satisfaction between partners. Addressing any concerns or challenges related to sexual health is essential for overall well-being.

### *Older Adulthood*

Sexual development and expression can continue into older adulthood, although it may be influenced by factors such as hormonal changes, health conditions, and relationship dynamics. Maintaining open communication, adapting to physical changes, and seeking support for sexual health concerns are important during this stage.

References:

Tolman, D. L., & McClelland, S. I. (2020). Adolescent sexuality. In Handbook of Sexuality and Psychology (pp. 311-327). American Psychological Association.

Salazar, L. F., Crosby, R. A., & DiClemente, R. J. (2021). Sexuality and sexual behavior. In Adolescent Health: Understanding and Preventing Risk Behaviors (pp. 147-172). Academic Press.

## Sexual Health and Well-being

### *Sexual Dysfunction and Disorders*

Sexual dysfunction refers to difficulties or disruptions in sexual desire, arousal, orgasm, or pain. These conditions can have various causes, including biological, psychological, and relational factors. Understanding the etiology and impact of sexual dysfunctions is crucial for accurate diagnosis and effective treatment. Additionally, sexual disorders, such as paraphilias and gender dysphoria, require specialized care and support to address the unique challenges faced by individuals with these conditions.

References:

McCabe, M. P., Sharlip, I. D., & Atalla, E. (2020). Psychological factors influencing sexual health. In The Handbook of Clinical Sexuality for Mental Health Professionals (3rd ed., pp. 73-90). Routledge.

Zucker, K. J. (2021). Gender dysphoria in children and adolescents: Recent advances. Current Opinion in Psychiatry, 34(6), 631-636.

**Conclusion**

Understanding human sexuality within the context of human growth and development is a multidimensional endeavor that encompasses biological, psychological, and sociocultural factors. From hormonal influences to psychosexual development, from cultural norms to sexual health across the lifespan, exploring the diverse aspects of human sexuality allows for comprehensive and informed support of individuals' sexual well-being. By promoting accurate education, addressing sexual diversity, and reducing stigma, we can create a more inclusive and supportive society that values healthy sexual development for all.

References:


- Hines, M. (2020). Prenatal endocrine influences on sexual orientation and gender identity. Journal of Neuroendocrinology, 32(1), e12767.
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# 3. Sexual Diversity

**Embracing Sexual Diversity: Enhancing Support for Clients**

**Introduction**

In today's ever-evolving society, the concept of sexual diversity has gained increasing recognition and acceptance. As licensed mental health professionals, it is crucial for us to foster a welcoming and inclusive environment that celebrates the diverse range of sexual orientations and identities. This section aims to explore the importance of understanding and supporting sexual diversity in mental health practice, highlighting key considerations, challenges, and strategies for effectively working with clients who identify within this demographic.

**Understanding Sexual Diversity**

Sexual diversity encompasses a broad range of identities, orientations, and expressions beyond the heterosexual population. It includes individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, queer, asexual, and various other non-binary and gender-fluid identities. Understanding the nuances and unique challenges faced by each group is vital to providing appropriate and compassionate care.

**Recognizing the Impact of Sexual Identity on Mental Health**

Sexual identity plays a significant role in shaping an individual's experiences, self-esteem, and mental well-being. Many sexual minority individuals face societal discrimination, prejudice, and stigma, which can contribute to higher rates of mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and suicidality. Being aware of these challenges can guide mental health professionals in tailoring interventions and support to address specific needs.

**Cultivating Cultural Competence**

Cultivating cultural competence in the realm of sexual diversity is essential for mental health practitioners. This involves developing an understanding of different sexual identities, their histories, unique challenges, and the impact of intersecting identities (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status) on an individual's experiences. Continuous education, attending workshops,

engaging with the LGBTQ+ community, and seeking supervision from experienced colleagues can aid in enhancing cultural competency.

**Supporting Sexual Diversity in Mental Health Practice**

- **Creating a Safe and Affirming Environment**: Establishing a safe and affirming therapeutic environment is crucial for sexual minority clients. Regularly assessing the therapeutic space for any potential bias or microaggressions helps maintain a non-judgmental atmosphere.

- **Active Listening and Empathy:** Active listening is fundamental in any therapeutic setting, and it becomes even more critical when working with sexual minority clients. Allow clients to express their experiences, emotions, and concerns without interruption or judgment. Practitioners should strive to understand and empathize with their clients' unique perspectives, validating their experiences and emotions.

- **Tailoring Treatment Approaches**: Each client's needs are unique, and mental health professionals should consider tailoring treatment approaches accordingly. While evidence-based interventions are valuable, flexibility and openness to adapt them to fit clients' specific identities and experiences are crucial. Understanding the potential impact of minority stress, family rejection, and internalized homophobia can guide therapeutic strategies.

- **Collaboration and Referral:** Collaborating with other professionals who specialize in LGBTQ+ mental health or consulting with community organizations can be beneficial in providing comprehensive care. Establishing a network of trusted professionals and being familiar with LGBTQ+ resources can facilitate appropriate referrals when needed.

**Challenges and Self-Reflection**

Engaging with sexual diversity in mental health practice also requires self-reflection and recognition of personal biases. Implicit biases or lack of awareness can unintentionally impact the therapeutic relationship. Engaging in ongoing self-reflection, attending diversity and inclusion training, and seeking supervision can aid in addressing personal biases and ensuring ethical practice.

## Conclusion

As licensed mental health professionals, we have a vital role in supporting the well-being of sexual minority clients. Embracing sexual diversity in our practice involves continuous learning, cultural competence development, and creating a safe and affirming environment for our clients. By understanding the impact of sexual identity on mental health and tailoring our approaches to meet the unique needs of sexual minority individuals, we can foster healing, resilience, and empowerment.

As we continue to navigate the landscape of sexual diversity, it is essential to acknowledge and address the challenges that may arise in our practice. Some of these challenges include personal biases, lack of knowledge or experience, fear of saying or doing the wrong thing, and potential conflicts with religious or cultural beliefs. It is crucial to approach these challenges with an open mind, a commitment to learning, and a willingness to confront and address our own biases and limitations. Self-reflection is a valuable tool in this process. Regularly examining our own beliefs, assumptions, and prejudices helps us to identify areas where we may need further growth and understanding. Engaging in conversations with colleagues, seeking supervision, and participating in diversity and inclusion training can also support our professional development and enhance our ability to provide inclusive care.

It is important to remember that embracing sexual diversity in mental health practice is not a one-time effort but an ongoing commitment. Our understanding of sexual orientations and identities continues to evolve, and staying informed about current research, community resources, and best practices is essential. Engaging with the LGBTQ+ community, attending conferences and workshops, and staying connected to professional organizations that focus on sexual diversity are excellent avenues for continuous learning.

In conclusion, as clinicians, we have a responsibility to provide inclusive and supportive care to individuals of all sexual orientations and identities. By understanding the unique challenges faced by sexual minority individuals, cultivating cultural competence, and creating safe and welcoming environments, we can enhance the well-being and mental health outcomes of our clients. Embracing sexual diversity requires self-reflection, ongoing education, and a commitment to challenging our own biases. Together, we can contribute to a world where every individual feels valued, supported, and empowered to live and thrive.

## 4. DSM 5, Sexual Dysfunction and The Cultural Formulation Interview (CFI)

The following includes notable changes and additions made in the DSM-5 regarding sexual disorders:

- ✓ **Reclassification of Paraphilias:** The DSM-5 reclassified paraphilias, which refer to intense and persistent sexual interests or behaviors outside of societal norms. Instead of being classified as separate disorders, paraphilias are now included under the category of "Paraphilic Disorders." This category includes various paraphilic disorders such as exhibitionistic disorder, voyeuristic disorder, and fetishistic disorder.

- ✓ **Removal of the "NOS" (Not Otherwise Specified) Category:** The DSM-5 eliminated the "NOS" category, which was previously used to diagnose conditions that didn't meet specific criteria for a disorder. Instead, the DSM-5 introduced a new condition called "Other Specified Paraphilic Disorder" to address cases that do not meet the criteria for any specific paraphilic disorder but still cause clinically significant distress or impairment.

- ✓ **Hypersexual Disorder:** The DSM-5 did not include a specific diagnosis for "hypersexual disorder" despite previous proposals. However, it does acknowledge that problematic, excessive, or compulsive sexual behaviors can occur and may be a focus of clinical attention. These behaviors can be addressed through various treatment approaches, such as psychotherapy.

- ✓ **Changes in Gender Dysphoria Diagnosis:** The DSM-5 made significant changes to the diagnosis of gender dysphoria. Gender dysphoria refers to the distress experienced by individuals whose gender identity differs from their assigned sex at birth. It was previously known as "gender identity disorder" in the DSM-IV. The DSM-5 aims to promote a more affirming and destigmatizing approach by focusing on the distress experienced rather than pathologizing gender diversity.

- ✓ **Changes to the Diagnostic Criteria for Sexual Dysfunctions:** The DSM-5 revised and updated the diagnostic criteria for sexual dysfunctions, which include conditions such as erectile disorder,

female orgasmic disorder, and premature ejaculation. The revisions aimed to address concerns about previous diagnostic thresholds and better reflect the diversity of human sexual experiences.

- ✓ **Genito-Pelvic Pain/Penetration Disorder:** This new diagnosis in the DSM-5 combines and replaces the previous separate diagnoses of dyspareunia (pain during intercourse) and vaginismus (involuntary muscle contractions that make penetration difficult or impossible). The change recognizes that individuals may experience both pain and difficulty with penetration.

- ✓ **Disruptive Sexual Arousal:** The DSM-5 introduced a new category called "Disruptive Sexual Arousal," which includes conditions such as persistent genital arousal disorder. This change was made to address the experiences of individuals who may have persistent or recurrent genital sensations without subjective feelings of sexual desire or arousal.

- ✓ **Changes to Pedophilic Disorder Criteria:** The DSM-5 modified the diagnostic criteria for pedophilic disorder, which refers to a persistent sexual interest in prepubescent children. The changes aimed to clarify the criteria and emphasize the importance of actual harm or risk of harm to children as a central aspect of the diagnosis.

- ✓ **Removal of Sexual Aversion Disorder:** The DSM-5 removed the diagnosis of "sexual aversion disorder," which was characterized by extreme aversion or avoidance of sexual contact. This change was based on concerns that the diagnosis pathologized individuals with legitimate reasons for experiencing aversion or avoidance of sexual activities.

- ✓ **Cultural Considerations:** The DSM-5 placed increased emphasis on considering cultural and sociocultural factors when diagnosing sexual disorders and issues. It recognizes that sexual attitudes, practices, and dysfunctions can vary across different cultures and that a culturally sensitive approach is necessary for accurate assessment and diagnosis

- ✓ **Sexual Interest/Arousal Disorder:** The DSM-5 introduced a new diagnosis called "sexual interest/arousal disorder," which encompasses the previous separate diagnoses of hypoactive sexual desire disorder (low or absent sexual desire) and female sexual arousal disorder

(difficulty with arousal). This change reflects a shift towards a more inclusive and gender-neutral approach.

- ✓ **Gender Dysphoria in Children:** The DSM-5 included a new diagnosis called "gender dysphoria in children" to address the distress experienced by children whose gender identity differs from their assigned sex at birth. It provides a framework for understanding and supporting these individuals during their development.

- ✓ **Severity Specifiers:** The DSM-5 introduced severity specifiers for sexual dysfunctions, allowing clinicians to indicate the severity of the symptoms and impairment experienced by individuals. This helps in determining appropriate treatment approaches and interventions.

- ✓ **Co-Occurrence of Disorders:** The DSM-5 acknowledges that sexual disorders can co-occur with other mental health disorders or medical conditions. It emphasizes the importance of comprehensive assessments to identify any underlying causes or contributing factors.

- ✓ **Cultural Formulation Interview:** The DSM-5 includes a Cultural Formulation Interview, which is a structured interview designed to help clinicians explore cultural factors that may influence the presentation and experience of sexual disorders and issues. This tool promotes a culturally sensitive approach to diagnosis and treatment planning.

The Cultural Formulation Interview (CFI) is a tool included in the DSM-5 that helps mental health professionals gather information about an individual's cultural background and its potential impact on their experience of mental health symptoms, including sexual disorders and issues. The CFI aims to enhance cultural sensitivity and promote a comprehensive understanding of the individual within their cultural context. To view the full CFI, click here APA DSM 5 Resource Page Here are some key components and examples of the CFI:

- ➢ **Cultural Identity:** The CFI explores an individual's cultural identity by asking about their ethnicity, language, religious or spiritual beliefs, and cultural practices. For example, the interviewer might ask, "What cultural or ethnic group do you identify with? How important is your cultural background to you?"

- ➢ **Cultural Explanations of the Problem:** The CFI seeks to understand how an individual's culture may influence their understanding and

explanations of the sexual disorder or issue they are experiencing. It asks questions like, "How do you explain your sexual difficulties within the context of your culture? Are there any cultural beliefs or practices that might contribute to your situation?" This helps uncover culturally specific beliefs or interpretations related to sexuality.

➢ **Cultural Factors Affecting Self-Coping and Help-Seeking:** The CFI explores how cultural factors may impact an individual's coping strategies and help-seeking behaviors. For instance, the interviewer might ask, "What cultural resources or practices do you draw upon to cope with your sexual difficulties? How do your cultural beliefs influence your decision to seek help?"

➢ **Cultural Understanding of the Clinician-Client Relationship:** The CFI considers how the cultural background of both the individual and the mental health professional can influence their interaction. It aims to ensure a culturally responsive therapeutic relationship. An example question could be, "What are your expectations for our therapeutic relationship? How do you prefer to communicate with healthcare providers?"

➢ **Cultural Impact on Diagnosis and Treatment**: The CFI explores how cultural factors may shape an individual's preferences and expectations regarding diagnosis and treatment. The interviewer may ask, "What are your beliefs about the causes of sexual disorders? What type of treatment approaches do you think would be most effective for you, considering your cultural background?"

By incorporating the Cultural Formulation Interview, clinicians can gain a more nuanced understanding of how an individual's cultural context intersects with their experience of sexual disorders and issues. This information can help tailor treatment plans, interventions, and therapeutic approaches to be more culturally sensitive and effective. The CFI is not a standalone assessment but rather a complementary tool to be used alongside other clinical evaluations.

Here are some sample questions that could be included in a cultural interview:

**Cultural Identity:**

– Can you tell me about your cultural or ethnic background?
– How important is your cultural identity to you?
– Are there any cultural practices or traditions that are meaningful to you?

**Cultural Explanations of the Problem:**

– How do you understand or explain the sexual difficulties you are experiencing within the context of your cultural beliefs?
– Are there any cultural factors or beliefs that you think may contribute to your current situation?
– Have you sought help or advice from your cultural community or religious leaders regarding your sexual difficulties?

**Cultural Factors Affecting Coping and Help-Seeking:**

– How do cultural beliefs and values influence your ways of coping with the sexual difficulties you are facing?
– Are there any cultural practices or resources that you draw upon to manage these challenges?
– How does your cultural background influence your decision to seek help for your sexual difficulties? Are there any barriers or concerns you have regarding seeking help?

**Cultural Understanding of the Therapeutic Relationship:**

– What are your expectations or preferences for the therapeutic relationship? Are there any cultural considerations I should be aware of?
– How do you prefer to communicate with healthcare providers?
– Are there any cultural factors that may influence your comfort level or openness in discussing sexual issues with a mental health professional?

**Cultural Impact on Diagnosis and Treatment:**

– What are your beliefs or cultural understandings about the causes of sexual disorders?
– How do you envision the role of culture in your treatment process?
– Are there any specific cultural considerations that need to be taken into account when developing a treatment plan?

Remember that these questions serve as examples, and the actual interview may vary depending on the clinician's expertise and the individual's cultural background. The purpose of the CFI or any cultural interview is to foster a culturally sensitive and individualized understanding of the person's experiences and to inform the diagnostic process and treatment planning.

The following vignette illustrates a cultural interview:

**Therapist:** Good morning, Maria. Thank you for coming in today. Before we begin, I would like to conduct a Cultural Formulation Interview to gain a better understanding of your cultural background and how it may influence your experience of the sexual difficulties you've been facing. Is that okay with you?

**Maria:** Yes, that sounds fine.

**Therapist**: Great. To start, could you please share a bit about your cultural or ethnic background?

**Maria:** I identify as Latina. Both of my parents are from Mexico, and I was born and raised here in the United States.

**Therapist:** Thank you for sharing. How important is your cultural identity to you?

**Maria:** My cultural identity is very important. It's a significant part of who I am, and it shapes my values and the way I see the world.

**Therapist:** I appreciate that. Now, let's talk about how your cultural background may influence your understanding of the sexual difficulties you've been experiencing. Are there any cultural factors or beliefs that you think may contribute to your current situation?

**Maria:** Well, in my culture, there is a strong emphasis on modesty and traditional gender roles. It can sometimes be challenging to openly discuss sexual matters. I feel like I've internalized some of those beliefs, which might make it harder for me to express myself sexually.

**Therapist:** Thank you for sharing that insight, Maria. It's essential to acknowledge how cultural beliefs and values can impact our experiences. How do you think your cultural background affects the way you cope with these sexual difficulties?

**Maria:** I think my cultural background has influenced my coping strategies. I tend to be more reserved and may avoid discussing these issues openly, even with my partner. It can be challenging for me to initiate conversations about sex due to cultural expectations around modesty.

**Therapist**: I understand. Cultural influences can shape our comfort levels and communication styles around sensitive topics like sexuality. Let's discuss your help-seeking behaviors. Are there any cultural factors that influence your decision to seek help for your sexual difficulties?

**Maria:** Yes, definitely. Seeking help for sexual issues is not something that is openly discussed in my community. There is a fear of judgment and stigma around seeking therapy, especially for matters related to intimacy and sex.

**Therapist**: I appreciate you sharing that. It's important to honor and respect your cultural context. Now, let's talk about your expectations and preferences for our therapeutic relationship. Are there any cultural considerations I should be aware of?

**Maria**: I would appreciate a therapist who understands and respects my cultural background. It would be helpful to have a therapist who can provide a safe and non-judgmental space for discussing sensitive topics related to sexuality.

**Therapist:** Thank you for expressing that, Maria. I will strive to create a therapeutic environment that acknowledges and respects your cultural values and beliefs. Lastly, how do you envision the role of culture in your treatment process?

**Maria:** I believe that addressing cultural factors can help me understand myself better and find ways to navigate my sexual difficulties within the context of my cultural background. It's important to me that my therapist recognizes and incorporates cultural considerations into the treatment approach.

**Therapist:** Absolutely, Maria. Integrating your cultural background into our treatment process will be a priority. We will work collaboratively to explore

how your cultural values and beliefs intersect with your sexual experiences and develop strategies to address your concerns effectively.

In this vignette, the LMFT conducts a CFI to gather information about Maria's cultural background, beliefs, and experiences related to her sexual difficulties. The therapist acknowledges the influence of cultural factors on Maria's coping strategies, help-seeking behaviors, and expectations for therapy. The therapist emphasizes the importance of creating a safe and non-judgmental space that respects Maria's cultural values and beliefs. They also discuss the role of culture in the treatment process and highlight the integration of cultural considerations into therapy.

Based on the information gathered through the CFI, the clinician can tailor the treatment plan to address Maria's specific needs and cultural context. They may incorporate culturally sensitive interventions such as exploring cultural narratives around sexuality, challenging cultural beliefs that hinder open communication, and introducing culturally relevant coping strategies.

Throughout therapy, the clinician maintains an ongoing awareness of cultural dynamics, regularly checking in with Maria to ensure that her cultural identity is acknowledged and respected. They continue to collaborate with her, allowing her to express any concerns or preferences related to cultural aspects of therapy.

By using the insights gained from the CFI, the clinician can provide a culturally sensitive and personalized treatment approach that honors Maria's cultural background, promotes her comfort and engagement in therapy, and addresses her sexual difficulties within the context of her cultural beliefs and values.

**Therapist:** Good morning, I'm Dr. Johnson, a mental health therapist specializing in sexual dysfunction. How can I assist you today?

**Client:** Hi, Dr. Johnson. I've been experiencing some difficulties in my sexual relationship with my partner, and it's been causing me a lot of distress. I thought it would be a good idea to seek professional help.

**Therapist:** I'm glad you reached out. Let's start by using the Cultural Formulation Interview (CFI) to gain a comprehensive understanding of your concerns. This will help me consider any cultural factors that might be relevant to your experience. Is that okay?

**Client:** Absolutely, that sounds helpful.

**Therapist:** Great. Let's begin with Domain 1, Cultural Definition of the Problem. How would you describe the specific sexual difficulties you've been facing?

**Client:** Well, I've been having trouble with arousal and reaching orgasm. It's been going on for a few months now, and it's affecting my self-esteem and our overall intimacy.

**Therapist:** Thank you for sharing that. Now, let's move on to Domain 2, Cultural Perceptions of the Problem. How do you think your culture and background might influence or shape your experience of sexual difficulties?

**Client:** I come from a conservative cultural background where discussions about sex are often considered taboo. I believe this cultural upbringing has contributed to my feelings of shame and embarrassment about discussing my sexual concerns.

**Therapist:** I appreciate you sharing that. It's essential to consider the impact of cultural factors. Moving on to Domain 3, Cultural Explanatory Model. How do you make sense of your sexual difficulties within the context of your cultural beliefs and values?

**Client:** I've been raised with the belief that sex is primarily for procreation and not for pleasure. It's possible that this belief has unconsciously influenced my ability to enjoy and engage in sexual activities fully.

**Therapist:** That's an insightful observation. Domain 4, Cultural Factors Affecting Self-Coping and Past Help-Seeking, allows us to explore how your culture and community have influenced your coping strategies and previous attempts to address this issue. Can you tell me about any previous experiences or support-seeking behaviors related to your sexual difficulties?

**Client:** In my community, seeking help for sexual concerns is heavily stigmatized. I haven't spoken to anyone about this before, not even my close friends or family.

**Therapist**: Thank you for sharing your experience. Finally, in Domain 5, Cultural Factors Affecting the Relationship Between the Individual and the Clinician, we examine how your cultural background might influence our therapeutic relationship. Is there anything you'd like me to know or consider in this regard?

**Client:** I would appreciate a therapist who is sensitive to my cultural background and understands the unique challenges I might face due to it. It would make me feel more comfortable and open during our sessions.

**Therapist**: I understand and will do my best to provide a safe and culturally responsive environment. Your cultural background is an essential aspect of your identity and will be integrated into our treatment approach.

In this clinical vignette, the therapist utilizes the DSM-5 Cultural Formulation Interview (CFI) to explore the client's sexual difficulties in the context of their cultural background. By acknowledging the impact of culture on the client's experiences, beliefs, and coping strategies, the therapist aims to develop a culturally sensitive treatment plan.

Note: The CFI is a structured interview developed by the DSM-5 to guide clinicians in assessing the cultural aspects of mental health issues. The dialogue above is a fictional example for illustrative purposes and not a substitute for professional clinical training or advice.

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When addressing sexual disorders and issues with cultural competence, mental health professionals need to be aware of the diverse cultural beliefs, values, and norms that can influence an individual's sexual health and well-being. Here are a few assessment tools and approaches that can aid in this process:

- ✓ **Cultural Formulation Interview (CFI):** As mentioned earlier, the CFI included in the DSM-5 is a structured interview that helps clinicians explore the cultural factors that may impact the presentation and experience of sexual disorders and issues. It provides a framework for understanding the individual within their cultural context and guides treatment planning.

- ✓ **Cultural Competence Assessment Tool (CCAT):** The CCAT is a self-assessment tool that mental health professionals can use to evaluate their own cultural competence. It helps them identify areas of strength and areas that may require further development in terms of understanding and addressing cultural influences on sexual health.

- ✓ **Klein Sexual Orientation Grid (KSOG):** The KSOG is a self-report measure that assesses sexual orientation on multiple dimensions, including sexual attraction, sexual behavior, sexual fantasies, emotional preference, and lifestyle indicators. It acknowledges the diversity of sexual orientations and allows individuals to express their experiences and identities within their cultural context.

- ✓ **Intersectionality Framework:** When assessing sexual disorders and issues, it is important to consider the intersectionality of various social identities, such as race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status. The Intersectionality Framework helps mental health professionals understand how these intersecting identities may influence an individual's experiences, needs, and access to care.

- ✓ **Culturally Sensitive Interviewing:** Mental health professionals should adopt culturally sensitive interviewing techniques when exploring sexual issues. This involves actively listening, demonstrating empathy, and avoiding assumptions or judgments based on cultural stereotypes. It also involves respecting privacy and confidentiality while being mindful of cultural norms around disclosure.

- ✓ **Language and Communication Considerations:** Professionals should consider language barriers and provide interpreters or translated materials if necessary. Additionally, they should be aware of cultural differences in communication styles and adapt their approach accordingly to facilitate effective and culturally sensitive communication.

- ✓ **Continuous Education and Training:** Staying updated on research and best practices related to sexual disorders and cultural competence is crucial. Mental health professionals should engage in ongoing education and training to enhance their knowledge and skills in providing culturally competent care.

By utilizing these assessment tools and approaches, clinicians can better understand the cultural nuances of sexual disorders, respect individual diversity, and provide more effective and sensitive treatment interventions that meet the unique needs of each individual.

## 5. Gender Identity and Gender Dysphoria

### Exploring Gender Identity, Gender Dysphoria, and the DSM-5: Implications for Mental Health and Social Work Professionals

### Introduction

In recent years, discussions surrounding gender identity and gender dysphoria have gained significant attention in both academic and public arenas. As mental health and social work professionals play a crucial role in supporting individuals experiencing gender-related challenges, it is vital to understand the complexities of gender identity, the diagnostic criteria for gender dysphoria as outlined in the DSM-5, and the associated risks, such as suicidality. This section aims to provide an overview of these topics, equipping professionals

with essential knowledge and resources to offer effective and sensitive support to individuals navigating gender identity issues.

**Understanding Gender Identity**

Gender identity refers to an individual's deeply-felt sense of being male, female, or non-binary, which may or may not align with the sex assigned at birth. It is essential to recognize that gender identity exists on a spectrum, and individuals may identify beyond traditional male or female categories. Mental health professionals should approach gender identity with respect and acknowledge the self-determination and courage of individuals seeking mental health treatment.

**Gender Dysphoria**

Gender dysphoria is a psychological distress experienced by individuals whose gender identity does not align with the sex assigned at birth. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition (DSM-5), provides diagnostic criteria for gender dysphoria, which include significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other areas of functioning. The DSM-5 aims to facilitate access to healthcare and support for individuals experiencing gender dysphoria, rather than pathologize gender diversity.

According to the DSM-5, gender dysphoria is characterized by a marked difference between the individual's expressed gender and their assigned gender, persistent discomfort or distress related to their assigned gender, and a desire to be rid of or treated as a different gender. These feelings must persist for at least six months to meet the diagnostic criteria.

It is important to note that the DSM-5 depathologized gender identity itself and instead focuses on the distress associated with the incongruence between gender identity and assigned sex. This change reflects a more nuanced understanding of gender diversity and aims to reduce stigma and discrimination against transgender individuals.

It is worth mentioning that the understanding and treatment of gender dysphoria have evolved over time. The DSM-5 revision marked a significant change by emphasizing the distress and impairment experienced by individuals rather than pathologizing their identity. This shift reflects a more affirming approach that acknowledges and supports transgender individuals' rights and well-being.

### The DSM-5 Criteria for Gender Dysphoria

The DSM-5 outlines specific diagnostic criteria for gender dysphoria, which include the presence of a marked incongruence between one's experienced gender and assigned gender, persistent discomfort or distress about one's assigned gender, and a strong desire to be of the other gender. Mental health professionals should be familiar with these criteria to accurately assess and support individuals with gender dysphoria.

The following are the diagnostic criteria for Gender Dysphoria as outlined in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5):

A. A marked incongruence between one's experienced/expressed gender and the assigned gender of at least six months' duration, as manifested by at least two of the following:

1. A strong desire to be of a gender different from the one assigned at birth.
2. A strong desire to be treated as a gender different from the one assigned at birth.
3. A strong conviction that one has the typical feelings and reactions of a gender different from the one assigned at birth.
4. A strong desire for the physical characteristics that match one's experienced gender.

B. The condition is associated with clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.

C. The condition is not better explained by a concurrent intersex condition. It's important to note that the DSM-5 criteria reflect a shift from pathologizing gender identity to focusing on the distress and impairment caused by the incongruence between gender identity and assigned gender. The criteria emphasize the individual's experiences and desires rather than classifying gender diversity as a mental disorder.

### Mental Health Risks and Suicidality

It is crucial to recognize that individuals experiencing gender dysphoria often face higher rates of mental health challenges and suicidality compared to the general population. Research suggests that social stigma, discrimination, lack of acceptance, and lack of access to appropriate healthcare contribute to these elevated risks. Mental health professionals should prioritize the assessment

and management of suicidality when working with gender dysphoric individuals and provide a supportive environment to help reduce these risks.

Suicide is a serious concern when discussing gender dysphoria. Research has consistently shown that individuals with gender dysphoria are at a higher risk of experiencing mental health challenges, including an increased risk of suicidal ideation and suicide attempts. It is essential to address this topic with sensitivity and emphasize the importance of providing appropriate support and care for individuals who are transgender or experiencing gender dysphoria. Several studies have documented the elevated risk of suicide among transgender individuals. A systematic review published in JAMA Surgery examined 28 studies and found that transgender individuals were approximately 22 times more likely to attempt suicide compared to the general population. Another study published in the American Journal of Public Health in indicated that transgender adults had a higher prevalence of lifetime suicide attempts compared to cisgender adults.

Several factors contribute to the increased risk of suicide among individuals with gender dysphoria. These factors can include societal discrimination, social rejection, lack of access to appropriate healthcare, and high levels of distress related to gender incongruence. Gender dysphoria itself can cause significant psychological distress, especially when individuals face challenges in expressing their gender identity or accessing affirming treatments and support.

To address the high rates of suicide among individuals with gender dysphoria, it is crucial to provide comprehensive and compassionate care. This includes access to mental health support and social support networks. Creating inclusive and supportive environments, reducing discrimination and stigma, and promoting acceptance of transgender individuals are also important steps toward improving mental health outcomes and reducing the risk of suicide.

Resources that provide information and support regarding gender dysphoria, mental health, and suicide prevention:

1. Trans Lifeline: A helpline staffed by transgender people for transgender individuals in crisis. Website: https://www.translifeline.org/
2. The Trevor Project: A leading organization providing crisis intervention and suicide prevention services for LGBTQ+ youth. Website: https://www.thetrevorproject.org/
3. National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (USA): A 24/7 helpline for individuals in crisis or those concerned about someone's well-being. Website: https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/

4. International Suicide Hotlines: A comprehensive list of suicide helplines worldwide. Website: https://www.suicidestop.com/call_a_hotline.html
5. GLAAD: An LGBTQ+ media advocacy organization that provides resources and support for transgender individuals. Website: https://www.glaad.org/
6. National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI): A grassroots mental health organization offering support, education, and resources. Website: https://www.nami.org/
7. Gender Spectrum: An organization supporting and advocating for transgender and non-binary youth and their families. Website: https://www.genderspectrum.org/
8. World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH): An international organization that promotes evidence-based care, education, research, and advocacy for transgender health. Website: https://www.wpath.org/
9. American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP): A nonprofit organization dedicated to understanding and preventing suicide through research, education, and advocacy. Website: https://afsp.org/

These resources can provide valuable information, support, and assistance for individuals experiencing gender dysphoria or anyone concerned about the mental health and well-being of transgender individuals

**STDs and Risk Factors**

Studies have shown that transgender individuals, particularly transgender women, are disproportionately affected by sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Factors contributing to this disparity include limited access to healthcare, discrimination, and social marginalization. Mental health and social work professionals can play a critical role in educating transgender individuals about safe sex practices, providing resources for accessing healthcare, and addressing the psychosocial factors that may increase vulnerability to STDs.

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**Additional Information**

It is important to note that the field of gender identity and gender dysphoria is constantly evolving, and new research and understanding continue to emerge. Mental health and social work professionals should stay informed about the latest developments in this field to provide the best possible care to their clients. Additionally, seeking specialized training and consultation from experts in transgender health can enhance professionals' competence and confidence in working with gender diverse populations.

Beyond the DSM-5, it is crucial to recognize that not all individuals who identify as transgender or non-binary experience distress or dysphoria. Some individuals may undergo gender-affirming interventions, such as hormone therapy or surgeries, to align their physical appearance with their gender identity. These interventions can be essential in alleviating dysphoria for some individuals. Mental health professionals should adopt a holistic and affirming approach, recognizing the unique needs and preferences of each individual they work with.

In providing support to individuals with gender dysphoria, mental health and social work professionals should prioritize creating a safe and non-judgmental space for individuals to explore their gender identity. Active listening, empathy, and validation of their experiences can go a long way in establishing trust and rapport. Professionals should also be aware of local resources, support groups, and organizations that can provide additional assistance and community connections for their clients.

Furthermore, it is essential to address the social determinants of health that impact transgender individuals, such as discrimination, stigma, and access to healthcare. Advocating for transgender rights and inclusive policies can contribute to creating a more equitable and supportive society for individuals of all gender identities.

In conclusion, mental health and social work professionals have a crucial role in supporting individuals with gender identity concerns and gender dysphoria. By understanding the complexities of gender identity, familiarizing themselves with the DSM-5 criteria, and staying up-to-date with current research, professionals can provide affirming and effective care. By addressing the mental health risks, including suicidality, and advocating for the well-being of transgender individuals, professionals can contribute to a more inclusive and accepting society where all individuals can live authentically and thrive.

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**Cultural Competence**

Professionals working with transgender individuals should continuously strive to develop cultural competence. This involves understanding the unique experiences, challenges, and strengths of transgender individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. It is important to be aware of the intersectionality of identities, including race, ethnicity, religion, and socioeconomic status, to provide sensitive and effective support.

**Collaboration and Referral**

Mental health and social work professionals should be prepared to collaborate with other healthcare providers, including endocrinologists, surgeons, and primary care physicians, to ensure comprehensive care for transgender individuals.

**Ethical Considerations**

Professionals should adhere to ethical guidelines and codes of conduct specific to their profession when working with transgender individuals. These guidelines emphasize the importance of respecting autonomy, confidentiality, and informed consent. Mental health professionals should also be mindful of their own biases and work towards providing non-discriminatory and equitable care.

### Continuing Education and Self-Care

Given the evolving nature of the field, mental health and social work professionals should engage in ongoing education and professional development to stay informed about the latest research, best practices, and emerging therapeutic modalities. Additionally, self-care practices are crucial for professionals to prevent burnout and maintain their well-being while supporting transgender individuals.

# 6. Cultural Competence

### Cultural Norms, Beliefs, and Values: Exploring Ethnic Perspectives on Human Sexuality

This section aims to explore the diverse cultural norms, beliefs, and values related to human sexuality within different ethnic groups. Understanding the variations in attitudes towards sexuality across cultures is crucial for mental health professionals to provide culturally sensitive and inclusive care. By examining specific ethnic groups, including but not limited to Asian, African American, Hispanic/Latinx, Native American, and Middle Eastern cultures, we will shed light on their unique perspectives on sexuality. The paper will emphasize the importance of cultural competence and provide recommendations for mental health professionals to enhance their understanding and support individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

***Asian Cultural Norms, Beliefs, and Values***

#### Historical context and Confucian influences:

Asian cultures, such as those found in China, Japan, and Korea, have been influenced by Confucianism, which emphasizes hierarchical relationships and filial piety. This traditional framework often shapes attitudes towards sexuality, promoting modesty, chastity, and the suppression of sexual desires.

#### Traditional views on sexuality and gender roles:

Historically, Asian cultures have held conservative attitudes towards sexuality, valuing virginity and marital fidelity. Gender roles have often been rigidly defined, with men expected to be assertive and dominant while women are expected to be submissive and nurturing.

**Cultural expectations and family honor:**

In many Asian cultures, family honor and reputation are highly valued. As a result, sexual behavior is closely monitored and regulated, with expectations for individuals to conform to societal norms and avoid behaviors that may bring shame or dishonor to the family.

**Impact of acculturation and generational differences:**

Acculturation and exposure to Western values have led to shifting attitudes towards sexuality among younger generations. The influence of media, globalization, and increased mobility has resulted in more open discussions about sexuality and greater acceptance of diverse sexual orientations

***African American Cultural Norms, Beliefs, and Values***

**African roots and cultural resilience:**

African Americans have diverse ethnic backgrounds, with ancestral ties to various African countries. African cultural values often highlight communal living, extended family networks, and a holistic approach to well-being, which can influence attitudes towards sexuality.

**Historical influences and the impact of slavery:**

The experience of slavery and systemic oppression has shaped African American cultural norms and beliefs. Historical trauma and the struggle for civil rights have influenced attitudes towards sexuality, with resilience and empowerment being key themes.

**Religiosity and its implications for sexual attitudes:**

Religion plays a significant role in African American communities, with a high level of religiosity often linked to conservative sexual attitudes. However, there is a wide range of perspectives within the community, from conservative to more progressive views on sexuality.

**The role of hip-hop culture and the media:**

Hip-hop culture and the media have had a profound impact on African American attitudes towards sexuality. While hip-hop can celebrate sexual freedom and empowerment, it can also reinforce stereotypes and

hypersexualization, creating a complex and sometimes contradictory landscape.

### *Hispanic/Latinx Cultural Norms, Beliefs, and Values*

#### Influence of Catholicism and machismo:

Catholicism has historically been a dominant religion within Hispanic/Latinx cultures, influencing sexual norms and values. The concept of machismo, which emphasizes male dominance and traditional gender roles, can influence attitudes towards sexuality and relationships.

#### Familismo and the importance of family:

Hispanic/Latinx cultures often prioritize family cohesion and interdependence. Familismo, the strong sense of loyalty and obligation to the family, can shape attitudes towards sexuality, emphasizing the importance of maintaining family honor and unity.

#### Marianismo and its impact on female sexuality:

Marianismo refers to the cultural expectation of female modesty, purity, and self-sacrifice. This concept can influence the sexual behavior and agency of women within Hispanic/Latinx communities, potentially limiting their autonomy and sexual expression.

#### Acculturation and changing attitudes towards sexuality:

Acculturation, particularly among younger generations, has led to a shift in attitudes towards sexuality. Exposure to Western culture and increased educational opportunities have contributed to more progressive views on sexuality and greater acceptance of diverse sexual orientations.

### *Native American Cultural Norms, Beliefs, and Values*

#### Spirituality and connection to the land:

Native American cultures have a strong spiritual connection to the land and a holistic understanding of sexuality. Many tribes view sexuality as a sacred aspect of life, connected to the natural world and spiritual well-being.

**Traditional views on gender and Two-Spirit identities:**

Native American cultures often have traditional views on gender that encompass more than a binary understanding. Some tribes recognize Two-Spirit individuals who embody both masculine and feminine qualities, and they hold unique roles within their communities.

**Sexual health and cultural revitalization efforts:**

Native American communities place importance on sexual health as part of overall well-being. Efforts are made to address sexual health disparities, promote safe practices, and preserve cultural traditions related to sexuality through cultural revitalization initiatives.

**The impact of historical trauma and colonization:**

Historical trauma and the legacy of colonization have had a profound impact on Native American cultures and attitudes towards sexuality. The disruption of traditional practices, forced assimilation, and cultural erasure have influenced the way sexuality is perceived and expressed within Native American communities.

***Middle Eastern Cultural Norms, Beliefs, and Values***

**Islamic influences and cultural conservatism:**

Islamic influences shape cultural norms and values related to sexuality in many Middle Eastern countries. Modesty, sexual restraint, and adherence to religious teachings regarding sexual behavior are often emphasized, with premarital sex and homosexuality viewed as taboo.

**Gender roles and modesty:**

Middle Eastern cultures often have distinct gender roles and expectations, with an emphasis on modesty and the preservation of family honor. Modesty in dress and behavior, particularly for women, is highly valued and considered an important aspect of sexual propriety.

**Arranged marriages and cultural expectations:**

Arranged marriages, prevalent in some Middle Eastern cultures, play a significant role in shaping attitudes towards sexuality. Marital relationships are

seen as a social and familial contract, with expectations for couples to fulfill their marital duties and maintain the family unit.

### The influence of globalization and shifting attitudes:

Globalization, exposure to Western values, and increased mobility have resulted in shifting attitudes towards sexuality among younger generations in some Middle Eastern countries. Western media, the internet, and increased access to information have contributed to more open discussions and diverse perspectives on sexuality.

## Recommendations for Mental Health Professionals

### ➡Cultivating cultural competence:

Mental health professionals should actively engage in cultural competence training to understand and respect the diverse cultural norms, beliefs, and values related to sexuality within different ethnic groups. This includes acknowledging and challenging personal biases, stereotypes, and assumptions.

### ➡Recognizing biases and challenging stereotypes:

It is important for mental health professionals to be aware of their own biases and stereotypes that may influence their understanding and interactions with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. Active self-reflection and continuous learning are essential in providing unbiased and culturally sensitive care.

### ➡Engaging in ongoing education and self-reflection:

Mental health professionals should stay informed about the unique cultural perspectives on sexuality within different ethnic groups through ongoing education, attending cultural competency workshops, and actively seeking opportunities for self-reflection and growth.

### ➡Collaborating with community resources:

Building partnerships with community organizations and cultural leaders can enhance mental health professionals' understanding of cultural norms, beliefs, and values related to sexuality. This collaboration allows for more comprehensive and culturally appropriate support for individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

**Conclusion**

This section has explored the diverse cultural norms, beliefs, and values related to human sexuality within various ethnic groups. By understanding the unique perspectives of different cultures, mental health professionals can provide culturally sensitive care that respects individual diversity and promotes positive mental well-being. Recognizing and embracing the richness of cultural diversity is essential for fostering inclusive and effective mental health practices. Through continuous education, self-reflection, and collaboration with community resources, mental health professionals can enhance their cultural competence and support individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds in a respectful and empowering manner.

## Culturally Competent Best Practices

This section provides clinicians with a comprehensive understanding of the significance of cultural competence in working with diverse populations regarding human sexuality. By implementing the best practices discussed and applying the culturally informed clinical strategies outlined, professionals can foster a safe, inclusive, and effective therapeutic environment that respects the cultural norms, beliefs, and values of clients from various ethnic backgrounds. Through continuous learning and self-reflection, mental health professionals can enhance their cultural competence and promote positive outcomes in their practice.

### ***Culturally Competent Assessment Strategies:***

#### Culturally Tailored Assessment Measures:

➡Utilize assessment measures that are culturally appropriate and sensitive to the cultural background of the individual. This may involve using validated assessment tools that have been adapted or developed specifically for the target culture or population.

➡Cultural Formulation Interview: Incorporate the Cultural Formulation Interview (CFI) from the DSM-5, which provides a structured approach to gathering information about an individual's cultural background, beliefs, values, and the impact of culture on their presenting concerns. The CFI helps clinicians develop a comprehensive understanding of the individual's cultural context.

➡Open-Ended Questions: Use open-ended questions during assessments to allow individuals to freely express their cultural perspectives, values, and beliefs related to their sexuality. This approach encourages clients to share

their unique experiences and provides insights into how culture shapes their understanding of human sexuality.

➡Cultural Awareness and Sensitivity: Cultivate cultural awareness and sensitivity as a mental health professional. This involves recognizing one's own biases, assumptions, and stereotypes and continuously engaging in self-reflection to promote cultural humility.

➡Cultural Empathy and Validation: Demonstrate empathy and validation toward individuals' cultural experiences related to human sexuality. Validate the impact of cultural norms, beliefs, and values on their sexual identity, attitudes, and behaviors, fostering a safe and non-judgmental assessment environment.

➡Intersectionality: Acknowledge the intersectionality of culture, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and other social identities. Consider how these intersecting identities influence an individual's experience of their own sexuality and their interactions with broader cultural norms.

➡Family and Community Involvement: Recognize the significance of family and community in shaping an individual's sexual beliefs, values, and behaviors. Incorporate questions and discussions about family and community influences during the assessment process.

➡Cultural Rituals and Practices: Inquire about and explore the role of cultural rituals and practices in an individual's sexual beliefs and behaviors. Understand the significance of cultural ceremonies, traditions, or religious practices in relation to sexuality and their impact on the individual's well-being.

➡Intersectional Assessment: Recognize and assess the intersectionality of various cultural identities, such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and disability status. Understanding how these intersecting identities influence an individual's experience of human sexuality can provide valuable insights for assessment and treatment planning.

➡Narrative and Storytelling Approaches: Incorporate narrative and storytelling approaches to allow individuals to share their cultural narratives and personal stories related to human sexuality. This allows for a deeper understanding of their cultural beliefs, values, and experiences and helps to inform the assessment process.

***Language and Communication Considerations:***

➡Assess individuals' preferred language for communication and ensure the availability of interpreters or cultural consultants when needed. This helps to overcome language barriers and ensures accurate understanding and communication during the assessment process.

➡Cultural Genograms: Incorporate cultural genograms to visually map individuals' family and social networks, including important cultural factors such as cultural practices, beliefs, and roles. This helps to identify cultural influences on an individual's sexuality within their familial and community contexts.

***Culturally Competent Treatment Strategies:***

- ✓ Culturally Sensitive Psychoeducation: Provide culturally sensitive psychoeducation about human sexuality that takes into account the cultural norms, beliefs, and values of the individual's specific cultural background. This may involve adapting educational materials and resources to be culturally relevant and respectful.

- ✓ Collaborative Goal Setting: Engage in collaborative goal setting with the individual, taking into consideration their cultural values and beliefs. This ensures that treatment goals align with the individual's cultural context and aspirations.

- ✓ Culturally Adapted Interventions: Adapt therapeutic interventions to be culturally appropriate and relevant. This may involve incorporating cultural practices, rituals, or traditional healing methods that are valued within the individual's culture. It is important to work in partnership with the individual to identify interventions that align with their cultural values and preferences.

- ✓ Respect for Autonomy and Decision-Making: Recognize and respect the individual's autonomy and decision-making regarding their sexuality within the context of their cultural norms and values. This includes acknowledging and validating their cultural perspectives, even if they differ from the clinician's personal beliefs.

- ✓ Culturally Responsive Communication: Utilize effective cross-cultural communication skills, such as active listening, empathy, and sensitivity to nonverbal cues, to establish rapport and build a therapeutic alliance. Be aware of linguistic and cultural nuances that may impact communication and adjust accordingly.

- ✓ Collaboration with Community Resources: Collaborate with community resources, cultural consultants, or organizations that specialize in providing culturally competent support and services related to human sexuality. This helps to ensure that the individual receives comprehensive care that respects their cultural background and needs.

- ✓ Continuous Professional Development: Engage in ongoing education and training to enhance cultural competence and stay informed about emerging research, best practices, and evolving cultural norms and beliefs. This allows mental health professionals to continually refine their skills and knowledge in working with diverse populations.

- ✓ Collaboration with Indigenous Healing Methods: Acknowledge and respect indigenous healing methods and traditional knowledge related to human sexuality. Collaborate with indigenous healers or cultural leaders to incorporate culturally appropriate practices into treatment plans.

- ✓ Addressing Stigma and Discrimination: Address stigma and discrimination related to an individual's cultural background, sexual orientation, or gender identity. Provide psychoeducation, support, and advocacy to help individuals navigate and challenge cultural norms that may perpetuate stigma or prejudice.

- ✓ Culturally Relevant Resources and Referrals: Provide individuals with culturally relevant resources, such as books, articles, or websites, that address human sexuality within their cultural context. Refer individuals to culturally specific support groups or community organizations that can provide additional guidance and support.

- ✓ Cultural Consultation and Collaboration: Seek consultation from cultural experts, community leaders, or colleagues with expertise in specific cultural backgrounds. Engage in collaborative discussions to ensure cultural competence and effectiveness in treatment planning and implementation.

- ✓ Flexibility in Therapeutic Approaches: Adapt therapeutic approaches to accommodate cultural preferences and practices. Allow space for storytelling, traditional healing practices, or alternative forms of expression that are valued in the individual's culture.

- ✓ Evaluation of Treatment Outcomes: Evaluate treatment outcomes in a culturally sensitive manner. Consider the individual's cultural context when assessing progress and determining the effectiveness of interventions.

It is important to note that these strategies are not exhaustive, and the application of culturally competent assessment and treatment should be tailored to the unique needs and cultural contexts of each individual. By incorporating these strategies into assessment and treatment approaches, clinicians can better understand and respect the cultural norms, beliefs, and values related to human sexuality within diverse populations, leading to more effective and culturally responsive care.

**Resources**

- **Scarleteen** (www.scarleteen.com): Scarleteen is an inclusive and comprehensive online resource for young people regarding sexual health, relationships, and consent. It provides accurate information, articles, and advice on a wide range of topics related to human sexuality.

- **American Sexual Health Association** (www.ashasexualhealth.org): The American Sexual Health Association offers information, resources, and advocacy related to sexual health. Their website provides educational materials on various topics, including sexual health, STIs, and relationships.

- **LGBTQ+ Resource Centers:** Local LGBTQ+ community centers often offer resources, support groups, and educational programs related to sexual orientation and gender identity. These centers can provide valuable information, referrals, and community connections for individuals seeking support in navigating their sexuality within their cultural context.

- **National Alliance on Mental Illness** (NAMI) (www.nami.org): NAMI is a mental health organization that provides resources and support for

individuals and families affected by mental health conditions. They offer educational materials, support groups, and advocacy resources related to mental health and cultural competence.

- **Ethnic-specific Community Organizations**: Many ethnic-specific community organizations provide culturally relevant support, resources, and advocacy related to sexuality and sexual health. These organizations may focus on specific cultural or ethnic communities and can provide information and support within the cultural context of the individual.

- **Therapy for Black Girl**s (www.therapyforblackgirls.com): Therapy for Black Girls is an online directory that connects Black women and girls with mental health professionals who specialize in supporting their unique needs. It also offers a podcast and resources on mental health and wellness.

- **National Asian American Pacific Islander Mental Health Association** (www.naapimha.org): The National Asian American Pacific Islander Mental Health Association offers resources, advocacy, and support for Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander communities. Their website provides information on mental health and culturally competent care.

- **National Indigenous Women's Resource Center** (www.niwrc.org): The National Indigenous Women's Resource Center focuses on addressing domestic violence, sexual assault, and other forms of violence against Indigenous women. Their website offers resources, toolkits, and information on cultural practices and healing within Indigenous communities.

- **The Trevor Project** (www.thetrevorproject.org): The Trevor Project is a leading organization providing crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to LGBTQ+ youth. Their website offers resources, educational materials, and a 24/7 helpline for LGBTQ+ individuals in need of support.

- **National Coalition for Sexual Freedom** (www.ncsfreedom.org): The National Coalition for Sexual Freedom advocates for the rights of consenting adults in the BDSM, fetish, and non-monogamous communities. Their website provides resources, educational materials, and support for individuals within these communities.

- **Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States** (SIECUS) (www.siecus.org): SIECUS is an organization that advocates for comprehensive sexuality education and sexual health. Their website provides educational resources, research, and policy advocacy materials on various topics related to human sexuality.

- **National Center for Transgender Equality** (www.transequality.org): The National Center for Transgender Equality advocates for policy change and social equality for transgender and gender non-conforming individuals. Their website offers resources, educational materials, and support for transgender individuals and their allies.

- **National Association of Social Workers (NASW)** (www.socialworkers.org): NASW provides resources and support for social workers and individuals seeking social work services. Their website offers information on cultural competence, social justice, and advocacy for diverse populations.

- **Association of Black Psychologists** (www.abpsi.org): The Association of Black Psychologists promotes the mental health and well-being of Black individuals and communities. Their website offers resources, directories, and educational materials on topics related to mental health and cultural competence.

- **American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors, and Therapists (AASECT) (www.aasect.org):** AASECT is an organization that promotes the understanding of human sexuality and provides resources for sexuality educators, counselors, and therapists. Their website offers directories, educational materials, and professional development opportunities.

- **Health Resource and Services Administration (HRSA) Office of Minority Health (www.minorityhealth.hrsa.gov):** HRSA's Office of Minority Health offers resources and support for addressing health disparities and promoting culturally competent care. Their website provides information, toolkits, and resources specific to minority populations.

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# 7. Sexual Violence and Abuse

All forms of sexual and sexuality-related violence have multiple negative effects on health and well-being. People living in violent relationships, for example, may be unable to make sexual and reproductive choices, either through direct exposure to forced or coerced sex or because they are unable to control or negotiate regular use of contraception and condoms. This puts them at risk of unwanted pregnancy (for women), and STIs including HIV. Intimate partner violence in pregnancy increases the likelihood of abortion, miscarriage, stillbirth, preterm delivery and low birth weight. An example of the way in which the law has an impact on sexual health is the legal understanding of rape, which has historically been understood as sexual intercourse by a man with a woman who is not his wife, through force and against her will, involving vaginal penetration by a penis. Under such a definition, women who have been raped by their husbands, women who have been raped anally, men and transgender individuals cannot claim, legitimately, to have been raped. International criminal law has evolved to define rape in much broader terms, covering different invasive acts perpetrated by and against people of any sex or gender, and recognizing that rape within marriage is a crime in all circumstances. Many national laws have been amended over the past decade in line with these human rights standards. This accommodates access to needed health services for all (unmarried girls and women, men, boys and transgender persons) as well as recourse to due process and redress, which plays a role in health.

States have obligations to bring their laws and regulations that affect sexual health into alignment with human rights laws and standards. Removing barriers in access to sexual health information and services, and putting in place laws and regulations that aim to support and promote sexual health, are actions that are also in line with the World Health Organization's global reproductive health strategy.

**Sexual and Sexuality Related Violence**

Over the past three decades, extensive research in all regions of the world has brought to light the extent of sexual violence and sexuality-related violence. Sexual violence has a profound impact on physical and mental health. As well as causing physical injury, it is associated with an increased risk of a range of sexual and reproductive health problems, with both

immediate and long-term consequences. People living in violent relationships, for example, may be unable to make sexual and reproductive choices, either due to being directly subjected to forced or coerced sex, or because they are unable to control or negotiate the use of contraception and condoms. This puts them at risk of unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV.

Intimate partner violence in pregnancy increases the likelihood of abortion, miscarriage, stillbirth, preterm delivery and low birth weight. People subjected to violence, including sexual and sexuality-related violence, have been found to be at increased risk of depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, sleep difficulties, eating disorders and emotional distress.

Recent global prevalence figures indicate that, overall, 35% of women worldwide have experienced either intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime. On average, 30% of women who have been in a relationship report that they have experienced some form of physical or sexual violence by their partner. Globally, as many as 38% of murders of women are committed by an intimate partner. Data indicate that there is a higher incidence of sexual violence directed against women and girls. However, sexual violence and sexuality-related violence can be, and is, directed against anyone – women, men, girls, boys, transgender people and intersex people – and particularly against people in positions of vulnerability, such as people engaged in sex work, migrants, internally displaced persons and refugees, and people with disabilities. For example, increasing attention is being paid to sexual violence against men in conflict situations. In the last decade, sexualized violence against men and boys – including rape, sexual torture, mutilation of the genitals, sexual humiliation, sexual enslavement, forced incest and forced rape – has been reported in 25 armed conflicts across the world. Sexual and sexuality-related violence serve as a form of punishment and control, which may be committed by both non-state actors such as family members, neighbors or co-workers, as well as by agents of the state such as police, with the intention of inducing shame and diminishing the reputation of the victim of violence. These forms of violence stem from other forms of inequality, and serve to reinforce hierarchies of power based on gender, class, race, ethnicity, caste, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, or other important social divisions. Victims of sexual violence may perceive themselves to be responsible, or may actually be held responsible by others, for the violence. They feel shame, dishonor, humiliation, guilt and stigmatization, all of

which contribute to making it difficult to report incidents of violence, as well as to seek treatment and care for related physical and psychological injuries, thus compounding the health problems. Sexual violence is thus responsible for a significant disease burden.

Violence, including sexual violence and sexuality related violence, is a violation of fundamental human rights, most notably the rights to life, to be free from torture and inhuman and degrading treatment, to the highest attainable standard of health, and to bodily integrity, dignity and self-determination. Addressing violence against women in particular, international and regional human rights standards have made clear that the elimination of violence against women is essential for women's individual and social development and their full and equal participation in all sectors and spheres of society. Human rights bodies have specifically condemned traditional attitudes that regard women as subordinate to men, particularly because they perpetuate practices involving violence or coercion, the effect of which is to deprive women of the enjoyment of many of their human rights. Under international and regional human rights law, states have a responsibility to protect all individuals from all forms of violence. In line with the human rights concept of "due diligence", which applies to all persons, states must adopt legislative, administrative, social and economic measures necessary to prevent, investigate and punish acts of violence including rape, sexual violence, homophobic violence, female genital mutilation and trafficking into forced prostitution, whether perpetrated by the state or by private persons. States should also provide effective remedies, compensation and a mechanism for seeking redress.

Many states have adopted national legislation to address the issue of domestic and intimate partner violence, including sexual violence. Yet there are still national laws that do not recognize the diversity of forms or contexts of sexual violence, often leading to serious negative consequences for health and rights. On the other hand, international and regional human rights standards now define the diversity of forms of violence, perpetrators and victims, and a growing number of national laws and jurisprudence reflect this, as highlighted in this chapter. This section focuses on those forms of violence that are directly sexual or related to sexuality, including rape, child sexual abuse, forced marriage, trafficking into forced prostitution, regardless of the gender or sex of the victim. It also addresses other forms of violence affecting bodily and sexual integrity such as female genital mutilation, coercive practices within health services that directly

affect people's sexual and reproductive health, and violence committed against persons because of their real or perceived sexual practices, behavior and expression, including hate crimes and so-called honor killings.

## Health, human rights and legal implications of different forms of sexual and sexuality-related violence

### Sexual assault including rape

Someone who is sexually assaulted, including someone who is raped or coerced into unwanted sexual intercourse, has little or no control over the situation, and the sexual health consequences are serious: possible unwanted pregnancy, and the need for abortion, which might be unsafe; exposure to STIs including HIV; and other reproductive and gynaecological morbidities. Cases are often unreported or undocumented because people who are sexually assaulted often suffer feelings of shame, blame or psychological distress, and because the responses they get from formal institutions (police, judiciary, health), as well as from community members, are frequently unsympathetic, discriminatory and traumatizing. Very few cases of rape, for example, are actually reported to the police, making it almost impossible to estimate the actual extent of rape worldwide, but it occurs in all countries of the world, both within and outside marriage and intimate partnerships. It is also widespread in times of conflict. The legal understanding of sexual assault and rape has been historically narrow in scope. Rape, for example, has traditionally been understood as "unlawful" sexual intercourse by a man with a woman who is not his wife, through force and against her will, and involving vaginal penetration by a penis. Under such a definition, women who have been raped by their husbands, women who have been raped anally, men and transgender individuals cannot legitimately claim to have been raped. In 2010, international criminal law elaborated the elements of the crime of rape, radically changing this traditional understanding, and these elements have been affirmed by a number of national laws. The consideration of these elements requires, for example, a broader definition of what constitutes rape, which should cover coercive "invasion" or "conduct resulting in penetration, however slight, of any part of the body of the victim ... with a sexual organ, or of the anal or genital opening of the victim with any object or any other part of the body". The definition of rape should also be broad enough to be gender-neutral, meaning that it can apply to any person of whatever sex or gender. In addition, international and regional human rights laws now recognizes that rape can take place within marriage and is a crime in all circumstances. At the regional level, the language of the

Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa clearly indicates that immunity cannot be granted to husbands, as states are enjoined to adopt laws that prohibit "all forms of violence against women, including unwanted or forced sex whether the violence takes place in private or in public". In a similar vein, the European Court of Human Rights has ruled unacceptable the idea of a husband being immune to prosecution for raping his wife, in line with what the Court termed a civilized concept of marriage but also with the fundamental right of respect for human dignity.

Many national laws have been amended over the past decade in line with these human rights standards. For example, laws have been changed to recognize that marital rape is a crime; that rape can be committed by a person of any gender against another person of any gender; that any act of penetration can be considered as rape; and that evidence of physical force is not required as proof of rape (e.g. South Africa, Thailand). According to international human rights standards, the definition of rape should no longer require corroboration of a victim's testimony by third parties. In this way, it can no longer be implied that women's testimony cannot be relied upon. Several national courts and legislatures have removed the requirement for corroboration of a third party to "prove" that rape has taken place. The South African Supreme Court, for example, specifically stated that such a requirement was "based on an irrational and out-dated perception and unjust stereotyping against women as unreliable victims", and the Kenyan Court of Appeal found that such requirement constitutes discrimination against women and is contrary to the concept of equality. People held in detention, such as prisoners, can be particularly at risk of sexual violence, and those who are sex workers, homosexuals or transgender, as well as sex offenders, may be at increased risk of sexual violence from other inmates and sometimes also directly from prison guards. Prison authorities' discriminatory attitudes towards these populations can create a climate in which such violations can easily proliferate. Rape in custodial situations has been regarded as a form of torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, and rape of a detainee by an official of the state is considered to be an especially grave and abhorrent form of ill treatment, given the ease with which the offender can exploit the vulnerability of his victim. Based on human rights standards, states are called upon to design and implement appropriate measures to prevent all sexual violence in all detention centers, ensure that all allegations of violence in detention centers are investigated promptly and independently, that

perpetrators are prosecuted and appropriately sentenced, and that victims can seek redress including appropriate compensation. Some countries have established specific legal protections against prison rape. In the USA, for example, following data collection that confirmed that sexual abuse was a significant problem in prisons, jails and immigrant detention centers, and even more likely in juvenile facilities, a number of standards have been put in place, including prohibition of the hiring or promotion of staff who have been engaged in coercive sex, and limits on body searches by opposite-sex staff.

**Sexual Abuse of Children**

Sexual abuse of children (i.e. people under the age of 18) occurs in all regions of the world and is part of a broader phenomenon of child maltreatment. It is a serious violation of a child's rights to health and protection. Evidence from different parts of the world indicates that up to 20% of women and 5–10% of men report having been sexually abused as children. Sexual abuse of children has not been well documented at a population level, but clinic-based studies have shown severe effects on health, including sexual health, such as injuries, STIs (including HIV), trauma, depression, anxiety and even death. In older female children, it may result in unwanted pregnancy and unsafe abortion with potential complications. Sexually abused children are at increased risk for behavioral, physical and mental health problems including depression, smoking, obesity, high-risk sexual behaviors, harmful use of alcohol and drugs, and perpetrating or being a victim of violence. Children are understood to be at risk of sexual harm in part because they lack the ability to claim their rights, and also in part because of the power imbalances between younger and older persons. International and regional human rights standards provide the framework for states' obligations to take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect children from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, including sexual abuse and to punish the perpetrators of such acts and protect the rights and interests of child victims. Regional standards also encourage children's participation, according to their evolving capacity,

in the design and implementation of relevant state policies, stressing that assistance to victims shall take due account of the child's views, needs and concerns, and always take into account the best interests of the child. Importantly, the Convention and mental health problems including depression, smoking, obesity, high-risk sexual behaviors, harmful use of

alcohol and drugs, and perpetrating or being a victim of violence. Children are understood to be at risk of sexual harm in part because they lack the ability to claim their rights, and also in part because of the power imbalances between younger and older persons. International and regional human rights standards provide the framework for states' obligations to take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect children from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, including sexual abuse and to punish the perpetrators of such acts and protect the rights and interests of child victims. Regional standards also encourage children's participation, according to their evolving capacity, in the design and implementation of relevant state policies, stressing that assistance to victims shall take due account of the child's views, needs and concerns, and always take into account the best interests of the child. Importantly, the Convention should closely reflect the recognition of the status of people under 18 years of age as rights holders, in accordance with their evolving capacity, age and maturity.

**Forced Marriage and Sexuality Related Violence**

In a number of countries, children and adults – particularly women – may not be able to freely enter into marriage with their full consent for reasons linked to historical subordination, lack of economic independence, sociocultural tradition or family interest. Practices related to forced marriage include child or early marriage, forced marriage in war, conflict and post-conflict situations, widow inheritance, and forced marriage with an abductor or rapist. All such practices have a detrimental effect on the health and well-being of the people involved, and violate fundamental human rights. International human rights standards are unequivocal: "marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses". Human rights bodies have frequently condemned both early and forced marriage as a violation of women's rights and have affirmed that a woman's right to choose when, if and whom she will marry must be protected and enforced by the law.

**Child or Early Marriage**

The practice of child or early marriage is widespread and occurs in all regions of the world. It prevents individuals from living their lives free from all forms of violence and it has adverse consequences on the enjoyment of human rights, such as the right to education, and the right to the highest attainable standard of health, including sexual and reproductive health.

Within marriage, young women and girls in particular are at risk of sexual abuse, rape, premature motherhood and domestic violence, with all associated physiological and psychological trauma. Adolescent and child wives are less able than their adult counterparts to negotiate sex, or to make free and informed decisions affecting their sexual and reproductive health, including access to health services for contraception and the prevention and treatment of STIs.

Early marriage is very often linked to early childbearing as in many countries there is considerable pressure on girls to become pregnant soon after they are married. The health risks of early pregnancy for adolescent girls are considerable. Early childbirth is nearly always associated with lower socioeconomic status, reduced access to antenatal care, and poor nutritional status, all of which can lead to poor maternal and child health outcomes. These include increased risks of: anaemia, premature labor, complications during delivery (including obstetric fistula), maternal death, low birth weight, and neonatal death. International and regional human rights standards and consensus documents call for the elimination of early and forced marriage. They call for the recognition of a minimum age of marriage, which should be 18 years for both men and women, and for the official registration of all marriages to be compulsory. They recognize the necessity of collective efforts of governments, lawmakers, judicial authorities, law enforcement officials, traditional and religious leaders, civil society, media, the private sector and other relevant stakeholders to address the root causes of this practice. In order to protect children and eliminate early marriage, most countries have put in place an enabling legal framework, setting the minimum age of marriage at 18 years in accordance with these human rights standards. Even in those countries, however, compliance is often poor for a variety of reasons, such as the lack of accurate registration of all births, which is necessary for establishing the age of those marrying, or the fact that many families remain financially and otherwise materially invested in early marriage practices. National courts are increasingly responding to this practice, upholding the fundamental rights of women to consent to marriage. For example, a Sharia Court in Nigeria ruled that a marriage of a teenage girl conducted without her consent constituted a violation of the rights to liberty and dignity under the Nigerian Constitution and that it was against their understanding of Sharia Law.Forced marriage in conflict settings. Forced marriages arise in war, conflict and post-conflict settings where women, sometimes very young, are captured by fighters and forced to live as their "wives" (i.e. as sexual and/or

domestic partners), essentially in slavery. Human rights bodies are calling for the elimination of such practices. In Sierra Leone, for example, forced marriage has been judged a crime against humanity, and is recognized as "resulting in severe suffering, or physical, mental or psychological injury to the victim".

**Widow Inheritance**

Women's free and full consent to marriage is also infringed by the practice of widow inheritance in some places. Drawn from local customary law and religious practices, such marriages still occurs in some parts of Asia and Africa, although it is diminishing. A surviving widow, whether a minor or an adult, is "inherited" by a male relative (often the brother) of the deceased spouse, along with other goods and property of the estate, such that she becomes his wife. Often this is the condition imposed on the widow for being able to remain in her house, or to receive support from her husband's kin. Thus, she must enter a sexual relationship with a spouse not chosen by her, which is a form of coerced sex, with many potential negative sexual and reproductive health consequences. Under human rights laws, states have an obligation to end any practice whereby a widow is liable to be inherited by another person, and states must ensure that "widows are not subjected to inhuman, humiliating or degrading treatment" and that a "widow shall have the right to remarry, and in that event, to marry the person of her choice".

**Marriage with an Abductor or Rapist**

Women may also be forced to marry against their will or without free and full consent in places where there are laws that allow mitigation (or complete annulment) of punishment for an abductor or rapist if he agrees to marry the woman he has abducted or raped. Such laws are discriminatory as well as being harmful to the well-being of the abducted or raped woman, as she is then pressured to take as her husband a person who has assaulted her. While a number of countries have such laws, there have been some positive reforms in line with international human rights protections, as, for example, in Ethiopia, which reformed its 1957 Penal Code in 2005 to remove the exculpation of an alleged rapist in light of a subsequent marriage to a victim.

**Violence Based on Real or Perceived Sexual Behavior or Expression**

Violence committed against persons because of their real or perceived sexual behavior or expression has been recorded in all regions of the world. Among these sexual behaviors or forms of sexual expression are: having same-sex sexual partner(s), having extramarital sex, engaging in sex work,

perceived effeminate behavior by men, sexual contact with those viewed as being social inferiors or members of enemy groups, behavior deemed to dishonor the kin group, and sexual disobedience. These behaviors are perceived as being nonconformist, transgressing societal or moral codes or norms, and violence is used to punish people for such conduct. The violent punishment may be physical or psychological, and the effects include: injury, reduced ability to access treatment for these injuries, humiliation, disempowerment and increased disease burden. Violence based on sexual orientation or gender identity. There is increasing documentation of targeted violence against people who have (or are suspected to have) same-sex sexual relationships, and against transgender people. The extent of such violence is currently impossible to estimate as few states have systems in place for monitoring, recording and reporting these incidents. Even where systems exist, incidents may go unreported or are misreported because victims distrust the police, are afraid of reprisals or threats to privacy, or are stigmatized. Homophobic and transphobic violence can take many forms, including harassment and bullying in schools, so-called street violence and other spontaneous attacks in public settings. Homophobic and transphobic violence can involve a high degree of cruelty and brutality, including beatings, murder, torture, rape and other types of sexual assault. Violent acts may be committed by family members and friends, peers at school, health-care providers, co-workers, the police or others.

Severe violence and torture occurring in healthcare settings has been documented, including denial of medical treatment, use of verbal abuse and public humiliation, and a variety of forced procedures such as psychiatric evaluation and sterilization. Other types of violence perpetrated by health personnel and other state officials include forcible anal examination for the prosecution of suspected homosexual activities, invasive virginity examination, hormone therapy, and so-called sex normalizing surgery and reparative therapy. These procedures are rarely medically necessary, can cause serious injury, scarring, loss of sexual sensation, pain, incontinence and lifelong depression, and have also been criticized as being unscientific, potentially harmful and contributing to stigma.

Lesbian, gay and transgender people may be subject to aggravated violence and abuse by inmates and prison guards when they are in detention or under state care. Incidents have been reported in which individuals were subjected to victimization by police and prison guards, and authorities failed to take reasonable measures to prevent violence against detainees perceived as

being lesbian, gay or transgender.

Criminalization of same-sex sexual behavior and non-gender-conforming behavior, and discriminatory laws and regulations, can create and intensify stigma, discrimination and violence, all of which have direct effects on lesbian, gay, transgender, gender variant and intersex people's health far beyond immediate injury. Criminal laws, public decency regulations and policing surveillance systems have all been used to harass, arrest, torture, rape and abuse people perceived as belonging to these groups. International and regional human rights bodies increasingly call for the respect and protection of lesbian, gay, transgender, gender variant and intersex people's human rights, including respect for their rights to life, liberty and security of person, to be free from torture or inhuman and degrading treatment and discrimination, the rights to privacy, freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, and the right to the highest attainable standard of health. They have also recognized that stigma, discrimination, marginalization and violence related to sexual orientation and gender identity and expression are often exacerbated by other personal characteristics and factors, such as race, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, being a migrant or residing in conflict settings, and so they have called for the elimination of multiple discrimination. International and regional human rights bodies have clearly condemned violent crime perpetrated against persons because of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity and expression, including by law enforcement officials, as well as the failure of states to address such crime in their legislation. They have urged states to ensure that these acts of violence and human rights violations are investigated and their perpetrators brought to justice. Human rights bodies call on states to adopt legislation and public policies against discrimination and violence by reason of gender identity and expression. They have also called for the implementation of special measures – including appropriate training of law enforcement and judicial officials – to protect persons in prison against bias-motivated crimes related to their sexual orientation or gender identity. A number of countries in all regions address discrimination and violence on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity in their legislation. Some have included provisions in their laws for addressing crimes committed on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, and included hate crimes and bias-motivated crimes related to sexual orientation and gender identity and expression in the hate crimes statute (e.g. Australia, USA). The anti-discrimination law in Serbia, for example, establishes the fundamental

principle of equality of people of different sexes and genders, and includes sexual orientation and gender identity among the grounds for non-discrimination. It specifies that rights pertaining to gender or gender Honor crimes and honor killings. In some regions, people may be killed because they are seen by family or community members as having brought shame or dishonor on a family, often for transgressing gender norms or for sexual behavior, including actual or assumed same- sex sexual activity. Documented crimes committed in the name of honor are most often perpetrated against women because of relations with a male partner who is viewed as an unacceptable match, or because of actual or assumed sex before marriage; one estimate suggests that at least 5000 women around the world are murdered by family members each year in these so-called honor killings. However, such crimes may also be committed against men and transgender people. Very often, these crimes remain unpunished and at times are even sanctioned by the law. International human rights bodies have stated that these crimes violate the rights to life, to equality before the law, and to equal protection in the law, and have strongly recommend that states pass legislation "to remove the defense of honor in regard to the assault or murder of a female family member". At the national level, some countries have changed their laws to reflect these human rights standards. In Turkey, for instance, where so-called honor killings were previously tolerated or even condoned by the state, a change in the Penal Code now takes the "honor" element of a killing as an aggravating instead of a mitigating factor in a criminal trial, signaling that such notions are a violation of human rights.

***Assessment and Treatment of Sexual Violence: A Comprehensive Guide for Clinicians***

Because sexual violence is a significant public health concern that affects individuals across all demographics, mental health professionals play a crucial role in the assessment and treatment of survivors of sexual violence. This section aims to provide clinicians with a comprehensive guide to understanding the assessment and treatment approaches for sexual violence.

Throughout this section, it is important to emphasize the trauma-informed approach when working with survivors of sexual violence. This approach recognizes the impact of trauma and promotes safety, choice, collaboration, and empowerment in the therapeutic relationship. It is also crucial to address

cultural considerations and the intersectionality of identity when assessing and treating survivors, as individual experiences can vary greatly.

Additionally, emerging trends such as technology-assisted interventions, online support, and teletherapy should be discussed. These advancements have expanded access to care and provided new avenues for survivors to seek support and treatment. However, it is important to highlight the ethical considerations related to privacy, confidentiality, and informed consent in the digital landscape.

Therapists' self-awareness and self-care should be addressed, as working with survivors of sexual violence can be emotionally demanding and may lead to secondary trauma or burnout. Encouraging therapists to prioritize their own well-being and seek supervision and support is essential for maintaining their effectiveness and overall mental health.

By providing clinicians with a comprehensive guide to the assessment and treatment of sexual violence, this section aims to enhance their knowledge and skills in supporting survivors on their healing journey. It is crucial for therapists to stay informed about the latest research and best practices in order to provide the most effective and compassionate care to those affected by sexual violence.

## Background and Prevalence

Sexual violence encompasses a range of acts, including rape, sexual assault, harassment, and abuse. It is a pervasive issue with significant physical, emotional, and psychological consequences for survivors. According to the World Health Organization, approximately 1 in 3 women and 1 in 6 men have experienced some form of sexual violence in their lifetime. These statistics underscore the importance of mental health therapists' role in providing assessment and treatment for survivors.

## Assessment of Sexual Violence

### *Initial Evaluation and Safety Assessment*

When working with survivors of sexual violence, conducting an initial evaluation and safety assessment is of utmost importance. It involves ensuring the survivor's immediate physical safety and identifying any urgent medical needs. Additionally, assessing the survivor's mental health, social support

system, and current living situation helps therapists gain a comprehensive understanding of their needs and develop a tailored treatment plan.

### *Trauma-Informed Assessment*

A trauma-informed assessment involves recognizing the potential trauma and its impact on the survivor's functioning. This approach emphasizes sensitivity, empathy, and validation while collecting information about the survivor's trauma history, symptoms, and coping strategies. It is crucial to create a safe and non-judgmental space for survivors to share their experiences at their own pace.

### *Screening Tools and Psychometric Measures*

Various screening tools and psychometric measures can aid in the assessment process. Examples include the PTSD Checklist for DSM-5 (PCL-5) and the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scales (DASS-21). These instruments can provide valuable insights into the survivor's symptom severity and guide treatment planning.

### *Cultural Considerations in Assessment*

Culture plays a significant role in shaping individuals' experiences and responses to sexual violence. It is essential for therapists to approach assessment with cultural sensitivity and humility. Engaging in open dialogue, actively listening, and being aware of cultural nuances can enhance the accuracy and relevance of the assessment process.

### *Medical Examination and Forensic Documentation*

In cases of recent sexual assault, a medical examination should be conducted to address immediate physical health concerns and collect forensic evidence. Collaboration with medical professionals is crucial to ensure the survivor's safety and obtain necessary documentation for legal proceedings, if desired. Mental health therapists should be aware of the protocols and resources available in their local jurisdictions.

## Treatment Approaches for Sexual Violence

### *Trauma-Informed Care*

Trauma-informed care is an essential framework for treating survivors of sexual violence. It involves creating a safe and empowering therapeutic environment, prioritizing the survivor's autonomy and choice, and focusing on strengths and resilience. This approach acknowledges the impact of trauma and emphasizes collaboration, trust, and validation throughout the therapeutic process.

### *Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT)*

CBT is an evidence-based approach widely used in the treatment of trauma-related symptoms. It focuses on identifying and modifying maladaptive thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors that contribute to distress. Therapists can help survivors challenge negative self-perceptions, develop coping skills, and process traumatic memories in a safe and controlled manner.

### *Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)*

EMDR is a therapeutic technique specifically designed to address trauma. It involves bilateral stimulation (such as eye movements or tapping) while the survivor mentally focuses on distressing memories or triggers. EMDR helps to reprocess traumatic experiences and reduce their emotional intensity. It has shown promising results in treating post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and trauma-related symptoms in survivors of sexual violence.

### *Narrative Therapy*

Narrative therapy focuses on helping survivors reconstruct their personal narratives and reclaim their sense of agency and resilience. Therapists collaborate with survivors to explore alternative interpretations of their experiences, identify strengths, and develop a coherent and empowering narrative. This approach can facilitate healing and promote a sense of empowerment and meaning-making for survivors.

### *Group Therapy and Support Groups*

Group therapy and support groups provide survivors with a safe and supportive community of individuals who have shared similar experiences. These settings offer validation, connection, and a platform for sharing

experiences and coping strategies. Group interventions can reduce feelings of isolation, increase social support, and provide a sense of belonging and understanding.

### *Pharmacotherapy*

Pharmacotherapy may be considered in cases where survivors experience severe symptoms of depression, anxiety, or PTSD. Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) and other psychiatric medications can help alleviate symptoms and improve overall functioning. Collaboration with a psychiatrist or primary care physician is essential in order for them to assess the appropriateness and monitor the effectiveness of medication interventions.

### *Mindfulness-Based Interventions*

Mindfulness-based interventions, such as mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) or mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT), can be beneficial for survivors of sexual violence. These interventions cultivate present-moment awareness, acceptance, and self-compassion. Mindfulness practices can help survivors develop emotional regulation skills, reduce distress, and enhance overall well-being.

## Emerging Trends in Assessment and Treatment

### *Technology-Assisted Interventions*

Advancements in technology have opened up new possibilities for assessment and treatment. Digital platforms, mobile applications, and virtual reality tools can provide accessible and engaging interventions. These technologies can be particularly useful in reaching individuals who may face barriers to in-person care or who prefer remote options.

### *Online Support and Teletherapy*

Teletherapy and online support have become increasingly relevant, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. These modalities allow therapists to provide remote counseling and support services, ensuring continuity of care and reaching individuals in remote or underserved areas. However, therapists must be mindful of the ethical considerations surrounding privacy, confidentiality, and technological competence.

### *Integrated Care Models*

Integrated care models involve collaboration among mental health professionals, medical providers, and social service agencies to address the holistic needs of survivors. By working together, these professionals can provide comprehensive support and coordinate treatment interventions, leading to more effective outcomes for survivors.

### *Self-Care and Secondary Trauma*

Therapists working with survivors of sexual violence are vulnerable to experiencing secondary trauma or compassion fatigue. It is crucial for therapists to prioritize self-care, engage in regular supervision, and seek support when needed. Establishing healthy boundaries, practicing self-compassion, and maintaining a self-care routine are essential for sustaining therapist well-being and professional efficacy.

## Ethical Considerations and Therapist Self-Awareness

### *Confidentiality and Informed Consent*

Maintaining confidentiality is paramount in working with survivors of sexual violence. Therapists must adhere to legal and ethical guidelines regarding confidentiality and obtain informed consent from survivors. It is essential to explain the limits of confidentiality, such as mandatory reporting obligations in cases of imminent harm or abuse.

### *Countertransference and Vicarious Traumatization*

Therapists may experience countertransference, which involves having personal emotional reactions to the survivor's trauma. It is important for therapists to recognize and process these feelings, seek supervision, and engage in self-reflection to minimize the impact on their therapeutic work.

### *Cultural Competence and Intersectionality*

Cultural competence is crucial when working with survivors of sexual violence, as it acknowledges and respects the diversity of experiences and identities. Therapists should strive to understand the cultural context of the survivor, including their race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and socioeconomic background. Intersectionality, which recognizes the overlapping systems of

oppression and privilege, should be considered when assessing and treating survivors to provide individualized and culturally responsive care.

## Conclusion

The assessment and treatment of sexual violence require a comprehensive and trauma-informed approach. Mental health therapists play a vital role in supporting survivors on their healing journey. By conducting thorough assessments, employing evidence-based treatment approaches, and staying updated on emerging trends, therapists can provide effective and compassionate care to survivors of sexual violence.

As therapists continue to enhance their knowledge and skills, it is essential to prioritize ethical considerations, engage in self-reflection, and engage in ongoing professional development. By doing so, therapists can create a safe and supportive therapeutic environment that promotes healing, resilience, and empowerment for survivors.

In the coming years, further research and advancements in technology, integrated care models, and self-care practices will continue to shape the field of assessment and treatment for sexual violence. Mental health therapists should remain informed and adaptable to best serve the needs of survivors and contribute to the prevention and healing of sexual violence within our society.

## Future Directions and Recommendations for Therapists

### *Research and Evidence-Based Practices*

As the field of assessment and treatment of sexual violence continues to evolve, it is crucial for therapists to stay informed about the latest research and evidence-based practices. Engaging in continuing education, attending conferences, and participating in professional networks can help therapists stay up to date with emerging trends, interventions, and assessment tools.

### *Collaboration and Interdisciplinary Approaches*

Given the complex nature of sexual violence and its impact on survivors, collaboration among professionals from various disciplines is essential. Therapists should actively seek opportunities for collaboration with medical professionals, social workers, legal advocates, and community organizations. By working together, professionals can provide comprehensive and holistic care to survivors, addressing their physical, psychological, and social needs.

***Cultivating Therapist Self-Awareness and Wellness***

Working with survivors of sexual violence can take an emotional toll on therapists. It is essential for therapists to engage in regular self-reflection, supervision, and self-care practices. This includes seeking support from colleagues, engaging in personal therapy if needed, and implementing strategies to prevent burnout and compassion fatigue. Therapists should prioritize their own well-being to ensure they can provide effective and sustainable care to survivors.

***Advocacy and Prevention Efforts***

Therapists have a unique position to advocate for policy changes, raise awareness about sexual violence, and contribute to prevention efforts. By engaging in community education, collaborating with organizations focused on prevention, and actively participating in public discourse, therapists can help create a society that is more informed, supportive, and committed to preventing sexual violence.

***Addressing Digital and Online Challenges***

With the increasing use of technology in therapy and support services, therapists must navigate the ethical and practical considerations of digital interventions. Staying updated on privacy regulations, maintaining technological competence, and ensuring informed consent and confidentiality are crucial when using teletherapy, online support groups, or technology-assisted interventions.

***Culturally Competent and Inclusive Practice***

Therapists should strive for cultural competence and inclusivity in their practice. This includes ongoing self-reflection, education, and awareness of the unique experiences and needs of survivors from diverse cultural backgrounds. It is essential to create a safe and welcoming environment for all survivors, respecting their identities, beliefs, and values.

***Conclusion***

The assessment and treatment of sexual violence require a comprehensive and multidimensional approach that acknowledges the complexity and individuality of survivors' experiences. Licensed mental health therapists play

a vital role in providing trauma-informed care, addressing the unique needs of survivors, and promoting healing and empowerment.

By staying informed about current research, practicing evidence-based approaches, and prioritizing therapist self-awareness and self-care, therapists can effectively support survivors on their healing journey. Collaboration with other professionals, engaging in advocacy and prevention efforts, and fostering cultural competence are essential in creating a society that is committed to addressing and preventing sexual violence.

Ultimately, the work of licensed mental health therapists in the assessment and treatment of sexual violence contributes to the healing, resilience, and empowerment of survivors, fostering a future where sexual violence is eradicated, and individuals can live free from fear and trauma.

**Resources that victims of sexual violence can turn to for support, information, and assistance**:

***National Sexual Assault Hotline (United States)***:
Phone: 1-800-656-HOPE (4673)
Website: www.rainn.org

***National Domestic Violence Hotline (United States):***
Phone: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233)
Website: www.thehotline.org

***Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN):***
Website: www.rainn.org
RAINN provides support, resources, and information for survivors of sexual violence. Their website offers a comprehensive list of local resources and a live chat service for immediate support.

***National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV):***
Website: www.ncadv.org
NCADV offers resources and support for survivors of domestic violence, including sexual violence within the context of domestic abuse.

# 8. Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

This section aims to provide mental health and social work professionals with a comprehensive understanding of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs). By exploring various aspects such as epidemiological categories, prevalence, pathology, prevention, and mental health impact, this resource will equip professionals with up-to-date knowledge that can assist in their work with individuals affected by STIs.

**Introduction**

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) pose a significant public health concern worldwide. Mental health and social work professionals play a crucial role in supporting individuals affected by STIs. This article aims to enhance their understanding of STIs and equip them with evidence-based information to better assist their clients.

Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are also referred to as sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or venereal diseases (VDs). It is defined as "an illness that has a significant probability of transmission between humans or animals by means of sexual contact, including vaginal intercourse, oral sex, and anal sex". More recently, the term sexually transmitted infection (STI) has been preferred due to several reasons including that it has a broader range of meaning; a person may be infected, and may potentially infect others, without showing signs of disease. Until the 1990s, STDs were mostly referred to as venereal diseases. Public health officials originally introduced the term sexually transmitted infection, which clinicians are increasingly using alongside the term sexually transmitted disease in order to distinguish it from the former. According to the *Ethiopian Aids Resource Center FAQ*, "Sometimes the terms STI and STD are used interchangeably. This can be confusing and not always accurate, so it helps first to understand the difference between infection and disease. Infection simply means that a germ — virus, bacteria, or parasite — that can cause disease or sickness is present inside a person's body. An infected person does not necessarily have any symptoms or signs that the virus or bacteria is actually hurting his or her body; they do not necessarily feel sick. A disease means that the infection is actually causing the infected person to feel sick, or to notice something is wrong. For this reason, the term STI — which refers to infection with any germ that can cause an STD, even if the infected person has no symptoms — is a much broader term than STD." *(Source: Aids Resource Center)*.

**Epidemiological Categories of STIs**

STIs can be broadly classified into bacterial, viral, and parasitic infections. Each category presents unique challenges in terms of transmission, diagnosis, treatment, and prevention. Understanding these categories is essential for effective intervention and support.

The diseases listed below are usually sexually transmitted. Some diseases are transmitted in other ways such as HIV/AIDS which may be transmitted through the sharing of infected needles by drug users.

➢ **Bacterial**

- Bacterial Vaginosis (BV) - not officially an STD but affected by sexual activity.
- Chancroid
- Donovanosis
- Gonorrhea
- Lymphogranuloma venereum (LGV) (*Chlamydia trachomatis* serotypes $L_1$, $L_2$, $L_3$)
- Non-gonococcal urethritis (NGU)
- Staphylococcal infection (Staphylococcus aureus, MRSA) - Sexually transmissible.
- Syphilis

➢ **Fungal**

- Tinea curis "Jock Itch"- Sexually transmissible.
- Yeast Infection

➢ **Viral**

- Adenoviruses thought to contribute to obesity - venereal fluids (also fecal & respiratory fluids)
- Viral hepatitis (Hepatitis B virus) - saliva, venereal fluids.(Note: Hepatitis A and Hepatitis E are transmitted via the fecal-oral route; Hepatitis C (liver cancer) is rarely sexually transmittable, and the route of transmission of Hepatitis D (only if infected with B) is uncertain, but may include sexual transmission.

- Herpes Simplex skin and mucosal, transmissible with or without visible blisters
- HIV/ AIDS (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) - venereal fluids
- HTLV 1, 2 - venereal fluids
- Genital warts - ("low risk" types of Human papillomavirus HPV) - skin and mucosal, transmissible with or without visible warts
- Cervical cancer, anal cancer - ("high risk" types of Human papillomavirus HPV) - skin and mucosal
- Molluscum contagiosum
- Mononucleosis
    - (Cytomegalovirus CMV - Herpes 5) - saliva, sweat, urine, feces and venereal fluids.
    - (Epstein-Barr virus EBV - Herpes 4)

➢ **Parasites**

- Pubic lice, colloquially known as "crabs"
- Scabies

➢ **Protozoal**

- Trichomoniasis

**Bacterial Vaginosis**

Bacterial Vaginosis (BV) is a condition in women where the normal balance of bacteria in the vagina is disrupted and replaced by an overgrowth of certain bacteria. It is sometimes accompanied by discharge, odor, pain, itching, or burning.

Bacterial vaginosis (BV) is the most common vaginal infection in women of childbearing age. In the United States, BV is common in pregnant women. The cause of BV is not fully understood. BV is associated with an imbalance in the bacteria that are normally found in a woman's vagina. The vagina normally contains mostly "good" bacteria, and fewer "harmful" bacteria. BV develops when there is an increase in harmful bacteria. Not much is known about how women get BV. There are many unanswered questions about the role that harmful bacteria play in causing BV. Any woman can get BV. However, some activities or behaviors can upset the normal balance of bacteria in the vagina and put women at increased risk. It is not clear what role sexual activity plays in the development of BV. Women do not get BV from toilet seats, bedding, swimming pools, or from touching objects around

them. Women who have never had sexual intercourse may also be affected.

Women with BV may have an abnormal vaginal discharge with an unpleasant odor. Some women report a strong fish-like odor, especially after intercourse. Discharge, if present, is usually white or gray; it can be thin. Women with BV may also have burning during urination or itching around the outside of the vagina, or both. However, most women with BV report no signs or symptoms at all.

In most cases, BV causes no complications. But there are some serious risks from BV including:

- Having BV can increase a woman's susceptibility to HIV infection if she is exposed to the HIV virus.
- Having BV increases the chances that an HIV-infected woman can pass HIV to her sex partner.
- Having BV has been associated with an increase in the development of an infection following surgical procedures such as a hysterectomy or an abortion.
- Having BV while pregnant may put a woman at increased risk for some complications of pregnancy, such as preterm delivery.
- BV can increase a woman's susceptibility to other STDs, such as herpes simplex virus (HSV) and gonorrhea.

Pregnant women with BV more often have premature births or babies with a low birth weight (low birth weight is less than 5.5 pounds). The bacteria that cause BV can sometimes infect the uterus and fallopian tubes. This type of infection is called pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). PID can cause infertility or damage the fallopian tubes enough to increase the future risk of ectopic pregnancy and infertility. Ectopic pregnancy is a life-threatening condition in which a fertilized egg grows outside the uterus, usually in a fallopian tube which can rupture.

A health care provider must examine the vagina for signs of BV and perform laboratory tests on a sample of vaginal fluid to look for bacteria associated with BV.

Although BV will sometimes clear up without treatment, all women with symptoms of BV should be treated to avoid complications. Male partners generally do not need to be treated. However, BV may spread between female sex partners.

Treatment is especially important for pregnant women. All pregnant women who have ever had a premature delivery or low birth weight baby should be considered for a BV examination, regardless of symptoms, and should be

treated if they have BV. All pregnant women who have symptoms of BV should be checked and treated. Some physicians recommend that all women undergoing a hysterectomy or abortion be treated for BV prior to the procedure, regardless of symptoms, to reduce their risk of developing an infection.

BV is treatable with antibiotics prescribed by a health care provider. Two different antibiotics are recommended as treatment for BV: metronidazole or clindamycin. Either can be used with non-pregnant or pregnant women, but the recommended dosages differ. Women with BV who are HIV-positive should receive the same treatment as those who are HIV-negative.

BV can recur after treatment. BV is not completely understood by scientists, and the best ways to prevent it are unknown. However, it is known that BV is associated with having a new sex partner or having multiple sex partners.

The following basic prevention steps can help reduce the risk of upsetting the natural balance of bacteria in the vagina and developing BV:

- Be abstinent.
- Limit the number of sex partners.
- Do not douche.
- Use all of the medicine prescribed for treatment of BV, even if the signs and symptoms go away.

**Chlamydia**

Chlamydia is a common sexually transmitted disease (STD) caused by the bacterium, Chlamydia trachomatis, which can damage a woman's reproductive organs. Even though symptoms of Chlamydia are usually mild or absent, serious complications that cause irreversible damage, including infertility, can occur "silently" before a woman ever recognizes a problem. Chlamydia also can cause discharge from the penis of an infected man. Chlamydia is the most frequently reported bacterial sexually transmitted disease in the United States. Women are frequently re-infected if their sex partners are not treated. Chlamydia can be transmitted during vaginal, anal, or oral sex. Chlamydia can also be passed from an infected mother to her baby during vaginal childbirth.

Any sexually active person can be infected with Chlamydia. The greater the number of sex partners, the greater the risk of infection. Because the cervix (opening to the uterus) of teenage girls and young women is not fully matured and is probably more susceptible to infection, they are at particularly high risk for infection if sexually active. Since Chlamydia can be transmitted by oral or anal sex, men who have sex with men are also at

risk for Chlamydia infection.

Chlamydia is known as a "silent" disease because about three quarters of infected women and about half of infected men have no symptoms. If symptoms do occur, they usually appear within 1 to 3 weeks after exposure.

In women, the bacteria initially infect the cervix and the urethra (urine canal). Women who have symptoms might have an abnormal vaginal discharge or a burning sensation when urinating. When the infection spreads from the cervix to the fallopian tubes (tubes that carry fertilized eggs from the ovaries to the uterus), some women still have no signs or symptoms; others have lower abdominal pain, low back pain, nausea, fever, pain during intercourse, or bleeding between menstrual periods. Chlamydia infection of the cervix can spread to the rectum.

Men with signs or symptoms might have a discharge from their penis or a burning sensation when urinating. Men might also have burning and itching around the opening of the penis. Pain and swelling in the testicles are uncommon.

Men or women who have receptive anal intercourse may acquire Chlamydia infection in the rectum, which can cause rectal pain, discharge, or bleeding. Chlamydia can also be found in the throats of women and men having oral sex with an infected partner. If untreated, Chlamydia infections can progress to serious reproductive and other health problems with both short-term and long-term consequences. Like the disease itself, the damage that Chlamydia causes is often "silent."

In women, untreated infection can spread into the uterus or fallopian tubes and cause pelvic inflammatory disease (PID). This happens in up to 40 percent of women with untreated Chlamydia. PID can cause permanent damage to the fallopian tubes, uterus, and surrounding tissues. The damage can lead to chronic pelvic pain, infertility, and potentially fatal ectopic pregnancy (pregnancy outside the uterus). Women infected with Chlamydia are up to five times more likely to become infected with HIV, if exposed.

To help prevent the serious consequences of Chlamydia, screening at least annually for Chlamydia is recommended for all sexually active women age 25 years and younger. An annual screening test also is recommended for older women with risk factors for Chlamydia (a new sex partner or multiple sex partners). All pregnant women should have a screening test for Chlamydia.

Complications among men are rare. Infection sometimes spreads to the epididymis (the tube that carries sperm from the testis), causing pain, fever, and, rarely, sterility. Rarely, genital Chlamydia infection can cause arthritis that can be accompanied by skin lesions and inflammation of the eye and

urethra (Reiter's syndrome).

### Chancroid

Chancroid is caused by a bacterial infection that produces genital ulcers. It is difficult to diagnose without a specific laboratory test, which most health care providers and laboratories do not have the capability to perform. Large outbreaks may go unrecognized despite a large burden of disease in the community. The disease causes genital ulcers and is of concern because it may contribute to increased HIV transmission in some communities *(Source: CDC Center for Disease Control)*.

### Gonorrhea

Gonorrhea is caused by *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*, a bacterium that can grow and multiply easily in the warm, moist areas of the reproductive tract, including the cervix (opening to the womb), uterus (womb), and fallopian tubes (egg canals) in women, and in the urethra (urine canal) in women and men. The bacterium can also grow in the mouth, throat, eyes, and anus.

Detailed national data by city and state are only available for nationally notifiable STDs. And while Chlamydia became nationally notifiable in 1995, the data are currently more representative of trends in screening than of trends in disease. Because Chlamydia often has no symptoms, cases are frequently identified only through screening. Therefore, high rates of Chlamydia and gonorrhea may indicate more effective screening programs and the introduction of more sensitive tests, rather than higher incidence of disease. This section will therefore present the status of gonorrhea and syphilis by city and state. To provide an indication where Chlamydia is currently the most common, data on the percentage of women who tested positive for Chlamydia in family planning clinics also are provided on the overview maps. Other STDs, like genital herpes and HPV are known to be wide-spread across all states and communities.

## Prevalence of STIs

### The Rising Incidence of Sexually Transmitted Diseases: A Changing Landscape for Mental Health Professionals

This section highlights the global prevalence of STIs and emphasizes the need for increased awareness and intervention. It examines the epidemiological

trends of various STIs, including but not limited to HIV/AIDS, chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis, herpes, and human papillomavirus (HPV).

Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) continue to pose significant challenges to global public health, with high incidence rates observed across most parts of the world. In recent years, shifting sexual beliefs and the widespread use of oral contraceptives have led to profound changes in traditional sexual restraints, particularly for women. Furthermore, the emergence of drug-resistant bacteria, such as penicillin-resistant gonococci, has made the treatment of certain STDs more complex and challenging. Mental health professionals play a crucial role in addressing the psychological and emotional impacts of STDs, as well as promoting preventive strategies and effective treatment. In this article, we will explore the evolving landscape of STDs and highlight the key considerations for mental health professionals.

One of the primary factors contributing to the high incidence of STDs is the transformation of sexual beliefs and practices. In many societies, there has been a gradual shift away from traditional sexual restraints, leading to increased sexual activity and a greater number of sexual partners. This change, coupled with limited awareness about safe sexual practices and a lack of comprehensive sex education, has resulted in a higher risk of contracting and transmitting STDs.

The empowerment of women and the availability of oral contraceptives have significantly impacted sexual behavior and STD rates. The accessibility and effectiveness of contraception have allowed women to exercise greater control over their reproductive choices, leading to increased sexual freedom. While empowering, this shift has also brought about new challenges, as women may engage in sexual relationships without the sole purpose of procreation. Mental health professionals must recognize the potential emotional consequences and provide support and guidance to women navigating these changes, emphasizing the importance of regular STD testing and safe sexual practices.

Another critical concern in the realm of STDs is the emergence of drug-resistant bacteria. The overuse and misuse of antibiotics, combined with inadequate treatment adherence, have contributed to the development of drug-resistant strains of STDs. For example, penicillin-resistant gonococci have become more prevalent, rendering standard treatment protocols ineffective. Mental health professionals need to be aware of these challenges, as they may impact treatment outcomes and patient well-being. Collaborative efforts between mental health professionals and medical practitioners are crucial in

addressing the psychological effects of prolonged or recurrent infections, as well as providing appropriate support during treatment.

STDs can have profound psychological and emotional impacts on individuals. The stigma and shame associated with these infections can lead to feelings of guilt, anxiety, depression, and social isolation. Mental health professionals are instrumental in addressing these consequences, providing a safe and non-judgmental space for individuals to express their concerns and emotions. Through therapeutic interventions, mental health professionals can help individuals cope with the emotional distress associated with STDs, develop healthy coping strategies, and promote self-esteem and resilience.

To combat the rising incidence of STDs, mental health professionals should actively engage in preventive efforts and comprehensive sex education. Promoting safe sexual practices, regular testing, and open communication about sexual health can significantly reduce the transmission of STDs. Collaborating with healthcare providers, educators, and community organizations, mental health professionals can play a vital role in designing and implementing evidence-based interventions aimed at preventing the spread of STDs and improving sexual health outcomes.

The incidence of sexually transmitted diseases remains high worldwide, posing substantial challenges for global public health. The convergence of shifting sexual beliefs, increased contraceptive use, and the rise of drug-resistant bacteria has transformed the landscape of STDs. Mental health professionals have a crucial role in addressing the psychological and emotional impacts of STDs, promoting preventive strategies.

**Pathology of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)**

A comprehensive understanding of the pathology of STIs is crucial for mental health and social work professionals. This section delves into the biological mechanisms of common STIs, including their impact on physical and mental health. It discusses the potential long-term complications associated with untreated or recurrent infections.

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) can be transmitted through various routes, with the mucous membranes of the penis, vulva, rectum, and urinary tract being more susceptible than other areas like the mouth, throat, respiratory tract, and eyes. Pathogens can permeate the body through these membranes, as well as through breaks or abrasions in the skin, including minor ones. During penetrative sex, the friction on the penis shaft makes it particularly vulnerable

to infection. The main sources of infection, in ascending order, are venereal fluids, saliva, and mucosal or skin contact, with infections possibly transmitted through feces, urine, and sweat as well. The amount of pathogen required to cause infection varies depending on the specific pathogen

The probability of transmitting infections through sexual intercourse is higher compared to more casual means like touching and hugging. Mucous membranes are present in the mouth and genitals, and many STIs can be more easily transmitted through oral sex than through deep kissing. Genital fluids contain a higher pathogen content for HIV compared to saliva.

Certain STIs can also be transmitted through direct skin contact, such as herpes simplex and HPV. Some infections can be transmitted even in the absence of symptoms. For instance, herpes is more transmittable when blisters are present. However, HIV can be transmitted at any time, even without visible symptoms

Sexually transmitted diseases are transmitted through specific sexual activities but are not caused directly by those activities. Bacteria, fungi, protozoa, or viruses are the causative agents. Some STDs, like HIV, can also be transmitted from mother to child during pregnancy or breastfeeding. Both giving and receiving sexual activities carry risks, with receiving having a higher risk. Engaging in safer sex practices, such as using condoms, is the most effective way to reduce the risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases. Additionally, transmission can occur through the transfer of bodily fluids during activities like blood transfusions, sharing injection needles, and childbirth.

Certain groups, such as medical workers, hemophiliacs, and drug users, are at a higher risk of exposure to STIs.

**Prevention Strategies**

Prevention plays a vital role in combating STIs. This section explores evidence-based prevention strategies, including education, condom use, vaccination, routine screening, and behavioral interventions. It emphasizes the importance of holistic approaches that address the biological, psychological, and social factors contributing to STI transmission.

Vaccines have played a significant role in protecting against certain viral sexually transmitted infections (STIs). For instance, vaccines have been developed to prevent Hepatitis B and some types of Human Papillomavirus

(HPV) infections. Hepatitis B is a viral infection that can be transmitted through sexual contact, and the Hepatitis B vaccine has been proven effective in preventing the transmission of the virus.
Similarly, certain strains of HPV, which is a common STI, can be prevented through vaccination. HPV vaccines are designed to protect against the high-risk strains of the virus that can cause cervical cancer, as well as other types of cancer and genital warts. These vaccines have been shown to be highly effective in preventing HPV infections and associated diseases.

While vaccines provide protection against specific viral STIs, the most effective way to prevent contracting an STI is to avoid coming into contact with bodily parts or fluids that can lead to transmission. It is important to note that complete abstinence from sexual contact provides the highest level of risk reduction.

However, for individuals who are sexually active, it is crucial to engage in safer sexual practices. Proper and consistent use of condoms can significantly reduce the risk of STI transmission. Condoms act as a barrier, preventing direct contact between bodily fluids and mucous membranes, thus reducing the likelihood of infection.

In addition to using condoms, it is recommended that partners undergo testing and screening for STIs before engaging in sexual contact. Some STIs may not be immediately detectable after exposure, and there is a window period during which testing may not yield accurate results. Therefore, allowing an adequate amount of time to pass between possible exposure and subsequent screening is important to ensure the most reliable and accurate testing outcomes.

**Mental Health Considerations and Psychological Impact of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)**

The psychological impact of STIs cannot be overlooked. Mental health professionals play a crucial role in providing support and addressing the emotional and psychological consequences of an STI diagnosis. This section explores the stigma, anxiety, depression, relationship challenges, and other mental health considerations associated with STIs.

This section aims to provide mental health professionals with a comprehensive understanding of the mental health considerations and psychological impact associated with STIs. Specifically, it explores the stigma, anxiety, depression, relationship challenges, and other mental health factors related to STIs. By recognizing and addressing these issues, mental health professionals can offer

effective support and interventions to improve the overall well-being of individuals affected by STIs. While the physical health implications of STIs are widely acknowledged, the mental health considerations associated with these infections are often overlooked.

*Stigma*

Stigma refers to the negative social perceptions and judgments that individuals with STIs encounter, often leading to discrimination and marginalization. The stigma associated with STIs can be highly detrimental to an individual's mental health, causing feelings of shame, guilt, and low self-esteem. Stigmatization can lead to social isolation, avoidance of seeking medical care, and hinder disclosure of one's STI status to sexual partners or loved ones. STIs carry significant social stigmatization due to cultural and societal attitudes towards sexuality and morality. The stigma surrounding STIs can manifest as judgment, blame, and the perception that individuals with STIs are "dirty" or promiscuous. This stigma can affect individuals across various demographics, including age, gender, and sexual orientation.

The experience of stigma related to STIs can have severe mental health consequences. Individuals may internalize the stigma, leading to negative self-perception, increased levels of anxiety and depression, and reduced overall psychological well-being. Stigma can also contribute to social withdrawal, social anxiety, and avoidance of intimate relationships.

Efforts to reduce stigma associated with STIs are essential in promoting mental health and overall well-being. Education and awareness campaigns that challenge misconceptions and provide accurate information about STIs can help reduce stigma. Encouraging open dialogue, fostering empathy, and promoting non-judgmental attitudes towards individuals with STIs are crucial steps in combating stigma and promoting mental health.

II. Anxiety and Depression:

*Anxiety and depression among individuals with STIs*

Studies have shown that individuals diagnosed with STIs are at a higher risk of experiencing anxiety and depression compared to the general population. The uncertainty surrounding the infection, fear of transmission, and concerns about the impact on relationships contribute to heightened anxiety and depressive symptoms.

The psychological impact of STIs can be attributed to various factors, including the fear of judgment, disclosure of the diagnosis, concerns about sexual functioning and future relationships, and the impact on self-esteem. The emotional distress associated with the diagnosis can lead to persistent anxiety and depression if not addressed.

Anxiety and depression can significantly impact an individual's overall quality of life, including their ability to engage in daily activities, maintain relationships, and experience a sense of well-being. These mental health conditions can exacerbate

Psychotherapy, including cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), can be effective in managing anxiety and depression in individuals affected by STIs. CBT techniques focus on challenging negative thought patterns, promoting adaptive coping strategies, and improving emotional regulation. Support groups and peer counseling can also provide valuable support by creating a sense of community and reducing feelings of isolation.

*Impact of STIs on relationships*

STIs can significantly affect intimate relationships. The disclosure of an STI diagnosis can lead to challenges in trust, communication, and the renegotiation of sexual boundaries. Partners may experience feelings of anger, betrayal, or fear of infection, which can strain the relationship.

Individuals with STIs may find it challenging to communicate effectively about their diagnosis and sexual health with their partners. Fear of judgment or rejection, guilt, and shame can hinder open and honest conversations. Trust issues may arise, with partners questioning the infected individual's faithfulness.

STIs can have a significant impact on sexual and intimate relationships. Individuals with STIs may experience changes in their sexual functioning, such as reduced desire, erectile or vaginal difficulties, or pain during intercourse. These physical symptoms, along with emotional concerns and the fear of transmitting the infection, can lead to decreased sexual satisfaction and intimacy in relationships.

Couples therapy can be an essential intervention for addressing relationship challenges related to STIs. Therapists can provide a safe space for open communication, facilitate understanding and empathy between partners, and help develop strategies to rebuild trust and intimacy. Relationship

enhancement techniques, such as improving communication skills, fostering emotional intimacy, and exploring alternative ways of expressing affection, can also support couples in navigating the impact of STIs on their relationships.

*Body image and self-esteem concerns*

STIs can impact body image and self-esteem, particularly if visible symptoms are present or if individuals perceive their infection as a reflection of their personal worth. Mental health professionals should address body image concerns and help individuals develop a positive self-image, emphasizing that STIs do not define their identity or value as a person.

For individuals with chronic STIs, such as HIV, long-term management and the potential for ongoing health challenges can contribute to psychological distress. Mental health professionals can provide support in coping with the realities of living with a chronic illness, addressing emotional difficulties, and promoting resilience and self-care.

Individuals with STIs may engage in substance abuse or risky sexual behaviors as a way to cope with their emotional distress or to seek validation and connection. Mental health professionals should be attentive to these potential co-occurring issues and provide appropriate interventions and referrals to support substance abuse treatment or harm reduction strategies.

Sexually transmitted infections not only affect individuals physically but also have a profound impact on their mental health and well-being. Mental health professionals play a vital role in recognizing and addressing the mental health considerations associated with STIs. By understanding the stigma, anxiety, depression, relationship challenges, and other factors that arise in the context of STIs, mental health professionals can provide effective support and interventions to improve the overall mental health and quality of life for individuals affected by these infections. Collaboration between medical and mental health professionals is crucial to ensure holistic care and comprehensive support for STI-affected individuals.

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These references serve as a starting point for mental health and social work professionals to delve deeper into the research and gain a more comprehensive understanding of STIs and their impact on individuals' lives.

Note: It is important to consult the latest research and update the references based on the current medical literature for the most accurate and up-to-date information on STIs.

**Sexually Transmitted Diseases and Substance Abuse**

Infectious diseases are common among drug users. Throughout the past decade, drug use and the frequency of infectious diseases among this population have escalated. The acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS)

epidemic and the resurgence of tuberculosis have magnified the need for the prompt recognition and treatment of these and other infectious diseases.

Individuals who are dependent on substances are represented disproportionately in the population with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and AIDS; tuberculosis, including multi-drug resistant tuberculosis; syphilis; and hepatitis B and C. Patients who enter drug treatment programs are at risk of having one or more of these diseases. This section focuses on these particular infectious diseases because they occur frequently among treatment populations and have significant medical and socioeconomic consequences for infected persons and others if not recognized and treated. In addition, the trained staff of a drug treatment program can screen for and medically manage these diseases.

Included in this section are discussions of other infectious diseases common to treatment populations, including Chlamydia, gonorrhea, herpes simplex, chancroid, and hepatitis A and D. Information is provided about transmission, symptoms, and indications for screening. The section is intended for use in a broad variety of clinical settings - inpatient, residential rehabilitation, and outpatient facilities, including methadone and drug-free modalities.

This section focuses on infectious diseases that are prevalent in and especially harmful to patients in drug treatment, and that can be medically managed by treatment staff or through referrals for primary care. The treatment recommendations in this TIP are largely, but not exclusively, based on guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Trained medical staff are needed to diagnose and treat these diseases. Treatment providers who do not offer such medical resources are encouraged to refer their patients to community-based health care professionals. Follow up care of those patients referred initially to other health care professionals should be provided.

***Infectious Diseases Linked With Drug Use***

Using drugs is an important risk factor for disease. Drug use is associated with such risk behaviors as the sharing of contaminated needles and other drug paraphernalia, and unsafe sexual practices that contribute to transmission of certain infectious diseases.For example, research indicates:

- ❖ There has been a steady increase in the incidence of hepatitis B despite the availability of a vaccine since 1982. Most of the increase is attributed to injection drug use.The prevalence of hepatitis C in injection drug users

is also high.

- ❖ Injection drug use is closely linked to the spread of HIV. Patients infected with HIV, because of their impaired immune systems, are at increased risk of developing numerous infections, the majority of which represent reactivation of prior infection. However, HIV-infected persons are far more likely to develop active TB after exposure to TB than HIV-negative persons.
- ❖ An increase in cases of tuberculosis appears to be related to HIV infection and is seen primarily in the 25- to 44-age group. Multi-drug resistant tuberculosis has been detected in a growing number of States and is seen especially in large cities with high rates of drug use, homelessness, and HIV infection.

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) and Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) affect women disproportionately, because women tend to show fewer symptoms and as a consequence they go untreated for longer periods of time. A bacterial STD can usually be cured if treated early. However, these diseases are often undetected. Many of the most serious problems from STDs come from undetected Chlamydia and gonorrhea; many of these cases lead to bacterial infection of the uterus, fallopian tubes, or lining of the pelvic organs, sometimes causing infertility. The transmission of an STD to an unborn child or during childbirth can have devastating effects.

Substance use is common among people with HIV infection. Unfortunately, substance use can trigger and often complicate mental health problems. For many, mental health problems predate substance use activity. Substance use can increase levels of distress, interfere with treatment adherence, and lead to impairment in thinking and memory.

Diagnosis and treatment by a psychiatrist or other qualified physician is critical as symptoms can mimic psychiatric disorders and other mental health problems.

The Reference Group to the United Nations on HIV and Injecting Drug Use recently estimated that worldwide about three million injecting drug users might be infected with HIV. About 10% of HIV cases worldwide are attributable to injecting drug use (mostly with opioids, although the use of other substances, including stimulants, has been associated with

unsafe injecting practices and sexual risk behaviors). Injecting drug users principally acquire HIV through sharing injection equipment, whereas non-injecting use of drugs, such as cocaine or amphetamine-type stimulants, is associated with transmission of HIV through high-risk sexual behaviors. Some drug users practice unsafe sex with multiple partners in exchange for drugs or money, providing a bridge for HIV to spread from populations with high HIV prevalence to the general population.

Interventions that reduce the spread of HIV in injecting drug users include, among others, HIV testing and counseling, needle and syringe programs, opioid substitution therapy and other drug dependence treatment. Drug dependence is associated with particularly high- risk patterns of drug use and related risks of HIV transmission for the following reasons: drug users experience difficulties in controlling drug-taking behaviors and frequent episodes of intoxication and withdrawal (often accompanied by a strong desire to take drugs); furthermore, they persist with drug use despite clear evidence of harmful consequences or high risk of such consequences. Effective and ethical prevention and treatment at the early stages of drug use and dependence can reduce the drug-related risks of HIV transmission. A recent WHO collaborative study on drug dependence treatment and HIV/AIDS found that substitution therapy of opioid dependence significantly reduced risks of HIV transmission in opioid-dependent individuals in low- and middle-income countries, consistent with the findings in high-income countries.

The incidence of AIDS-defining illness in patients receiving highly active antiretroviral therapy has been reported to be especially high in injecting drug users. In a study conducted in HIV-positive women in the United States of America, chronic depressive symptoms were associated with increased AIDS-related mortality and rapid disease progression independent of treatment and co-morbid substance use.

Mental and substance-use disorders affect help-seeking behavior or uptake of diagnostic and treatment services for HIV/AIDS. Mental illnesses have been associated with lower likelihood of receiving antiretroviral medication. In a study of women who were medically eligible to receive highly active antiretroviral therapy, its non-receipt was

associated with substance use and with a history of childhood sexual abuse. Among people with HIV/AIDS, those with drug-use disorders typically experience the greatest barriers in accessing treatment because of negative societal attitudes and reluctance to seek any kind of treatment. Injection drug use has consistently been shown to be associated with low uptake of highly active antiretroviral therapy.

Substance-use disorders affect both the progression of HIV disease and the response to treatment. In untreated co-morbid drug dependence, rates of adherence to highly active antiretroviral therapy are low, and rates of co-infection with hepatitis B and C viruses are high. Several randomized controlled trials have indicated that, with integrated treatment of both drug dependence and HIV/AIDS, rates of adherence approach the rate for the non-drug-dependent population. Recent research suggests that harmful patterns of alcohol use are associated with higher mortality in patients with HIV/AIDS. Several mechanisms appear to be responsible, including a direct effect of alcohol on HIV disease progression, probably mediated through the immune system, and the undermining of adherence to treatment. Even relatively low levels of alcohol consumption, such as one standard drink per day, have been associated with a reduction in adherence to treatment regimens.

The use of alcohol is known to be associated with an increased risk of unsafe sexual behavior. Given the widespread harmful use of alcohol in many countries with a high incidence and prevalence of HIV, levels and patterns of alcohol consumption may substantially influence HIV spread in populations. Several studies, including those conducted in African countries with high prevalence of HIV, have shown a positive association between HIV and alcohol consumption, with a prevalence of HIV infection among people with alcohol-use disorders higher than in the general population.

*The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism* reports that the changing patterns of HIV transmission in the United States; the role of alcohol in the transmission of HIV within, and potentially beyond, high-risk populations; the potential influence of alcohol abuse on the progression and treatment of HIV-related illness; and the benefits of making alcoholism treatment an integral part of HIV prevention

programs (*Sources: Health Resources and Services Administration; National Institute on Drug Abuse; Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research)*.

With 31 percent of all HIV cases among men, and 57 percent among women, attributed to injection drug use, it is obvious the shooting illegal drugs increases the risk of contracting the AIDS virus, but drinking alcohol can also contribute to the spread and progression of the disease. According to the *Health Resources and Services Administration*, non- injection drug use can also lead to contracting the HIV virus, because drug users may trade sex for drugs or money or engage in behaviors under the influence that put them at risk. Binge drinking is also risky. The same is true for people who drink to excess. People who are intoxicated loose their inhibitions and have their judgment impaired and can easily find themselves involved in behavior that would put them at risk for contracting HIV *(Kranzler HR, Rounsavill BJ, eds. Dual Diagnosis and Treatment: Substance Abuse and Comorbid Medical and Psychiatric Disorders. New York: Marcel Dekker).*

*National Institute on Drug Abuse Research* reports that most young people are not concerned about becoming infected with HIV, but they face a very real danger when they engage in risky behaviors, such as unprotected sex with multiple partners.

***Alcohol Increases HIV Susceptibility****:*

Risky behavior is not the only way drinking alcohol can increase the risk for becoming infected with HIV. A study by Gregory J. Bagby at the Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center found that alcohol consumption may increase host susceptibility to HIV infection. Bagby's student, conducted with rhesus monkeys infected with simian immunodeficiency virus (SIV), found that in the early stages of infection, monkeys who were given alcohol to drink had 64 times the amount of virus in their blood than the control monkeys. Bagby concluded that the alcohol increased infectivity of cells or increased the number of susceptible cells (*Sources: Health Resources and Services Administration; National Institute on Drug Abuse; Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research)*.

***Virus Progresses Faster:***

For people who have already been infected with HIV, drinking alcohol can

also may accelerate their HIV disease progression, according to a study by Jeffrey H. Samet at Boston University. The reason for this is both HIV and alcohol suppress the body's immune system. Samet's research found that HIV patients who were receiving highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART), and were currently drinking, have greater HIV progression than those who do not drink. They found that HIV patients who drank moderately or at at-risk levels had higher HIV RNA levels and lower CD4 cell counts, compared with those who did not drink (*Sources: Health Resources and Services Administration; National Institute on Drug Abuse; Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research).*

***Drinking Impacts Medication Compliance:***

Patients with HIV who drink, especially those who drinking heavily, or less likely to adhere to their prescribed medication schedule. Both the Samet study and research at the Center for Research on Health Care at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine found that nearly half of their patients who drank heavily reported taking medication off schedule. The researchers reported that many of the heavy drinkers simply would forget to take their medications. This is potentially a big problem for healthcare providers due to the fact that alcohol dependence in those with HIV runs at rates twice as high as the general population (*Sources: Health Resources and Services Administration; National Institute on Drug Abuse; Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research).*

**Mental Health and Sexually Transmitted Diseases**

Direct or indirect effects of the HIV virus can affect brain functioning. Some medications used to treat HIV infection can also cause similar complications. In people with HIV infection or AIDS, these complications can have significant impact on daily functioning and greatly diminish quality of life. Among the most common disorders are *HIV- associated minor cognitive motor disorder, HIV-associated dementia, delirium, and psychosis*. Signs of trouble may include forgetfulness, confusion, attention deficits, slurred or changed speech, sudden changes in mood or behavior, difficulty walking, muscle weakness, slowed thinking and difficulty finding words. People with HIV who have any of these problems should discuss their concerns with their physician immediately. New anti-HIV therapies in combination with psychiatric medication can reverse delirium and dementia

and markedly improve cognition; however, special care must be taken to ensure that the drugs do not interact with HIV medications. Psychotherapy can also help patients understand their condition and adapt to their diminished level of functioning *(Gray F, Adle-Biassette H, Chrétien F, Lorin de la Grandmaison G, Force G, Keohane C).*

The prevalence of mental illnesses in HIV-infected individuals is substantially higher than in the general population. Furthermore, HIV tends to be concentrated in highly vulnerable, marginalized and stigmatized populations; in particular, sex workers, men who have sex with men, drug users and prisoners have higher levels of mental health disorders than the general population. Increased psychological distress among people with HIV infection is common. Studies in both low- and high income countries have reported higher rates of depression in HIV-positive people compared with HIV negative control groups. The level of distress often seems to be related to the severity of symptoms of HIV infection. Coping styles and learned resourcefulness may shape the experience of depressive symptoms and the ability to care for oneself. Family relationships and the support of a partner can also influence mental health consequences (*World Health Organization, Executive Board EB124/6, 124th Session)*.

When faced with a diagnosis of HIV or AIDS, there are many emotional issues that a person may experience. Some of the common concerns or issues include anger, loss (health, job, relationships), stigma and fear of disclosure. There may also be a general fear, as well as anxiety, isolation, and depression. People with HIV must also cope with the psychological effects of fatigue, medication side effects, insomnia, irritability and difficulty with concentration. Substance abuse also frequently either co-occurs or develops after a diagnosis of HIV or AIDS *(Blechner MJ, Hope and mortality: psychodynamic approaches to AIDS and HIV. Hillsdale, NJ: Analytic Press.)*

HIV/AIDS imposes a significant psychological burden. People with HIV often suffer from depression and anxiety as they adjust to the impact of the diagnosis of being infected and face the difficulties of living with a chronic life-threatening illness, for instance shortened life expectancy, complicated therapeutic regimens, stigmatization, and loss of social support, family or friends. HIV infection can be associated with high risk of suicide or attempted suicide. The psychological predictors of suicidal ideation in HIV-

infected individuals include concurrent substance-use disorders, past history of depression and presence of hopelessness (*World Health Organization, Executive Board EB124/6, 124th Session)*.

Studies have demonstrated a high prevalence of HIV infection in people with serious chronic mental illnesses. Prevalence rates in mentally ill inpatients and outpatients have been reported to be between 5% and 23%, compared with a range of 0.3% to 0.4% in the general population in the United States of America over comparable time periods. Some studies have reported behavioral risk factors for transmission of HIV in between 30% and 60% of people with severe mental illnesses. These risks include high rates of sexual contact with multiple partners, injecting drug use, sexual contact with injecting drug users, sexual abuse (in which women are particularly vulnerable to HIV infection), unprotected sex between men and low use of condoms. Besides these behavioral risks, mental disorders may also interfere with the ability to acquire and/or use information about HIV/AIDS and thus to practice safer behaviors or increase the likelihood of situations occurring in which risk behaviors are more common. Inadequate provision of integrated services for people with mental-health and substance-use disorders, HIV/AIDS and related physical, psychological and social problems creates an additional serious barrier to treatment and care for HIV/AIDS.

There is consistently strong evidence from high-income countries that adherence to highly active antiretroviral therapy is lowered by depression, cognitive impairment, alcohol use and substance-use disorders. Furthermore, such therapy, especially with efivarenz, can be associated with a range of side effects on the central nervous system, including depression, nervousness, euphoria, hallucination and psychosis. Mental disorders, including substance use disorders, are risk factors for contracting HIV, and the presence of HIV/AIDS increases the risk of development of mental disorders. The resulting comorbidity complicates help-seeking, diagnosis, quality of care provided, treatment and its outcomes, and adherence. The diagnosis of mental health problems in HIV-infected individuals faces several barriers. Patients often do not reveal their psychological state to health-care professionals for fear of being stigmatized further. Also, health-care professionals are often not skilled in detecting psychological symptoms and, even when they do, they often fail

to take the necessary action for further assessment, management and referral.

### Counseling Clients with STDs Such as HIV and Substance Abuse Disorders

The pandemics of substance abuse and HIV/AIDS are clearly moving along similar paths, and each continues to present unique, yet interrelated, challenges. First, both disorders are considered to be chronic--that is, lifelong diseases. Second, substance abuse is a primary risk behavior for HIV infection. Third, a diagnosis of HIV infection or related conditions can be a stressor for an individual already in recovery from a substance abuse disorder. However, the diagnosis of HIV infection may motivate a client to enter substance abuse treatment. Injection drug users who test positive for HIV are more likely to enter treatment than those who test negative. Also, studies have noted a reduction in risk-taking behaviors among injection drug users who test positive for HIV. The diagnoses of a substance abuse disorder and HIV/AIDS require extensive physical and mental health care and counseling in conjunction with extensive social services. To deal with the myriad issues surrounding substance abusers who are HIV positive, substance abuse treatment professionals must continually update their skills and knowledge as well as reexamine their own attitudes and biases.

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### Training, Attitudes, And Issues

Before conducting any screening, assessment, or treatment planning, clinicians should reassess their personal attitudes and experiences in working with HIV-infected substance abusers. This section discusses several ways in which clinicians can accomplish this, including formal training programs, examining personal attitudes (e.g., countertransference and homophobia), examining fears of infection, and avoiding burnout. It is important to reassess comfort levels with each client because each client will vary in demographic and cultural background. For instance, a service provider may feel comfortable working with a young Asian American male with a history of alcohol use, yet the same provider may not be at all comfortable with a pregnant Hispanic woman who is an active injection drug user and wishes to have her baby.

**Training**

Clinicians must have the proper training to screen, assess, and counsel clients. Achieving competency is an ongoing process. The complexities related to people with HIV/ AIDS and substance abuse disorders are constantly changing and do not allow staff members to defer learning or training or even to maintain a "status quo" attitude about their competency. Examples of methods to help staff grow in the areas of assessment, screening, and treatment planning include the following:

- *Model skills and competencies*. Less experienced staff can observe supervisors or more tenured staff who demonstrate desired qualities.
- *Peer training and feedback*. Peer teams can provide feedback through direct observation of staff members' interactions with clients, as well as review of staff members' client charts.
- *Case presentations*. Weekly or monthly group case presentations conducted by a different staff member each time can be effective for building skills and monitoring quality. Case simulation, in which each staff member has an opportunity to ask the "client" a question, is a highly useful training tool. At the end of the presentation, everyone attending can provide feedback about the activity.
- *Experiential skills-building exercises*. Many activities can be used to sensitize staff to the client's experiences. Activities can include encouraging staff members to go to a confidential and anonymous HIV/AIDS test site, or anonymously sit in the waiting room of the local food stamp office, HIV/AIDS clinic, or county jail. Staff must use different avenues to maintain a keen sensitivity to and awareness of the client's issues.
- *Assessment instruments*. Use specific assessment tools, such as substance abuse and sexual history questionnaires (e.g., the Addiction Severity Index [ASI]).
- *Formal conferences, training, consultations with clinicians*. Often agency budgets are tight, and the first expense to be cut is staff development. This is a major problem for many programs. Programs must establish that improvement and excellence are serious goals and that attending treatment-oriented conferences is a part of building staff competency and moving toward these goals.

**Attitudes**

It is important that clinicians be aware of any of their own attitudes that might interfere with helping a client. By learning to put aside personal

judgments and focus on client needs, staff members can build trust and rapport with the client. When a clinician can deal with a client in a sensitive, empathic manner, there is a much greater chance that both will have a positive and successful encounter.

Countertransference is a set of thoughts, feelings, and beliefs experienced by a service provider that occurs in response to the client. Although sometimes these beliefs and feelings are conscious, generally they are not. It is thus unrealistic to expect counselors, usually untrained in addressing unconscious mental processing, to be aware of countertransference. Regular clinical supervision, which should be integrated into the staffing of the program, can help raise their awareness. If such resources exist, counselors may, with caution, address this issue.

In order to deal with countertransference issues, clinicians must be willing to examine their skills and attitudes. Working with clients who have HIV/AIDS and substance abuse disorders brings up issues for treatment staff that can be both physically and emotionally demanding. Clinicians see a broad range of diverse clients from all walks of life. To work in both these fields, providers must learn to be comfortable in discussing topics they may never have talked about openly--sex, drug use, death, grief, and so on. To effect positive change, clinicians also must be willing to seek additional specialized training and support.

**Examining attitudes and skills**

Countertransference can manifest itself in many different ways. The key to seeing countertransference issues is awareness and consciousness-raising. The commitment to "do no harm" to clients and their families, along with a desire to provide quality services, should be the driving forces for willingly examining these issues.

The following are some common countertransference issues for providers working with substance abusers who are HIV positive *(adapted from National Association of Social Workers, NASW)*:

- ➢ Fear of contagion
- ➢ Fear of the unknown
- ➢ Fear of death, dying, grief, and loss
- ➢ Stigmatization (e.g., of people with mental health problems,

"addicts," people who are HIV positive, homosexuals)

- Powerlessness, helplessness, and loss of control
- Shame and guilt
- Homophobia
- Anger, rage, and hostility
- Frustration
- Overidentification
- Denial
- Differences in culture, race, class, and lifestyle
- Fantasies of professional omnipotence
- Burnout
- Measures of success and personal reward

**Homophobia**

To be aware of homophobic responses among treatment professionals and of their own countertransference issues, it is important that counselors understand how the client is handling his homosexuality. The counselor should understand the possible link between substance abuse and gay or lesbian identity formation. Substance abuse can be an easy relief, can provide acceptance, and, more important, can mirror the "comforting" dissociation developed in childhood. The "symptom-relieving" aspects of substance abuse help fight the effects of homophobia; substance abuse can allow "forbidden" behavior, allow social comfort in bars or other unfamiliar social settings and provide comfort just from the dissociative state itself. For example, some men have their first homosexual sexual experience while drinking or being drunk. This connection is a very powerful behavioral link--the pleasure and release of substance abuse with the pleasure and release of sex--and is very difficult to change or "unlink" later in life.

In regard to the issue of homophobia, it is also critical to understand how stereotypes affect the treatment options offered. The professional should take an inventory of these stereotypes to assess her homophobia potential and should be aware of the roles countertransference can play. The short assessment tool provided below can be used to examine where providers and clients alike might rank on a continuum of homophobic reactions. This tool is also useful in group supervision sessions or discussions with both gay/ lesbian and heterosexual colleagues.
It is important that counselors have a working knowledge of some of the terminology and definitions pertaining to homophobia. Following is a brief

list of terms and definitions.

- *Overt homophobia* includes violence, verbal abuse, and name-calling.
- *Institutional homophobia* describes the way in which governments, businesses, schools, churches, and other institutions and organizations treat people differently and less favorably based on their sexual orientation.
- *Cultural homophobia* includes social standards and norms requiring heterosexuality.
- *Internalized homophobia* is acceptance and integration by lesbians and gays of the negative attitudes expressed by society toward them.
- *Heterosexism* is the system of advantages bestowed on heterosexuals. It is the institutional form of homophobia that assumes all people are or should be heterosexual and therefore excludes the needs, concerns, and life experiences of lesbians, gays, and bisexuals.
- *Coming out* may possibly be the most important part of gay and lesbian development. This is the process, often lifelong, in which a person acknowledges, accepts, and in many cases appreciates his or her own lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender identity. This often involves sharing this information with others. Family members of gay and lesbian individuals go through a similar process.
- *Oppression* is the systematic subjugation of a particular social group by another group with access to social and political power, by withholding access to that power.
- *Lesbian/gay baiting* involves actions or words that imply or state that the presence of a gay man or lesbian hurts or discredits a social system. The purpose is to hurt, demean, intimidate, or control, and to stop social change or acceptance of lesbians and gays within the social system.

These definitions can help the clinician become aware of the added layer of discrimination felt by gay men and lesbians in treatment for HIV/AIDS and a substance abuse disorder. Following is a list of some "Do's" to keep in mind when working with homosexual clients *(adapted from Storms)*.

- Identify the client's strengths and accept them as you find them.
- Listen empathically and refrain from making judgments about the client's lifestyle.
- Remain aware of the client's sexual orientation and the possible effects of this orientation on the client's experience and world-view.
- Explore the client's sexual practices with an eye toward

internalized homophobia.

- Be aware of your own preference and mindful of possible homophobia or confusion in your own sexual identity.
- Be knowledgeable about compulsive sexual behavior and sexual practices in the lesbian/gay community.
- Ask your lesbian/gay clients what terms they prefer when discussing their sexual orientation and those of others.
- Encourage self-empowerment, consciousness-raising, and participation in the lesbian and gay community.
- Encourage your program to hire openly lesbian and gay counselors/therapists.
- Educate others about internalized homophobia and heterosexism. Be gay- and lesbian-affirming rather than just gay- and lesbian-tolerant.
- Stay abreast of current information on resources and display this information in your office. Attend seminars and professional workshops about working with lesbian and gay clients.

**Fear of infection**

Fear of infection is one of the most challenging issues for counselors. It is essential that providers examine this issue without blaming or judging themselves and others. Most professionals who work with substance abusers and HIV-positive individuals have thought about becoming infected with HIV, hepatitis, or tuberculosis (TB) through their jobs *(Sherman and Ouellette)*. Some fear that scientists are not aware of modes of infection or transmission that might put service providers and their families at greater risk of infection *(Montgomery and Lewis)*. The key to dealing with this fear is to discuss it and vent the feelings with someone who is safe, trusted, and informed, *and* to practice universal precautions at all times.

Beyond this, it is essential for providers to have regular and frequent inservice training with updates on the latest research and data about transmission and treatment of HIV/ AIDS, hepatitis, and TB.

**Special considerations for counselors who treat HIV-infected clients**

The challenges and stresses related to working with people with HIV/AIDS are in some ways unique. The fact that providers often deal with multiple and serial losses and see clients suffering on a daily basis clearly affects the providers' psychological health. In recent years, therapists have begun to

examine and assess these service providers for symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Burnout often is referred to as "bereavement overload." One definition characterizes burnout as lowered energy, enthusiasm, and idealism for doing one's job, that is, as a loss of concern for the people served and for the work. Unlike fatigue, burnout does not resolve after a given amount of rest and recreation.

Burnout prevention and stress management techniques should be used both in the work setting and in counselors' personal lives. Working with HIV-infected substance abusers requires agencies and individuals to be more creative and flexible in finding new and different ways to support and nurture counselors to prevent burnout. Agencies that have taken on this challenge with integrity and commitment have seen highly effective staff function at optimal levels for many years.

Suggestions for ways in which agencies can take care of counselors at work include

- Assigning clearly specific duties
- Having clear boundaries on professional obligations
- Enlisting volunteer help from community organizations
- Allowing for "time out" activities
- Varying tasks and responsibilities
- Building in "mental health days"
- Providing for continuing education
- Holding staff retreats (with enjoyable activities planned)
- Holding discussion, process, and support groups
- Convening regular staff/team supervision meetings

In addition, it is important that agencies allocate time to discuss the deaths and losses faced by staff. This may mean supporting special memorial events at which those who have been lost to HIV/AIDS disease can be remembered. Agencies also can support staff through contracts with employee assistance program therapists and by providing an onsite therapeutic support group for staff members to attend as they wish.

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**Screening**

A positive screen for HIV infection typically leads to a referral for formal

assessment, usually to an HIV/AIDS case management service. Frequently, substance abuse treatment programs provide referrals to HIV/AIDS care services. Providers will want to identify substance abuse treatment programs and agencies with these networks. At a minimum, services should include the following client needs in priority order:

- Substance abuse treatment
- Medical care
- Housing
- Mental health care
- Nutritional care
- Dental care
- Ancillary services
- Support systems

**Mental health care**

A diagnosis of mental illness may reflect the client's affective and mood responses to this medical judgment, may be a consequence of self-medication, or may reflect neurological complications of HIV/AIDS, as well as an underlying mental health disorder. Mental health care should consist of both a neuropsychiatric workup and full mental health status examinations. Service providers should be alert to and notify clients and psychiatrists that complications may arise from the use of prescription medication for mental health problems and interactions between drug residue in the body and medications for HIV/ AIDS and opportunistic infections.

**Lipodystrophy syndrome**

Lipodystrophy syndrome occurs in early end-stage AIDS and produces altered body composition and various hormonal and physiological changes. The cause of the syndrome and its relationship with HIV and protease inhibitors are unknown. Because of the disfiguring nature of some symptoms, lipodystrophy can be particularly distressing for women. Symptoms include

- Redistribution of body fat
- Increase in waist size

- ➢ Thinning of the arms and legs
- ➢ Increased facial wrinkling
- ➢ Weakness and muscle wasting
- ➢ Gastrointestinal symptoms
- ➢ Increased triglycerides and cholesterol
- ➢ Decreased testosterone levels
- ➢ Hypertension
- ➢ Diabetes

**Disclosure Issues**

Disclosure issues are difficult for all HIV-infected clients. For substance-abusing clients, these issues take on additional challenges. For example, disclosure of positive HIV status may lead to personal threats or harm to both client and family. A client's family may refuse to associate with him upon learning of his HIV/AIDS status. Particularly for clients whose culture reflects definition of self within a community or self in relation to a clan (as opposed to individual definition), separation from community can serve as a trigger for lapse or relapse into risky substance use and sex-related behaviors. Therefore, providers must use caution when notifying clients of test results and should comply with regulations to ensure that a client's confidentiality is preserved.

Also, during group therapy clients often feel an obligation to reveal their HIV status to the rest of the group. Counselors should caution clients about the impact of such disclosure and consider discouraging them from making it. Clients who wish to disclose their HIV status generally do so in response to treatment themes of honesty and openness and are not completely aware of the consequences. Of course, in treatment settings where all patients are HIV positive, there is no need for this concern.

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**HIV/AIDS-Specific Substance Abuse Counseling Issues**

There are many counseling issues specific to HIV/AIDS that providers should be familiar with when treating HIV-infected, substance-abusing clients.

**Cultural Competency Issues**

Culture is the integrated pattern of human behavior that includes thoughts, speech, actions, and artifacts. Culture depends on the capacity of humans for

learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations. It takes into account the customs, beliefs, social norms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group. With this type of definition, it is easy to see that there is indeed a culture of addiction, a culture of poverty, a gay culture, and even a recovery culture.

Cross and colleagues present a comprehensive discussion of culturally competent systems of care. Five essential elements contribute to cultural competence *(Cross)*, which can briefly be described as follows:

- **Valuing diversity.** Counselors value diversity when they accept that the people they serve come from very different backgrounds and may make different choices based on culture. Although all people share common basic needs, there are vast differences in how people go about meeting those needs. Accepting the fact that each culture finds some behaviors, actions, or values more important or desirable than others helps workers interact more successfully with different people.
- **Cultural self-assessment.** When counselors understand how systems of care are shaped by dominant cultures, it may be easier for them to assess how these systems interface with other cultures. Care providers can then choose actions that minimize cross-cultural barriers.
- **Dynamics of difference.** When cultural systems interact, both representatives (e.g., care provider and client) may misjudge the other's actions based on history and learned expectations. Both will bring dynamics of difference--culturally prescribed patterns of communication, etiquette, and problem-solving, as well as underlying feelings about serving or being served by someone who is different. Incorporating an understanding of these dynamics and their origins into the system enhances chances for productive cross-cultural interventions.
- **Institutionalization of cultural knowledge.** Workers must have accurate cultural knowledge and information or access to such information. They also must have available to them community contacts and consultants to answer culturally related questions.
- **Adaptations to diversity.** The previous four elements build a context for a cross-culturally competent system of care and service. Both workers' and systems' approaches can be adapted to

create a better fit between needs of people and services available. For instance, members of certain ethnic groups repeatedly receive negative messages from the media about their culture. Programs can be developed that incorporate alternative culturally enhancing experiences, develop problem-solving skills, and teach about the origins of stereotypes and prejudice. By creating and implementing such programs, workers can begin to institutionalize cultural interventions as a legitimate helping approach.

Finally, becoming culturally competent is a developmental process for individual counselors. It is not something that happens because one reads a book, or attends a workshop, or happens to be a member of a minority group. It is a process born of a commitment to provide quality services to all and a willingness to risk.

**Making culturally competent decisions**

Treatment providers and counselors must examine two essential factors when working with culturally, racially, or ethnically different populations: the socioeconomic status of the client or group and the client's degree of acculturation. A distinction should be made when discussing a population as a whole and a particular segment of that population. For example, when treating an HIV-infected substance-abusing Hispanic woman, the counselor should focus on the woman as an individual and on the particular circumstances of this individual's life, rather than seeing her as an abstract representative of her culture or race. More often, poverty is the relevant issue to be discussed, rather than specific ethnic or racial factors.

The second factor, degree of acculturation, is important and should be part of the assessment process. How acculturated or assimilated are the family and client? What generation is this client? Assessing for this, and knowing that several generations with different values and levels of acculturation may all live in one household, can test the communication skills and counseling skills of the best service providers. When discussing acculturation/ assimilation and values, counselors should keep in mind that, in general, the more years a family has lived in the United States, the less traditional their values tend to be. Thus a fourth-generation Chinese-American client may not speak Chinese or hold traditional Chinese values.

Knowing the values and beliefs of a client is crucial if treatment is to be effective.

Providers must also help develop culturally competent systems of care. A part of this is making services accessible to and often used by the target risk populations. Culturally competent systems also recognize the importance of culture, cross-cultural relationships, cultural differences, and the ability to meet culturally unique needs.

Aside from assessing cultural competence using the five elements discussed previously, it also is helpful to examine some ways in which providers can minimize cultural clashes and blocks that may exist when working with clients.

One concern in providing culturally competent care is how to discuss values and differences around sex and sexuality. In many cultures, people avoid discussing sex because they find such discussions disrespectful. This is one reason why so many cultures avoid discussing homosexuality. A counselor should consider using a less direct approach when initiating discussion about issues related to sex and sexual orientation. Many providers believe that some of the public health problems faced in communities of color and the gay community are related to their inability to speak often and directly enough about safer sex practices, risky behaviors, and homosexuality. Even in the recovery culture and in many treatment settings, sex and sexuality are blatantly avoided. Service providers must acknowledge that they, too, in addition to their clients, are often uncomfortable talking about sexuality, sexual identity, and sexual orientation.

Providers also should be aware of the messages often given to communities of color and particularly women. The message, "stop having sex," often advocated by providers has been mixed with historical issues and fears of racial/ethnic genocide, thus making it difficult for most groups to give any credence to those expounding this method of reducing HIV/AIDS. The value of sex and procreation in many cultures makes it difficult for someone from outside the client's culture, especially someone of a different gender, to tell people to not have sex or to have sex only with a condom.

Finally, it is important that the counselor recognize that much of what is asked of clients and their families is personal and private. Questions related

to sex, dying, and substance abuse are not usual topics of conversation, and when asking these questions, the counselor crosses many boundaries. It often is considered disrespectful (and offensive to certain cultural values) to ask questions about these specific areas. One wise way to broach these subjects with clients, especially clients who are significantly older than the provider or from a more traditional culture, is to simply apologize
The most practical advice is for providers to (1) maintain an open mind, (2) use cultural consultants for training and support, and (3) when in doubt, defer to the concepts of health and stability over pathology and dysfunction.

**Gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender populations**
Providers wishing to serve the needs of particular ethnic or cultural groups have learned that communities must be understood, respected, and consulted in order to make effective interventions; this also holds true when working with gay men, lesbians, and bisexual men and women. This population is defined not by traditionally understood cultural and ethnic minority criteria, but by having a sexual orientation that differs from that of the majority. Transgender people also form a unique population, often linked to gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals, although they differ from the majority by gender identification rather than sexual orientation.

Men who have sex with men (or MSMs--the CDC category used to report its data) may self-identify as gay (men with homosexual sexual orientations), bisexual (men who feel sexually drawn to both men and women), or heterosexual (men having sex with men as a purely physical act and not a reflection of innate sexual orientation). No matter what their sexual orientation, unprotected sexual contact puts MSMs at risk for HIV. In most reviews of gay men and safer sex practices, most men who were knowledgeable about safer sex failed to practice it while under the influence of some substance. Many men from minority backgrounds who have sex with other men do not self-identify as gay or bisexual, so interventions should be based not on sexual orientation, but on sexual behavior.

Some women who have sex with women continue to have sex with men. A number of these women may be injection drug users and share syringes; consequently, they are prone to HIV infection. Although it is unlikely that female-to-female transmission of the virus will occur, lesbians have been urged to use safer sex precautions, such as using dental dams during oral sex.

Lesbians present some specific issues that must be highlighted. Compared with gay men, they are more likely to have lower incomes (as do women in general when compared with men); are more likely to be parents (about one-third of lesbians are biological parents); face prejudice as women as well as for being gay, including the stronger reaction against and willingness to ignore females with substance abuse disorders; are more likely to come out later in life (about 28 years of age versus 18 years of age in men); and are more likely to have bisexual feelings or experiences, so that they are still at sexual risk for HIV infection as well as possible IDU risk *(Banks and Gartrell, ; Bell et al.,; Bradford and Ryan, Mosbacher).*

Gay youth also present treatment challenges. Special sensitivity and understanding are needed to work with youth of any background, especially youth who are gay or lesbian or from an ethnic minority background. Young gay males in particular may be subjected to harassment at home or school, and they are prone to alcohol use, dropping out of school, running away, and getting involved in sex for drugs or money (*Ku et al.,; Rotheram- Borus et al.,; Savin-Williams)*. Many young gay male streetworkers abuse amphetamines, "tweaking" to have a sexual experience, and may exchange sex for drugs.

In general, gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender people are wary of the medical establishment and may resist seeking health care, distrust the advice given, or question the treatment plan suggested if the provider displays evidence of homophobia or heterosexism.

Gender identification is different from sexual orientation. *Gender identity* refers to a person's basic conviction of being male, female, or transgender. *Sexual orientation* refers to sexual attraction to others (men, women, or transgender persons). For example, many cross-dressers are heterosexual men who have active sexual relationships with women. Many homosexual men, although historically considered effeminate, identify strongly as men and appear very masculine.

Substance use plays a significant role in the high HIV prevalence in MTF transgender individuals. One study that investigated 519 transgender individuals in San Francisco

found high rates of substance abuse among both MTF and FTM individuals (*Clements et al.*). The study reported that 55 percent of the MTF sample indicated they had been in substance abuse treatment at some time during their lifetime. The study also found that HIV prevalence was significantly higher among MTF individuals (35 percent) than FTM individuals (2 percent), and among the MTF individuals, HIV prevalence for African Americans was 61 percent. Although the HIV prevalence rate was low in the FTM individuals, they commonly reported engaging in many of the same HIV risk behaviors as the MTF individuals (*Clements et al.)*

Counseling transgender individuals who are HIV positive and in substance abuse treatment can involve many different issues. Some of these issues are obvious: lack of family and social supports, isolation, low self-esteem, and internalized transphobia, to name a few. Some issues are not so obvious; for example, transgender clients currently undergoing hormone therapy often experience emotional and physical changes that can make treatment for substance abuse more difficult and relapse more likely. Although medically managed hormone treatment should not be interrupted, both the clinician and client must be aware that estrogen and testosterone therapies are mind and mood-altering substances, particularly when incorrectly taken. Improper administration of estrogen mimics the premenstrual symptoms of non-transsexual women, which can have a deleterious effect on recovery (CSAT, in press [b]). These premenstrual symptoms can trigger or exacerbate Post Acute Withdrawal Syndrome, which is believed to be the leading cause of relapse.

Additional relapse triggers or clinical issues may include the following: (1) inability to find, engage in, or maintain gainful employment due to employer prejudice against transgender individuals; (2) lack of formal education or training because the client was forced to leave school or home before completing his or her education; (3) the fact that HIV-positive transgender clients may be denied sex reassignment surgery due to their HIV status, even if they are asymptomatic and healthy; and (4) the general lack of substance-free role models and widespread social support for transgender individuals.

### Women

The needs of women have always represented a unique challenge to health

care and substance abuse treatment systems. Traditionally, these challenges have not been well met and are being exacerbated by the growing number of substance-abusing women infected with HIV. The diseases of substance abuse and HIV/AIDS present differently in women than in men and progress at different rates for a variety of reasons, including the fact that women usually present later in the HIV/AIDS disease process than men.

Gender-specific services for women should include the following:

Medical and substance abuse treatment that is accessible, available, and incorporates

- General health (including reproductive health) and wellness across the life span
- Mental health counseling (particularly for PTSD)
- Parenting skills and support ᴼFamily-focused support ᴼRelationship issues Trauma/abuse support ᴼEducational/vocational services ᴼLegal services
- Sexuality and sexual orientation issues
- Eating disorder support
- Women-only support groups
- Empowerment--that is, holistic programming that emphasizes the development of a partnership with a female service provider, one in which there are mutual respect and many opportunities for positive role modeling
- Transportation services
- Child care, both onsite and supervised
- Woman-sensitive women working with women
- Long-term case management services that extend to the client and her family

A woman's identity as caregiver/caretaker must be recognized as an extremely powerful factor in how she accesses care and treatment and how successful she is in her recovery and health maintenance. There is no question that this identity/role can explain why a woman seeks treatment ("for the kids") or why she leaves treatment ("to get home to my husband/partner/kids"). This is also a factor in a woman's sense of guilt and shame from becoming HIV infected--a societal stigma that only "bad girls" get HIV or are addicts or alcoholics, and the stigma of being an unfit mother if she has lost custody of her children.

Providers must be open and prepared to discuss safer sex and drug and alcohol abuse from a risk-reduction perspective. They must be well informed about and comfortable in discussing sexuality. Risk reduction is an ongoing type of intervention that goes beyond assertiveness training and teaching women how to put condoms on men. It recognizes the need to "start where the client is" and use appropriate interventions, which may help a woman reduce her risk of getting reinfected or of infecting a partner. This includes instructing female injection drug users about how to use bleach to "clean their works," how to use a female condom, or how to use a vaginal spermicide foam (not the safest risk-reduction method, however) to lower their risk of HIV infection when having intercourse. It also involves making referrals to substance abuse treatment and instruction for male partners on how to use a condom correctly.

**Reproductive decision-making**

Reproductive decision-making is an important area for providers to examine with both female and male clients. Providers must be prepared to discuss pregnancy and family planning with respect and without judgment. This is a difficult task for providers and clients; counselors may have many judgments about "right" and "wrong" and many opportunities for counter-transference. One way providers can interact with clients is to help them openly and honestly consider various factors when making reproductive decisions.

One way to provide support in this area, and help build coping skills, is to encourage women to talk with other women--to become part of a support group that is based on empowerment and women helping women. Counselors should see reproductive decision-making as a very high priority and move toward this goal in small, incremental steps.

At present, no one knows exactly how to predict which mothers will transmit HIV to their infants. Although there is some speculation that a mother's viral load, measured through viral load assays, may indicate whether her infant

becomes HIV infected. Much is still unknown, and controversies abound, but providers must understand and respect the importance of self-determination and the right of women to make their own decisions. Ultimately, it is the woman's choice.

Today, HIV-positive women are looking at the prospect of pregnancy differently than they did in 1989. HIV-positive women who think about becoming pregnant have access to information about viral load testing and the possibility of artificial insemination. Also, HIV-positive women can consider a natural rhythm method, identifying fertile days and limiting unprotected intercourse to those times to decrease their partner's risk of HIV infection. There is no question that even today, facing pregnancy while HIV positive, examining the options related to terminating or continuing a pregnancy, deciding about medications, examining the woman's health and the infant's health, and addressing the long-term implications are all complex issues.

It is essential that providers examine these issues with clients within the context of a biopsychosocial framework. Counselors and health care providers must work together, along with the female client, to stay aware of the latest research and information regarding HIV/AIDS treatment. It is also important to remember that data and information on HIV/AIDS are constantly changing and that the "facts" provided to clients today may be very different tomorrow.

**Parents who are HIV Positive**

More and more resources have been developed for single- and two-parent households in which one or both parents are HIV positive and/or the children are HIV positive. There must be a continued awareness of the needs of these families.

These families experience the need for a variety of services, both child-centered and adult-centered. Concerns about guardianship for children after the parent is unable or unavailable to care for them must be a major focus for the parent and the service provider. Unfortunately, many clients who have long histories of substance abuse may have "burned many bridges," and the family support they need for permanency planning and establishing an appropriate guardian for their children is no longer available. All too often, there is only a tired, abused, and used grandparent who is dealing with chronic ailments, limited resources, and little emotional energy to raise more children.

If a child also is HIV positive, there will be special needs that the parent may

not be able to address while facing her own issues. The already demanding dynamics of childhood, school, and growing up become more challenging for an HIV-infected child and parent. Even if the child is not HIV positive, the demands of parenting can prove rigorous for single parents with HIV/AIDS. Although the parent experiences the relief of knowing the child is all right, the poignant realization that he may not live to see that child grow up can still be painful.

The HIV-infected single parent with a substance abuse disorder is at risk of losing custody of her minor children if convicted of drug possession or substance abuse. If family members disapprove of the single parent's lifestyle, they may seek custody of the active substance abuser's minor children. The counselor may facilitate a plan encouraging the single parent toward goals that support the parenting relationship. This enables the recovery process to take place while the parent and child are working out their own version of permanency planning.

It is difficult for a child to witness the effects of a substance abuse disorder on a parent; surely the difficulty increases enormously when the child is told that the parent has HIV/ AIDS. Children whose parents are in recovery from substance abuse disorders or who are maintaining some stability despite periodic substance abuse may experience some changes in their relationships with their parents.

There are support groups and programs for children whose parents are affected by HIV. Although not available in all communities, these groups offer children a chance to talk about their fears regarding their parents' health, learn more about the disease, and socialize with others who are facing these problems. At the same time, the programs can provide the parent with some respite time. In addition, groups like Al-Anon and Alateen can provide children with support and education about the recovery process.
If service providers work in a large urban area, chances are there will be an AIDS Service Organization (ASO) listed in the phone book. This agency is likely to have lists of support groups of all kinds. Single parents with substance abuse disorders who are HIV positive should also have a support group.

**Hispanic Populations**

The Hispanic population in the United States is diverse, composed of a wide range of racial, indigenous, and ethnic groups.

Within the context of acculturation and socioeconomic status, providers should be aware of specific cultural issues that can support interventions and improve a provider's ability to engage Hispanic clients, such as the role of the family, the values of interdependence, respect, and "personalismo" (i.e., importance of personal contact). Understanding these concepts will help establish rapport and trust.

The Hispanic family is generally extended and has many members. A Hispanic client's support system may be composed of siblings, godparents, aunts, and uncles who are all very involved with the client. The family as a whole is of great importance, and often what is best for the family will override what is best for one of its members. Because the family is so important to most Hispanics, children are highly valued. This makes it easier to see how some Hispanic women who are HIV positive grieve deeply about the decision not to have children and may feel unfulfilled and inadequate as a result. This also sheds some light on the challenges of involving Hispanics in substance abuse treatment. Leaving their children behind while in treatment or turning guardianship over to a State agency may be unacceptable and create more conflict.

**African Americans**

Many African Americans have a deep-seated mistrust of the health system. This dates back to the pre-Civil War period when, because they were considered property and had no legal right to refuse, slaves were sometimes used in medical experiments *(source: Gamble).* A collective memory thus exists among the African American community of their exploitation by the medical establishment More recently *(source: Gamble)* the syphilis study performed at Tuskegee University from 1932 to 1972, during which 400 African American men infected with syphilis were deliberately denied life-saving treatment, has fostered in some African Americans the belief that contact with health care institutions will automatically expose them to racist administrators and policies. Several articles point to the Tuskegee study as a significant factor in the low participation of African Americans in clinical trials and organ donation efforts and in the reluctance of

many African Americans to seek routine preventive care. As one AIDS educator said, "so many African American people that I work with do not trust hospitals or any of the other community health care service providers because of that Tuskegee experiment. It is like _ if they did it once, then they will do it again" *(Source: AIDS Weekly Plus; Karkabi; Thomas and Quinn)*.

Counselors should be aware that the issues of slavery and institutional racism are constant and prevalent facts in the lives of many African Americans and should be addressed early in treatment so they are acknowledged, validated, and brought into the treatment process. In order to provide effective substance abuse treatment for African American clients, providers need to take into account the social, economic, political, and cultural contexts of their lives *(Pena and Koss-Chioino)*.

Spirituality is very important for many African Americans. The relationship between an individual and the faith community is a critical source of strength that can help prepare clients to succeed in substance abuse treatment. In addition, many African Americans have strong social networks. They may have friends or a pastor with whom they might share information they would not share with a substance abuse counselor. These confidants might act as "co-therapists" for the client. It can be helpful for clients if counselors can identify and integrate clients' co-therapists into their substance abuse treatment plans (keeping in mind clients' rights to confidentiality and the need for signed consent forms--see Chapter 9 for more information). Along these lines, for African Americans with substance use disorders and HIV/AIDS, support groups of friends may be more likely to be helpful and less undermining than support groups of families. This is perhaps due to the lingering stigma of the ways in which HIV/AIDS is acquired--both intravenous drug use and homosexual activity are still highly stigmatized acts within many African American communities. Thus, activating family supports may be difficult, and providers should encourage clients to participate in support groups composed of their peers.

**Asian Americans**

The increasing size and diversity of the Asian and Pacific Islander population make it difficult to discuss group norms regarding substance abuse. Norms for alcohol and tobacco use vary by culture and there appear to be no norms governing the consumption of narcotics or other substances.

Service providers also should shed the notion of the "model minority," which

often typecasts Asians and Pacific Islanders and limits treatment access. Often, Asians and Pacific Islanders believe the model minority myth and feel isolated when they test positive or report substance abuse disorders. They may also feel they have let down their families and communities.

Despite differences in cultural norms and mores among Asians and Pacific Islanders, cross-cultural beliefs in the importance of group and collective identity, service, and responsibility suggest the use of treatment strategies that incorporate biological or constructed families and communities rather than a focus on individual behavior change. Moreover, treatments that emphasize nonverbal or indirect communication skills, not confrontation, may be more culturally appropriate and more effective. Most American treatment modalities rely heavily on verbal therapies that require direct verbal emotional expression and a high level of personal disclosure. Many substance abuse treatment programs favor a confrontational approach, and many HIV/AIDS programs favor support groups and psychotherapy. These treatment approaches, unless modified for Asian and Pacific Islander clients, are often unsuccessful because they violate Asian and Pacific Islander cultural norms. By American standards, Asians and Pacific Islanders tend to communicate more indirectly, often by telling stories and discussing what happened to themselves and others. Their feelings and opinions are implied rather than directly stated. Asians and Pacific Islanders are also less likely to provide direct verbal expression of their feelings by using "I" statements than are members of other groups. Providers should expect to reveal personal information about themselves if they want clients to disclose their own problems. Asians and Pacific Islanders may prefer to keep strong feelings under control so that they will not become disruptive. Caring is often demonstrated by physical support such as by giving money, cooking favorite foods, or giving advice rather than by verbal expression or physical affection.

A problem-solving approach rather than an intrapsychic one is more effective with Asian and Pacific Islander clients. Problem-solving enables a counselor to provide information, educational materials, and referrals without probing for more personal information and pushing a client to express feelings. For Asian and Pacific Islander clients with somatic complaints, suggest relaxation and breathing techniques, meditation, qigong, yoga, massage, acupuncture, tai chi, or biofeedback. It is generally not helpful to discuss underlying feelings because it is not only culturally unacceptable, but many Asian and Pacific Islander clients do not see the emotional-physical connection. In problemsolving, providers should actively give suggestions and if necessary, be directive rather than let Asian and Pacific Islander clients struggle to figure out what options are available to them.

Asking personal questions about substance abuse and sexual risk factors, especially early in the helping relationship, could be viewed as intrusive and disrespectful. Asian and Pacific Islander clients may not answer truthfully, if at all, and may not return. It is best to start with the least intrusive or nonthreatening questions during the intake and explain why the information is needed. If clients seem uncomfortable with certain questions, ask them at a later date.

Making an effort to connect with clients outside actual treatment appointments when they come to the agency for other activities or via follow-up calls is also helpful. Asian and Pacific Islander clients may not initiate contact when they have a problem because of cultural tendencies to minimize problems to reduce stigma and because they do not want to be intrusive and bothersome. In all interactions, it is helpful to minimize the stigma Asian and Pacific Islander clients attach to their HIV/AIDS status and substance abuse disorders. Counselors should not refer to themselves as HIV/AIDS, mental health, or alcohol and drug counselors unless they know the client is comfortable with this. These titles imply the client has an unacceptable condition and can increase stigma. Clients may be more receptive to treatment for HIV/AIDS and substance abuse issues if they are combined with other, less stigmatized health issues.

Group interventions can be effective if everyone speaks the same language well enough and if the group is centered around an unstigmatized activity, social gathering, or education session. Providing refreshments also facilitates bonding. Asian and Pacific Islander participants will look to a facilitator to provide direction and guidance. Rather than be assertive in talking, Asian and Pacific Islander clients will more likely wait for a space to open up for them to speak and consequently will rarely have the opportunity to do so when in a group with predominately non-Asians and Pacific Islanders. Should this happen, the group leader needs to facilitate opportunities for Asian and Pacific Islander clients to participate.

**Native Americans**

The CDC found that Native Americans have high rates of STDs and substance abuse, which in turn raise their risk of HIV/AIDS. They also lack access to diagnosis and treatment. Gay men and substance abusers run the highest risk of HIV/AIDS among Native Americans and Alaskan Natives, just as they do among white Americans.

The combination of high rates of cofactors for HIV/AIDS, limited access to health care, lack of information and education about HIV/AIDS issues, substantial numbers of Native Americans who are already infected with HIV, and the flow of Native Americans between urban centers and reservations all lead to an HIV/AIDS crisis for Native American communities.

Limited treatment services for HIV-infected substance abusers exist on and outside tribal lands. In 1991, the American Indian Community House, which ministers to the health, social service, and cultural needs of Native Americans in the New York City area, created the HIV/AIDS Project, the first Native American program east of the Mississippi River to provide culturally sensitive legal services, HIV/AIDS treatment information, emergency assistance, and prevention education. The Friendship House Association of American Indians in San Francisco provides another example of treatment (drop-in centers). This program provides comprehensive treatment to Native Americans living with HIV/AIDS as well as treatment for substance dependency. Services target the gay, lesbian, and bisexual communities. HIV/AIDS is presently underreported for Native Americans and is
based on the high incidence of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) in general, and thus substance abuse treatment centers will be faced with more and more HIV-infected Native Americans.

**Clients involved with the criminal justice system**

Many persons with substance abuse disorders receive treatment only after arrest and are offered treatment as a diversionary service or receive treatment while they are in jail or prison. The racial and class patterns characterizing arrest, adjudication, and sentencing in the United States skew more white Americans (regardless of social class or income) to treatment trajectories and more persons of color to jail or prison trajectories. Access to treatment within the criminal justice system is thus highly associated with ethnicity and social class. Only a handful of correctional facilities in the United States have instituted some type of therapeutic community treatment program in prison with a parallel transitional program for new parolees. Unfortunately, many HIV-infected individuals who are in treatment for HIV find it impossible to remain on their medication schedules after being arrested because their medications are often confiscated for days at a time.

Risky behaviors that lead to HIV infection are not eliminated when a person is imprisoned but may actually increase in frequency and availability. This occurs for several reasons. First, drug offenses count for the single largest number of Federal and State crimes for which people are arrested and incarcerated

Injection drug users face particular risk in prison settings as clean syringes are all but impossible to secure. Although syringes are not officially available, they can be acquired through illicit prison markets at exorbitant prices ($34 in one Canadian facility) or through risky exchange of syringes for unprotected sex. Syringes are typically not new or sterile. As a result, injection drug users have as their only recourse used or shared syringes, which increases their chances of HIV infection. Tattooing is also common practice among prisoners and is another source of HIV infection. To date, there have been at least two documented cases of HIV/AIDS related to tattooing with unsterile needles in a correctional facility.

Only six prison systems in the United States distribute condoms: Mississippi, New York City, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Vermont, and the District of Columbia. Distribution strategies range from receipt of a single condom per medical visit to receipt of multiple condoms during HIV/AIDS education workshops. Furthermore, condom distribution programs send mixed messages because sexual activity in some facilities is illegal and a punishable offense. In other facilities, correctional medical and social service staff may advocate condom availability while administration and security officers oppose it.

Sixteen prison systems mandate HIV testing, and although 77 percent make testing available to inmates on request, few inmates request it for several reasons. First, confidentiality of results is not guaranteed. Second, mandatory testing may result in the segregation of those who test positive from those who test negative or who do not test. Third, prisoners do not wish to acknowledge activities that could subject them to further sanctions. Fourth, confidentiality on discharge is eliminated because the Federal Bureau of Prisons requires HIV testing for all inmates on their release. HIV-positive inmates are asked to directly notify sex partners and significant others of the results. However, the Bureau of Prisons handles only a small percentage of inmates, and its policy is not the norm.

Although there are large numbers of substance abusers within correctional facilities, less than 15 percent participate in treatment programs. This is partly because of lack of program availability and the common type of program offered (i.e., 12-Step, abstinence- based.) A 1991 study reported that only 1 percent of inmates with moderate to severe substance abuse disorders received appropriate treatment. Many of these treatment programs advocate sexual abstinence during recovery. Often, these programs offer no or little information about safer sex practices or advocacy around changing sexual behaviors. When persons with substance abuse disorders in treatment relapse, as is often the

case, they may also engage in risky sexual behaviors. They are most likely to engage in risky sexual behaviors with sexual partners from similar treatment networks. These partners may include people who have used syringes, traded sex for money or drugs, or been victims of trauma. All of these populations are likely to have higher rates of HIV infection, making transmission likely.

**Adolescents**

Adolescents are another group that is experiencing an increase in incidence and prevalence of HIV. Findings from the Monitoring the Future surveys have revealed a dramatic and sustained increase in consumption of licit and illicit drugs among adolescents--this after nearly two decades of sustained decrease in drug consumption. Studies also note that teens are having sex earlier than ever before, often with multiple partners and inconsistent use of condoms, putting them at greater risk for HIV/AIDS. Beyond this, young people find themselves marginalized in U.S. society; this is especially true for young gay and bisexual youth, sexually active young women, and young people of color.

According to the CDC, AIDS is the fifth leading cause of death for Americans between the ages of 25 and 44 *(Source: CDC)*. At greatest risk are young, disadvantaged females, particularly African American females, who are being infected with HIV at younger ages and higher rates than their male counterparts *(Source: CDC)*. Because of the long and variable time between HIV infection and AIDS, surveillance of HIV infection provides a clearer picture of the pandemic in young people than surveillance of AIDS cases. From the States for which HIV is a reportable condition, young people ages 13 to 24 accounted for a much greater proportion of HIV than AIDS cases (17 percent versus 4 percent). Of these HIV infections, 38 percent were reported among young females, and 56 percent were among African Americans *(Source: CDC)*.

Adolescents may benefit from treatment that is developmentally appropriate and peer oriented. Addressing educational needs may be particularly important as well as involving family members in the planning of treatment and therapy. Substance abuse among adolescents is frequently associated with depression, eating disorders, and sexual abuse history. Histories of familial sexual and substance abuse are predictive of serious adolescent substance involvement and subsequent treatment needs.

**Older adults**

The last few years have witnessed greater increases in the number of HIV/

AIDS cases among middle-aged and older individuals than in those under 40 years of age. Although many of these AIDS cases are the result of HIV infection at a younger age, many people become infected after age 50. Rates of HIV infection among older adults are difficult to ascertain because very few people over 50 years of age routinely test for HIV. Because older adults are diagnosed with HIV/AIDS at advanced stages, older adults are less amenable to treatment, become sicker, and die faster than their under-50 counterparts. In addition, retroviral treatments and opportunistic infection prophylaxis may interact with medications the older person is taking to treat other preexisting chronic illnesses and conditions. Also, the vast majority of medication studies are done on much younger subjects. There is little research on the metabolism of anti-HIV drugs in older adults.

There is, as well, little research on the substance-abusing behavior of older adults, and very few substance abuse treatment programs address the needs of older adult substance abusers. Unfortunately, many medical professionals do not consider older patients to be at risk for either substance abuse (with the exception of alcohol use) or HIV infection. A study in Texas found that most doctors never asked patients older than 50 years questions about substance abuse or HIV/AIDS or discussed risk factor reduction. Doctors were much more likely to rarely or never ask patients over 50 about HIV/AIDS risk factors (40 percent) than to rarely or never ask patients under 30 (7 percent). Older persons may not be comfortable disclosing their sexual behaviors or substance abuse to others, since their generation or culture may not encourage such disclosures. This can make finding treatment programs and support programs especially difficult.

Certainly, there is a need to educate service providers about the sex- and substance- related behaviors of older persons. At the very least, service providers should conduct thorough sex and substance abuse risk assessments with their patients over 50, and challenge all assumptions that older people do not engage in these activities or will not discuss them.

**Sex industry workers**

Among sex workers, street prostitutes are the most vulnerable to HIV infection, given the coexisting features of poverty, homelessness, history of childhood sexual abuse, and alcohol and drug dependence. Comparatively, male and female sex workers who work in massage parlors, escort services, their own apartments, or brothels rather than on the street are far less likely to be at risk for infection, less likely to depend on substances, and more likely to control sexual transactions and insist on condom use.

Among female sex workers, IDU continues to be the major cause of HIV infection. Female injection drug users who trade sex for money or drugs are more likely to share syringes than injection drug users who do not exchange sex for money or drugs. Drug use also increases the likelihood of sex work and risky sex. Studies of crack cocaine abusers in three urban neighborhoods found that 68 percent of the women who were regular crack smokers exchanged sex for drugs or money. Of those, 30 percent had not used a condom in 30 days. Recent research has also demonstrated an association between HIV infection, heavy crack use, and unprotected fellatio. This is likely due to the combination of poor dental hygiene, damage to the mouth from hot crack stems or pipes, high frequency of fellatio, and inconsistent or marginal condom use. Street-based sex workers may agree to unprotected sex if clients offer more money, if workers themselves are desperate for money to buy drugs, or if activity has been slow.

HIV treatment challenges may occur given the sex workers' more immediate needs for drugs, food, and housing. These needs overshadow future concerns about living with HIV/AIDS. Beyond this, sex workers with HIV/AIDS may continue to work routinely for the purpose of exchanging sex for drugs or money. Sex workers thus run risks of spreading HIV/AIDS as well as reinfection of HIV and the acquisition and transmission of other diseases such as hepatitis and STDs.

There are many examples of effective treatment programs for sex workers with substance abuse disorders, including the California Prostitutes Education Project (CAL-PEP); Sisters Helping Each Other in Chicago, Illinois; Second Chance in Toledo, Ohio; the Threshold Project in Seattle, Washington; Alternatives for Girls in Detroit, Michigan; and the On the Streets Mobile Unit-Options Program in New York City. Most of these programs use former sex workers as outreach staff, use a risk-reduction model of care, and establish linkages with organizations in the treatment continuum.

**Individual therapy strategies**

- ➢ Clients may raise several issues in therapy that then become clinical issues. Following are common issues that clients raise during the inpatient treatment process along with suggested responses from the counselor during individual therapy:
- ➢ Feeling the problem (of HIV infection or living with AIDS) has not "hit them" yet. The counselor can provide the client with education about risky behaviors, living with AIDS, and so on. Presenting the

client with future scenarios and life trajectories if behaviors remain unchanged may be helpful. Sharing success stories about positive changes in peers may also be a helpful strategy.

- Expressing the need to make their own decisions and choices regarding care, treatment, and their lives. Counselors should underscore the fact that clients must decide what is in their best interests, taking care to define "their best interests" within the client's definition of self as either an individual, a provider, a parent or caregiver, a member of a family or community, or a combination thereof. Counselors should balance this by letting clients know that no one has all the answers to their problems, and reassure clients that their feelings are valid, not unusual, and realistic. Changing one's life is hard work.
- Knowing how to change behavior, yet not making these changes.
- The counselor should support client efforts to reduce risk behaviors but educate the client as to why risk remains. Exploring what the client is willing to consider changing provides an outline of possible actions. Working together with the client on strategies to resolve barriers to change in small steps may be a useful tactic as well.
- Giving up hope for change or feeling overwhelmed by problems.

Service providers should know that this initial phase of client change is the longest and most difficult for many clients. It is not uncommon for clients to spend a lot of time in inpatient treatment weighing the pros and cons of their behavior. Clients may have invested much energy in intentionally not thinking about the problem. Thinking about the problem may release painful issues (real or perceived) for clients that they have not allowed themselves to reflect on. Service providers should be acutely aware of the power of denial for many substance-abusing clients living with HIV/AIDS.

It is often difficult for the client to anticipate potential problems, interactions, and pitfalls, particularly those that will be faced in the external community. The counselor must help the client examine the barriers that may arise and develop strong responsive coping skills and activities. A weak plan of action can lead to quick lapses and relapses. This level of client activity (preparing for action) is characterized by switches in both personal external cues for behaviors and the ways in which clients perceive and cope with internal situations. This is a time for counselors to develop specific plans and identify individuals in a person's social environment who may provide support or information to the client upon discharge.

# 9. Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Behavioral Health

SAMHSA Releases New Data on Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Behavioral Health

In June 2023, The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) released a new data report Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Behavioral Health: Results from the 2021 and 2022 National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (PDF | 2.1 MB), indicating that lesbian, gay, and bisexual adults are more likely than straight adults to use substances, experience mental health conditions including major depressive episodes, and experience serious thoughts of suicide.

“We know that statistically, lesbian, gay and bisexual Americans face increased risks for mental health and substance use issues, which is often related to stress caused by stigma, discrimination and harassment,” said HHS Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use Miriam E. Delphin-Rittmon, Ph.D., and the leader of SAMHSA. “SAMHSA is committed to addressing this issue by increasing services and supports for LGBTQI+ individuals.”

SAMHSA’s approach to addressing the behavioral health needs of LGBTQI+ people with, affected by, or at risk for mental health and substance use conditions, builds on the President’s Executive Order on Advancing Equality for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex Individuals (EO 14075).

Since 2020, SAMHSA has funded a Center of Excellence for LGBTQ+ Behavioral Health Equity, which is designed to support the implementation of change strategies within mental health and substance use disorder treatment systems to address disparities impacting the LGBTQ+ community.

In fall 2022, the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline launched a pilot service for LGBTQI+ youth offering 24/7 call, text and chat access to specially trained crisis counselors.

The report covers adults aged 18 or older. Age adjusted findings include:

- Lesbian and bisexual females were more likely than straight females to have engaged in binge drinking in the past month, and about twice as likely to have engaged in heavy drinking in the past month.
- Gay and bisexual males and females were two to three times more likely than their straight counterparts to have used illicit drugs other than marijuana in the past year.
- About one third of bisexual females, bisexual males, and gay males had a substance use disorder (SUD) in the past year. About one fourth of lesbian females had an SUD in the past year.
- Bisexual females were three times more likely than straight females to have had an opioid use disorder in the past year.
- The prevalence of serious mental illness (SMI) in the past year was more than three times higher among bisexual males than among straight males and more than twice as high among gay males than among straight males.
- More than one in four bisexual females and more than one in seven lesbian females had a major depressive episode (MDE) in the past year. Sexual minority males were two to three times more likely than straight males to have had an MDE in the past year.
- Bisexual females were six times more likely to have attempted suicide in the past year than straight females.

The 2023 survey asks all respondents their sex at assigned at birth and their gender identity, including whether they identify as male, female, transgender, or another identity.

If you or someone you know is struggling or in crisis, help is available. Call or text 988 or chat 988lifeline.org. To learn how to get support for mental health, drug, and alcohol issues, visit FindSupport.gov.

The following is the full report released from SAMHSA in June, 2023:

**Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Behavioral Health:** Results from the 2021 and 2022 National Surveys on Drug Use and Health


### Acknowledgments

This report was prepared for the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), under Contract No. HHSS283201700002C with SAMHSA, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Marlon Daniel served as the government project officer and as the contracting officer representative. SAMHSA review was led by Douglas Richesson, Iva Magas, Samantha Brown, and Jennifer Hoenig. Tenecia Smith was an additional reviewer.



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### Recommended Citation

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2023). *Lesbian, gay, and bisexual behavioral health: Results from the 2021 and 2022 National Surveys on Drug Use and Health* (SAMHSA Publication No. PEP23-07-01-001). Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. https://www.samhsa.gov/data/report/LGB-Behavioral-Health-Report-2021-2022

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### Nondiscrimination Notice

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Substance use and mental health issues have significant impacts on people, families, communities, and societies. A higher prevalence of substance use and mental health issues has been well documented among people who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (also referred to as sexual minorities) than among those who identify as heterosexual or straight.[1,2,3] Sexual minorities experience unique stressors that can contribute to adverse substance use and mental health outcomes.[4,5,6] People who identify as bisexual may experience additional problems with substance use and mental health due to sexual orientation-based discrimination, bisexual invisibility and erasure, and a lack of bisexual-affirmative support.[7] Challenges faced by members of sexual minorities can be further compounded by the experience of being female or a person of color.[8,9,10]

### Survey Background

The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) is an annual survey sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. NSDUH covers residents of households and people in noninstitutional group settings. The survey excludes people with no fixed address, military personnel on active duty, and residents of institutional group settings, such as jails, nursing homes, mental health institutions, and long-term care hospitals. Further information about the NSDUH design and methods can be found in the *2021 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH): Methodological Summary and Definitions*.[11] Appendix A in the 2021 Methodological Summary and Definitions report also defines relevant measures and terms.

### Presentation of Estimates and Statistical Testing

This report focuses on substance use and mental health indicators among adults aged 18 or older in the United States based on pooled NSDUH data from 2021 and 2022. Estimates are presented by adults' sexual identity (i.e., gay/lesbian, bisexual, straight) and gender. All estimates (e.g., percentages and numbers) presented in the report are derived from survey data that are subject to sampling errors and have met the criteria for statistical precision.[12]

In the 2021 and 2022 National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUHs), only a binary measure of male or female was collected. The 2021 and 2022 NSDUHs also collected information on sexual identity only from adults. Therefore, this report does not present findings for transgender people, non-binary people, or those people with any other identity besides binary male or female, and it does not present findings on sexual identity for adolescents younger than 18. Beginning with the 2023 NSDUH, the survey asks respondents their sex at birth and their gender identity, including whether they

identify as male, female, transgender, or another identity. The 2023 NSDUH also asks all respondents about their sexual identity, regardless of age. In addition to choices for heterosexual/straight, gay or lesbian, and bisexual, NSDUH respondents in 2023 can report that they use a different term (and specify the other term), they are not sure about their sexual identity, or they do not know what the sexual identity question is asking.

Because of differences in the age distributions for sexual identity groups in the 2021 and 2022 NSDUH samples, estimates were age adjusted to the adult age distribution of the 2000 U.S. standard population in accordance with federal agency best practices.[13] Figures in this report present the age-adjusted estimates. Tables in Appendix A present both unadjusted and age-adjusted estimates; the unadjusted estimates indicate the actual prevalence estimates among sexual identity groups before differences in age distributions were taken into account.

Comparisons of age-adjusted estimates across groups were performed according to statistical testing procedures described in the 2021 Methodological Summary and Definitions report.[14] Differences in age-adjusted estimates were considered statistically significant at the .05 level of significance. Statistically significant differences resulting from these testing procedures are described using terms such as “higher,” “lower,” “more likely,” or “less likely.” Statements use terms such as “similar” or “the same” when a difference was not statistically significant. When estimates are presented without reference to differences across groups, statistical significance is not implied.

## DEFINITIONS

### SUBSTANCE USE

Binge drinking means consumption of four or more drinks on the same occasion for females and five or more drinks on the same occasion for males on at least 1 day in the past 30 days. Heavy drinking means binge drinking on 5 or more days in the past 30 days.

Illicit drug use includes the use of marijuana, cocaine, heroin, hallucinogens, inhalants, and methamphetamine, as well as the misuse of prescription drugs (pain relievers, tranquilizers, stimulants, or sedatives). Misuse of prescription drugs means use in any way not directed by a doctor, such as use without a prescription of one’s own, or use in greater amounts, more often, or longer than told to take a drug.

## SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS

**Substance use disorders (SUDs)** are characterized by impairment caused by the recurrent use of alcohol or other drugs (or both), including health problems, disability, and failure to meet major responsibilities at work, school, or home. Respondents who used alcohol or drugs in the past 12 months were classified as having SUDs in that period if they met criteria specified in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5th edition.15

## MENTAL HEALTH

Any mental illness (AMI) refers to the presence of a mental, behavioral, or emotional disorder in the past year of sufficient duration to meet criteria from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 4th edition, excluding developmental disorders and substance use disorders.16 Serious mental illness (SMI) refers to the presence of a mental, behavioral, or emotional disorder that substantially interfered with or limited one or more major life activities. AMI and SMI were estimated based on a statistical prediction model. For more details on the estimation of AMI and SMI, see the *2021 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH): Methodological Summary and Definitions* report.11

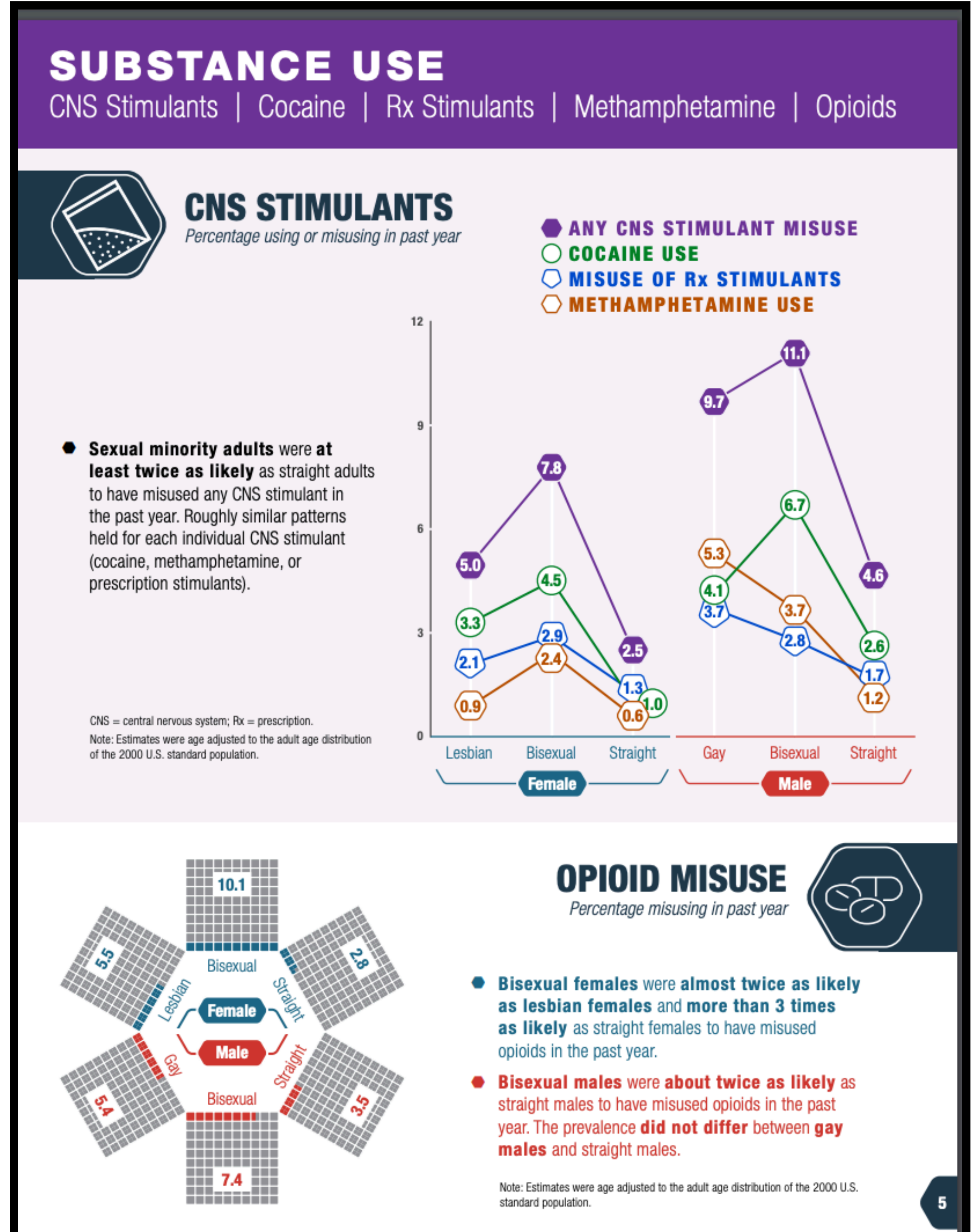
National Survey on Drug Use and Health respondents were classified as having a major depressive episode (MDE) in the past 12 months if (1) they had at least one period of 2 weeks or longer in the past year when for most of the day nearly every day they felt depressed or lost interest or pleasure in daily activities; and (2) they also had problems with sleeping, eating, energy, concentration, self-worth, or having recurrent thoughts of death or recurrent suicidal ideation. The MDE questions are based on diagnostic criteria from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5th edition.15

✦ Marijuana was by far the most commonly used illicit drug in the past year regardless of sexual identity or gender.

✦ Sexual minority females were 2 to 3 times more likely than straight females to have used marijuana in the past year. The prevalence was 40% to 45% for sexual minority females.

✦ Marijuana use in the past year among sexual minority males was nearly twice as high compared with marijuana use among straight males. The prevalence was roughly 40% for sexual minority males.

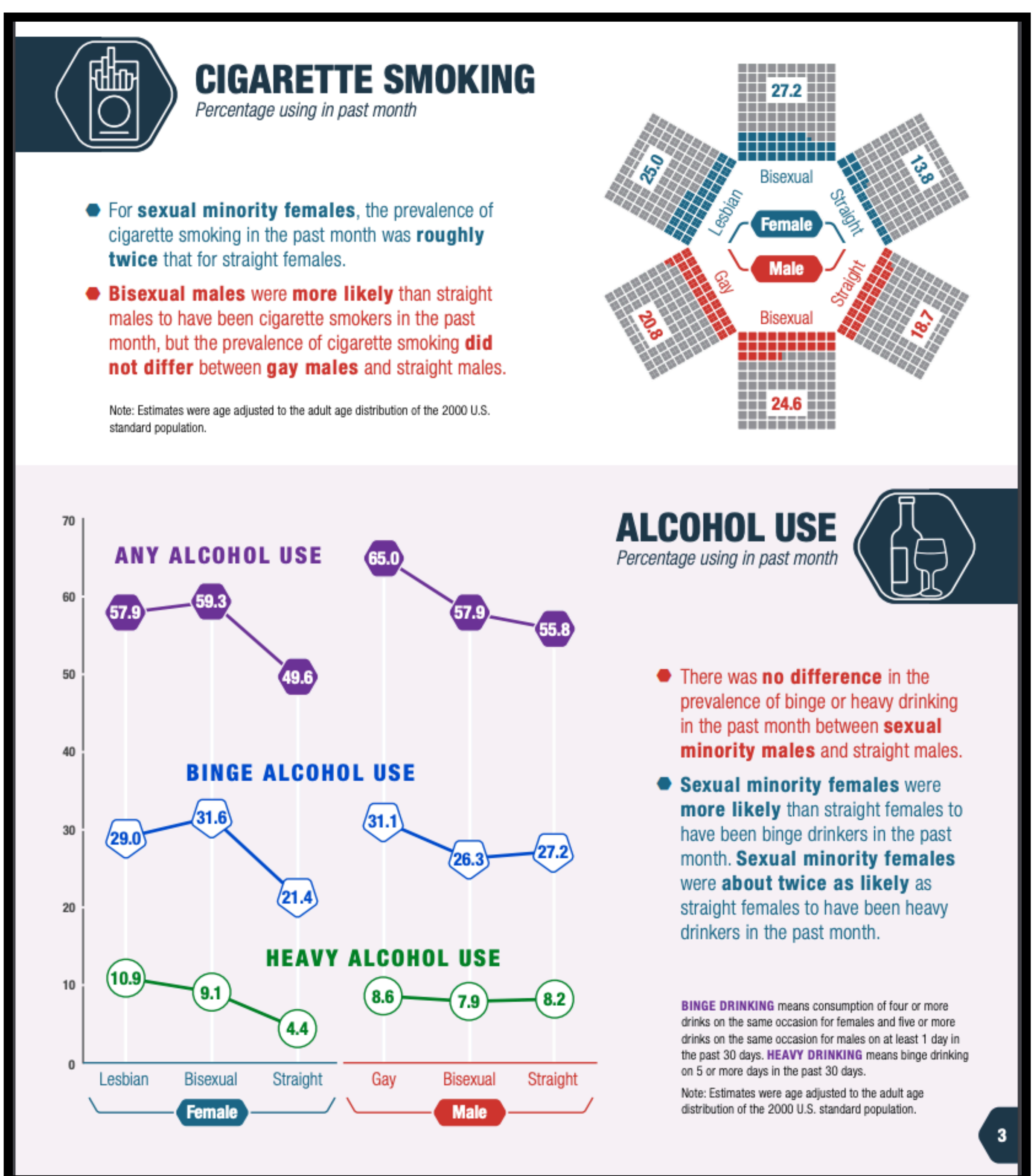
✦ Sexual minority males were 2 to 3 times more likely than straight males to have used illicit drugs other than marijuana in the past year.



✦ Sexual minority females were 2 to 3 times more likely than straight females to have used illicit drugs other than marijuana in the past year.

ILLICIT DRUG USE includes the use of marijuana, cocaine, heroin, hallucinogens, inhalants, and methamphetamine, as well as the misuse of prescription drugs (pain relievers, tranquilizers, stimulants, or sedatives).

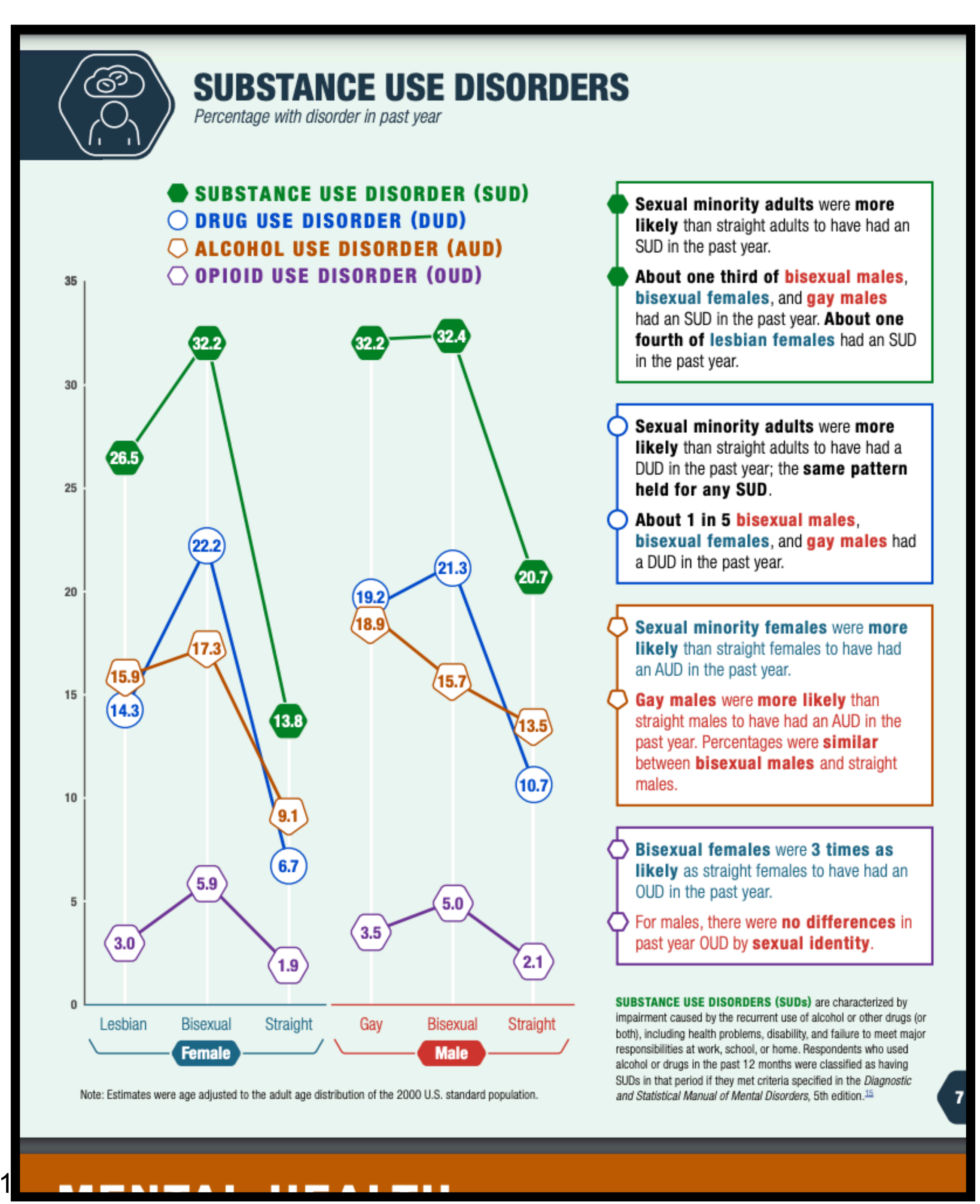
MISUSE OF PRESCRIPTION DRUGS means use in any way not directed by a doctor, such as use without a prescription of one's own, or use in greater amounts, more often, or longer than told to take a drug.



Note: Estimates were age adjusted to the adult age distribution of the 2000 U.S. standard population.

➢ Bisexual females were almost twice as likely as lesbian females and more than 3 times as likely as straight females to have misused opioids in the past year.

➢ Bisexual males were about twice as likely as straight males to have misused opioids in the past year. The prevalence did not differ between gay males and straight males.

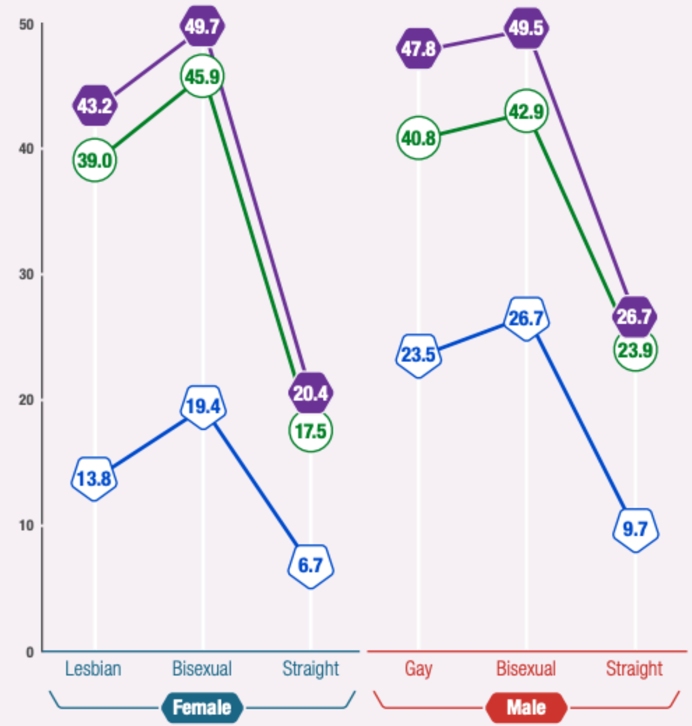


# SUBSTANCE USE

Any Illicit Drugs | Marijuana | Illicit Drugs Other Than Marijuana

## ILLICIT DRUG USE

*Percentage using in past year*




- Marijuana was by far the most commonly used illicit drug in the past year regardless of **sexual identity** or gender.
- **Sexual minority females** were **2 to 3 times more likely** than straight females to have used marijuana in the past year. The prevalence was **40% to 45%** for **sexual minority females**.
- Marijuana use in the past year among **sexual minority males** was **nearly twice as high** compared with marijuana use among straight males. The prevalence was roughly **40%** for **sexual minority males**.
- **Sexual minority males** were **2 to 3 times more likely** than straight males to have used illicit drugs other than marijuana in the past year.
- **Sexual minority females** were **2 to 3 times more likely** than straight females to have used illicit drugs other than marijuana in the past year.

**ILLICIT DRUG USE** includes the use of marijuana, cocaine, heroin, hallucinogens, inhalants, and methamphetamine, as well as the misuse of prescription drugs (pain relievers, tranquilizers, stimulants, or sedatives). **MISUSE OF PRESCRIPTION DRUGS** means use in any way not directed by a doctor, such as use without a prescription of one's own, or use in greater amounts, more often, or longer than told to take a drug.

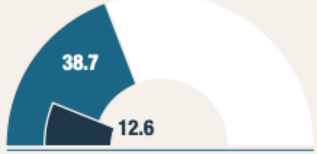
Note: Estimates were age adjusted to the adult age distribution of the 2000 U.S. standard population.

# MENTAL HEALTH

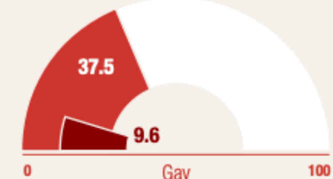
Any Mental Illness | Serious Mental Illness

## MENTAL ILLNESS

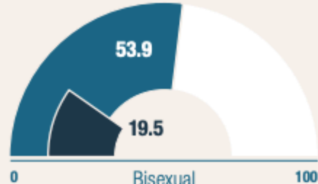
*Percentage in past year*



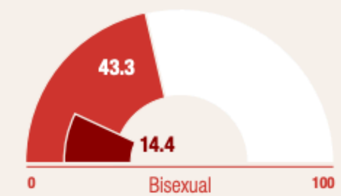

0 Lesbian 100



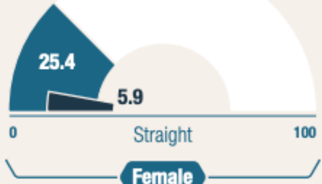

0 Gay 100



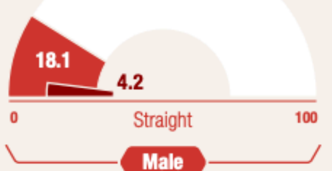

0 Bisexual 100




0 Bisexual 100




0 Straight 100




0 Straight 100

Female

Male

- **Sexual minority females** were **more likely** than straight females to have had AMI in the past year. **Bisexual females** also were **more likely** than **lesbian females** to have had AMI; **more than half** of **bisexual females** had AMI.
- **Sexual minority males** were **at least twice as likely** as straight males to have had AMI in the past year.

- **Sexual minority females** were **more likely** than straight females to have had SMI in the past year, a pattern similar to the findings for past year AMI. **Bisexual females** also were **more likely** than **lesbian females** to have had SMI; **about 1 in 5 bisexual females** had SMI.
- The prevalence of SMI in the past year was **more than 3 times higher** among **bisexual males** than among straight males and **more than twice as high** among **gay males** than among straight males. **Bisexual males** also were **more likely** than **gay males** to have had SMI.

**ANY MENTAL ILLNESS (AMI)** refers to the presence of a mental, behavioral, or emotional disorder in the past year of sufficient duration to meet criteria from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 4th edition,[16] excluding developmental disorders and substance use disorders.

**SERIOUS MENTAL ILLNESS (SMI)** refers to the presence of a mental, behavioral, or emotional disorder that substantially interfered with or limited one or more major life activities. Estimates of SMI are a subset of estimates of AMI because SMI is limited to people with AMI that resulted in serious functional impairment.

AMI and SMI were estimated based on a statistical prediction model. For more details on the estimation of AMI and SMI, see the *2021 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH): Methodological Summary and Definitions* report.[11]

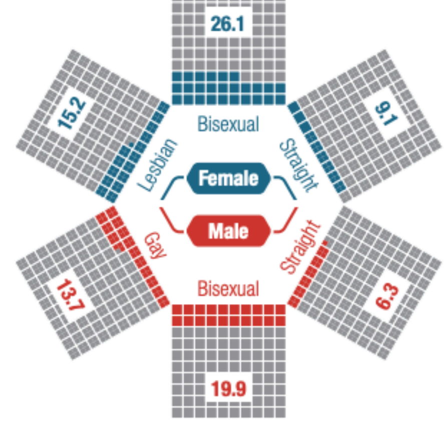
Note: Estimates were age adjusted to the adult age distribution of the 2000 U.S. standard population.

# MAJOR DEPRESSIVE EPISODE

*Percentage in past year*

- Although nearly 1 in 10 straight females had a major depressive episode (MDE) in the past year, **sexual minority females** were **even more likely** to have had an MDE. **More than 1 in 4 bisexual females** and **more than 1 in 7 lesbian females** had an MDE. **Bisexual females** also were **more likely** than **lesbian females** to have had an MDE.
- **Sexual minority males** were **2 to 3 times more likely** than straight males to have had an MDE in the past year. **Bisexual males** also were **more likely** than **gay males** to have had an MDE; **nearly 1 in 5 bisexual males** had an MDE.

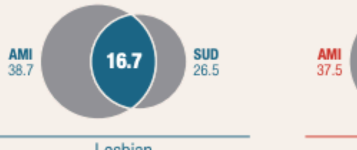
NSDUH respondents were classified as having a **MAJOR DEPRESSIVE EPISODE (MDE)** in the past 12 months if (1) they had at least one period of 2 weeks or longer in the past year when for most of the day nearly every day they felt depressed or lost interest or pleasure in daily activities; and (2) they also had problems with sleeping, eating, energy, concentration, self-worth, or having recurrent thoughts of death or recurrent suicidal ideation. The MDE questions are based on diagnostic criteria from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5th edition.[15]

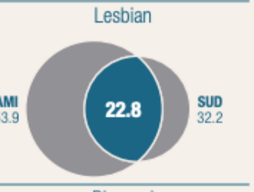


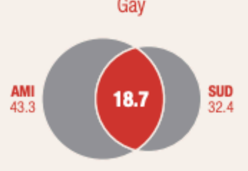

Note: Estimates were age adjusted to the adult age distribution of the 2000 U.S. standard population.

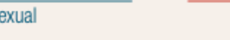
# CO-OCCURRING AMI AND SUD

*Percentage in past year*





Male

- **Sexual minority females** were **about 2 to 3 times more likely** than straight females to have had both AMI and an SUD in the past year. **Bisexual females** also were **more likely** than **lesbian females** to have had both AMI and an SUD; **more than 1 in 5 bisexual females** had an SUD and AMI.
- **Sexual minority males** were **more than twice as likely** as straight males to have had both AMI and an SUD in the past year. However, the prevalence was **similar for bisexual males or gay males**.

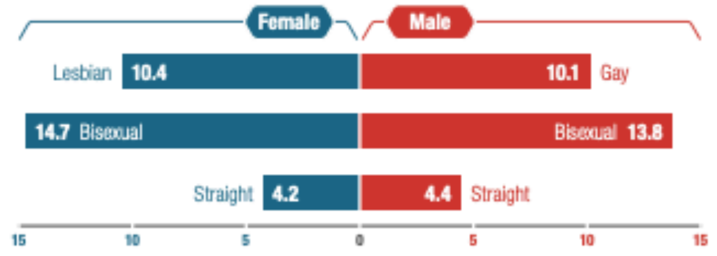
Note: Estimates were age adjusted to the adult age distribution of the 2000 U.S. standard population.

# SUICIDAL THOUGHTS & BEHAVIORS

Had Serious Thoughts of Suicide | Made a Suicide Plan | Attempted Suicide

## HAD SERIOUS THOUGHTS OF SUICIDE

*Percentage in past year*

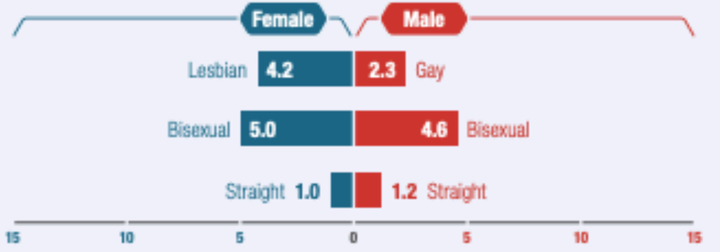



Note: Estimates were age adjusted to the adult age distribution of the 2000 U.S. standard population.

- **Sexual minority females** were **more likely** than straight females to have had serious thoughts of suicide in the past year. **Bisexual females** also were **more likely** than **lesbian females** to have had serious thoughts of suicide; **more than 1 in 7 bisexual females** had serious thoughts of suicide.
- **Bisexual males** and **gay males** were **more likely** than straight males to have had serious thoughts of suicide in the past year (**about 3 times as likely** for **bisexual males** and **more than twice as likely** for **gay males**). However, the prevalence of serious thoughts of suicide in the past year **did not differ for bisexual males or gay males**.

## MADE A SUICIDE PLAN

*Percentage in past year*




- The prevalence of making a suicide plan in the past year was **5 times higher** among **bisexual females** than among straight females. The prevalence among **lesbian females** was **more than 4 times higher** than among straight females.
- The prevalence of making a suicide plan in the past year was **highest** among **bisexual males**, followed by **gay males**, then by straight males.

Note: Estimates were age adjusted to the adult age distribution of the 2000 U.S. standard population.

## ATTEMPTED SUICIDE

*Percentage in past year*

Female | Male

Lesbian 1.3 | 1.7 Gay

Bisexual 2.4 | 2.3 Bisexual

Straight 0.4 | 0.5 Straight

15 10 5 0 5 10 15

- **Bisexual females** were the **most likely** to have attempted suicide in the past year, followed by **lesbian females**, then by straight females. The prevalence among **bisexual females** was **6 times higher** than among straight females.
- The prevalence of past year suicide attempts was **higher among bisexual males** than among straight males.

Note: Estimates were age adjusted to the adult age distribution of the 2000 U.S. standard population.

Results from the 2021 and 2022 NSDUHs indicate that lesbian, gay, and bisexual adults are more likely than straight adults to use substances, experience mental health issues including major depressive episodes, and experience serious thoughts of suicide. The findings in this report particularly underscore how these issues affect bisexual adults. However, these findings do not explain the reasons for these differences, such as the influence of stressors that are unique to people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex (LGBTQI+). SAMHSA is committed to eliminating health inequities experienced by the LGBTQI+ community. As such, SAMHSA has several efforts focused on LGBTQI+ people, including encouraging states to consider LGBTQI+ needs in administering SAMHSA block grant resources, issuing funding announcements focused on sexual and gender minorities, and expanding data collection efforts to capture the experiences of LGBTQI+ people more accurately. For more information, see https://www.samhsa.gov/behavioral-health-equity/lgbtqi.

*End Notes*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# 10. LGBTQ+ Youth

Like all youth, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, and intersex youth and other sexual-and gender-diverse children and adolescents (LGBTQI+youth) deserve to grow up in supportive environments absent stigma and discrimination that allow them to thrive and achieve their human potential. When seeking behavioral health treatment (both mental health and substance use interventions), these children and adolescents, like their peers, and their families deserve the best evidence-based care from knowledgeable health providers without the risk of harm.

This section, *Moving Beyond Change Efforts: Evidence and Action to Support and Affirm LGBTQI+ Youth*, provides behavioral health providers, researchers, policymakers, and other audiences with current knowledge about LGBTQI+ youth, a comprehensive research overview, and important information on behavioral health concerns within this community. More specifically, the report provides details on helpful and harmful interventions for these populations in clinical, community, family, and school settings. In particular, the report documents that attempts to change an individual's sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI; pronounced "SO-gee" change efforts) are harmful and should not be provided. Additionally, this report discusses evidence-informed policy options that could improve the overall health and well-being of LGBTQI+ youth.

As the abbreviation LGBTQI+ suggests, this population is not homogenous. It includes individuals with many distinct sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions, and variations in sex characteristics. Sexual and gender minorities are also diverse with respect to other identities, including age, race, ethnicity, language, national origin, religion, spirituality, ability, and socioeconomic status.

Critically, LGBTQI+ youth experience significant physical and behavioral health inequities. Several factors contribute to these inequities and result in minority stress, which is harmful to behavioral health, including:

- ➢ Stigma
- ➢ Negative social attitudes
- ➢ Systemic barriers in health care for LGBTQI+ people
- ➢ Rejection and lack of support from families, caregivers, and communities
- ➢ Bullying and harassment, and lack of recognition and support in schools

Lack of appropriately trained behavioral health providers and exposure to harmful efforts that attempt to change sexual orientation and/or gender identity compound these challenges. Additionally, some transgender and gender-diverse youth require behavioral health support for their experience of gender dysphoria—that is, psychological distress arising from the incongruence between one's body and gender identity.

The conclusions in this section are based on research and professional consensus statements from experts in behavioral health, research, education, and policy. They strengthen and build on the conclusions of previous reports published by the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), *Ending Conversion Therapy: Supporting and Affirming LGBTQ Youth*, the precursor to this report.

An overarching and guiding conclusion of this new report is that SOGI change efforts in children and adolescents are harmful and should never be provided. Although the terms "conversion therapy" and "reparative therapy" are commonly used to describe efforts to repress or change someone's sexual orientation or gender identity, these efforts are not therapeutic, and using these terms reinforce disinformation that sexual-and gender-diverse people need repair or conversion. Efforts to change or suppress a person's sexual orientation or gender identity are grounded in the belief that being LGBTQI+ is abnormal. They are dangerous, discredited, and ineffective practices. Therefore, this report utilizes the term "SOGI Change Efforts" to describe so-called "conversion therapy." Recent studies have linked SOGI change efforts to significant harms, such as increased risk of suicidality and suicide attempts, as well as other negative outcomes including severe psychological distress and depression.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is committed to eliminating health inequities within communities, including the LGBTQI+ population. This report reflects that commitment by moving the focus away from SOGI change efforts and toward ensuring that behavioral health care for LGBTQI+ children and adolescents is safe and reflects the most current scientific evidence. This report also provides a roadmap for action centered on evidence-based care and helpful interventions for clinicians, all providers, educators, families, caregivers, and policymakers to improve the behavioral health of LGBTQI+ youth. Further, this report reflects priorities included in President Biden's June 15, 2022, Executive Order on Advancing Equality for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex Individuals,14 and the January 20, 2021, Executive Order on Preventing and Combating Discrimination on the Basis of Gender Identity or Sexual Orientation.

> The term "evidence-based care" refers to care, practices, or policies that are based on current research evidence, clinical expertise, and expert consensus.

Key Findings

This report and its recommendations are based on scientific research distilled into consensus statements by a Subject Matter Expert Consensus Panel. After a thorough review of the scientific research; professional health and scientific association statements, guidelines, and reports; and state and national public policies, and in consultation with professionals across a wide range of expertise, the Panel revised and built on key statements from previous reports.

Based on recent studies on thousands of individuals who have undergone SOGI change efforts, the Panel concluded that:

- No available research supports the claim that SOGI change efforts are beneficial to children, adolescents, or families.
- Available research indicates that SOGI change efforts are not effective in altering sexual orientation. Further, no available research indicates that change efforts are effective in altering gender identity.
- Available research indicates that SOGI change efforts can cause significant harm.

- SOGI change efforts are inappropriate, ineffective, and harmful practices that should not be provided to children and adolescents.

Research over the past 20 years has underscored the importance of family and community support to the health of LGBTQI+ youth. Family and community negativity toward sexual diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity, especially family rejection and school bullying and harassment, can cause harm to the behavioral health of this population. The Panel confirmed that:

- Rejection and lack of social and emotional support from families and caregivers, schools, and communities negatively affects the health of sexual and gender minority youth. Such behaviors can cause harm, particularly family rejection of the youth's sexual and/or gender diversity.

After a comprehensive review of the substantial research assessing the impacts of public policies, the Panel determined that:

- Policies that stigmatize, restrict, or exclude sexual or gender minority youth are harmful to children and adolescents.

**Understanding Sexual Orientation and Gender in Children and Adolescents**

Behavioral health providers, parents, schools, policymakers, and communities can best provide support to children, adolescents, and their families and caregivers and improve their behavioral health when they have access to the most current information about sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression in youth. The following overview presents the most current understanding, based on scientific evidence of youth sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.

While many youth have identified with having a diverse sexual orientation in the past, they have not always felt safe enough to share that diversity openly with others. There is no single developmental trajectory for sexual orientation. Certainty about sexual orientation— e.g., gay/lesbian, bisexual, or straight— increases with age, suggesting "an unfolding of sexual identity during adolescence." Some researchers have found that it has become more common in the 21st century compared to the 20th century for children to self-identify as having a diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity. What has changed from earlier periods is that youth appear to be publicly acknowledging their sexual orientation earlier as societal attitudes have increasingly become more accepting and open to diverse sexual orientations. Regardless of age, the increase in identifying as an individual of diverse sexual orientation may be

tied to the increasing awareness and acceptance of diverse sexual orientations; the expansion of laws, policies, and practices that protect and support individuals regardless of sexual orientation; and an increased willingness and ability among people with diverse sexual orientations to self-identify. Evidence suggests that acceptance of diverse sexual orientations does not make people more likely to identify with a diverse sexual orientation, but rather it increases the likelihood that people feel safer to identify this way publicly.

Gender development begins in early childhood and continues throughout childhood and adolescence. Gender diversity in youth can follow many possible paths. It may emerge as early as a child's preschool years, in late adolescence, or anytime in between. Some gender-diverse children are actively exploring their gender, and there is variation regarding their identity development trajectories and ultimate identity outcomes. Recent research has found that most gender-diverse children continue to identify as transgender or another gender identity that differs from their sex assigned at birth into adolescence and adulthood. For those who exhibited diverse gender-typed behavior in childhood, but did not identify as transgender or nonbinary, the majority reported a diverse sexual orientation in adolescence. For transgender children who have been supported in their gender identity and gender expression, the vast majority show consistency in their trans identity across time.

Some people are born with differences in sex characteristics, such as reproductive anatomy, chromosomes, or hormones that do not fit typical definitions of male and female. Intersex is an umbrella term used to describe people who can have different gender identities. Individuals with intersex traits may identify as male, female, nonbinary, or a different gender. Intersex individuals may consider themselves transgender if they do not identify with their sex assigned at birth. Like other LGBTQI+ youth, intersex youth experience pervasive stigma and discrimination. While research involving intersex individuals has been limited, the Federal Government has taken steps to reduce this disparity, such as issuing a Request for Information on Promising Practices for Advancing Health Equity for Intersex Individuals in February 2023.

Supportive families and caregivers, peers, and school and community environments are associated with improved psychosocial outcomes for all children and adolescents, and this is especially true for those children and adolescents with minority sexual orientations or gender identities that do not align with their sex assigned at birth. Extensive research indicates that even just one supportive adult, such as a family member, teacher, or mental health

provider, can have a positive impact on the mental health of youth of diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity; such support can reduce adverse mental health impacts including suicide. Additionally, family or caregiver, peer, school, and community support for youth of diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity promotes better mental health and fewer negative outcomes, and can lead to positive development and emotional resilience.

### Behavioral Health Concerns Among LGBTQI+ Youth

LGBTQI+ adolescents face the same developmental milestones that accompany adolescence for all youth. However, unlike adolescents with a cisgender and straight/heterosexual orientation, LGBTQI+ adolescents often must navigate an environment lacking awareness and acceptance of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Moreover, they might have to do so without family, community, or societal support, for example, through the child welfare system.

Limited research with sexual minority children indicates that mental health inequities may begin in childhood, which may be connected to greater prevalence of discrimination and victimization among sexual minority children. As a result of experiencing stigma and discrimination, some youth with diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity are at increased risk for:

- Psychological distress (e.g., depressive symptoms, anxiety, and behavioral disorders)
- Substance use
- Suicidal ideation and attempts
- Victimization, violence, and homelessness
- Involvement with child welfare services, often stemming from family rejection
- Involvement in juvenile justice programs

Psychosocial distress is often related to, if not caused by, negative social attitudes or rejection. High levels of parental and caregiver support of youths' sexual orientation and gender identity can mitigate increased risk of behavioral health concerns. For example, transgender and gender-diverse youth with affirming parents and caregivers have similar levels of mental health challenges as their cisgender peers. It is essential to note that youth with diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity are resilient, and that with sufficient support and access to resources, they can thrive.

Some children may experience gender dysphoria, meaning feelings of distress or incongruence between one's gender identity and sex assigned at birth. This

distress, rather than the youth's gender diversity, is recognized as a behavioral health concern. For some, the physical changes of adolescence may worsen feelings of gender dysphoria. For others, gender dysphoria or feelings of gender incongruence may begin post-puberty without any childhood history of gender dysphoria or gender diversity.

### Beneficial Therapeutic Approaches and Interventions With LGBTQI+ Youth

Given scientific findings that SOGI change efforts are harmful and medically inappropriate, the behavioral health approaches below are recommended instead. These approaches are consistent with the Panel's consensus statements and current research. Several professional and scientific association guidelines recommend these approaches as well. When providing services to children, adolescents, families, and caregivers, appropriate therapeutic approaches include:

- Providing accurate information on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and variations in sex characteristics
- Identifying sources of distress, including internalized stigma and minority stress, and working with children, adolescents, families, and caregivers to reduce the distress LGBTQI+ youth experience
- Supporting adaptive coping to improve psychological well-being
- Supporting youth as they learn more about their sexual orientation and gender identity
- Helping children and adolescents navigate their sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression within the context of their cultural, religious, and other identities

Interventions should be client-centered, culturally appropriate, and developmentally sensitive. The treatment goal should be to facilitate the best possible level of psychological functioning, rather than identifying with a specific gender or sexual orientation. Appropriate treatment approaches with youth of diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity should focus on identity development and affirming exploration that allows the child or adolescent the freedom of self-discovery within a context of acceptance and support. It is important to identify the sources of any distress experienced by LGBTQI+ youth and their families and caregivers, and work to reduce this distress.

Working with parents and caregivers is important, as their behaviors and attitudes have significant effects on the mental health and wellbeing of youth with diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Supportive family, caregivers, community, school, child welfare, and healthcare environments have been shown to positively impact both the short-and longterm health and well-being of LGBTQI+ youth. Families, caregivers, and those working with these youth can benefit from guidance and resources to increase support for sexual-and gender-diverse groups and to reduce stigma and discrimination.

In addition to the appropriate therapeutic approaches described above, social transition is appropriate and beneficial for many transgender and gender-diverse youth. Although professional intervention is not required for youth to take steps in social transition, providers can support families and caregivers to protect youth's safety, ensure emotional, psychological, and social well-being, and help youth and families navigate the potential complexities of exploring and taking steps in social transition.

Policy Approaches to Support the Behavioral Health of LGBTQI+ Youth

LGBTQI+ youth and their families can benefit from policies that aim to:

End harmful and ineffective efforts such as SOGI change efforts and ensure access to evidence-based care
Promote behavioral health through protective and antidiscrimination policies
Improve behavioral health through facilitating increased support from families, schools, and communities
Conduct research that increases knowledge of health inequities with the goal to improve care

Given that SOGI change efforts are not appropriate therapeutic interventions, and are in fact harmful, immediate efforts are required to end their practice. Policy efforts to end SOGI change efforts have included:

- Passing state legislation to ban SOGI change efforts or provide supportive resources
- Introducing federal legislation to ban SOGI change efforts or provide supportive resources
- Banning licensed behavioral health providers from engaging in SOGI change efforts
- Restricting use of state funds and proposing the restriction of federal funds for these efforts
- Defining SOGI change efforts as consumer fraud

Efforts to improve understanding among behavioral health providers and other stakeholders of the harms of SOGI change efforts and the benefits of evidence-based care are essential. Other policy efforts can expand access to LGBTQI+ evidence-based care through reforming insurance and health services, ensuring nondiscrimination in health services programs, and increasing behavioral health and medical professional training in appropriate treatments.

Policies can improve behavioral health and reduce health risks in this population by ensuring protection from discrimination, exclusion, and violence in schools and communities, and by expanding civil rights for LGBTQI+ individuals and families. Reducing stigma directed at LGBTQI+ individuals and families through affirmative public information that is respectful of families and youth from diverse religious, cultural, socioeconomic, and racial/ethnic backgrounds is important and consistent with professional ethical guidelines and standards of care. Supporting research to continue the development of evidence-based behavioral interventions for LGBTQI+ youth — especially those from diverse backgrounds—will contribute to the overall health and well-being of this community.

***Guiding Principles for Behavioral Health Providers***

The Panel updated a statement regarding the guiding human rights and scientific principles that provide a foundation for behavioral health providers working with this population. They are based on codes of professional ethics for the fields of psychology, psychiatry, counseling, social work, and pediatrics.

Behavioral health providers respect human dignity and human rights. Professional ethics necessitate that children and adolescents be supported in their right to explore and actualize their own identities.

All children and adolescents should have fair and equitable access to behavioral health services that will benefit their health and welfare without the risk of harm. Children and adolescents have the right to participate in decisions that affect their health care and future lives.

- ✓ Behavioral health providers assist children, adolescents, and their families in making informed healthcare decisions by providing developmentally appropriate information and assessing their decision-making capacities and family and community contexts.
- ✓ Behavioral health providers strive to provide care that is in the best interest of the child or adolescent.

In the field of health care, the term "inappropriate" is used to designate care that is nonbeneficial, not medically indicated, and ineffective in achieving a patient's desired results. Medically inappropriate care is not needed or supported by clinical evidence and can result in negative health outcomes. The term "appropriate" is used to designate care when the expected health benefit exceeds the expected negative consequences by a sufficiently wide margin that the care is worthwhile.

- ✓ Behavioral health providers strive to incorporate cultural awareness, respect, and sensitivity into their work. They recognize that age, gender identity and expression, race, ethnicity, culture, language, national origin, religion, spirituality, sexual orientation, different abilities, and socioeconomic status are important factors to consider when working with children, adolescents, and families.
- ✓ Behavioral health providers strive to eliminate any impact of bias on their professional interactions and decisions.

***Defining Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Change Efforts***

SOGI change efforts, commonly referred to as "conversion therapy" or "reparative therapy," are practices that aim to suppress or alter an individual's sexual orientation or gender to align with heterosexual orientation, cisgender identity, and/or stereotypical gender expression. SOGI change efforts are premised on or motivated by the belief that diversity in sexual orientation and/or gender identity and expression is a deficit, mental illness, or pathology.

SOGI change efforts do not include gender-affirming care. They do not include counseling that facilitates acceptance, social support, or open and affirming exploration and development of one's sexual or gender identity, including navigating sexual orientation and/or gender identity within the context of intersecting identities.

***Professional Consensus on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Change Efforts With Youth***

- Available research indicates that SOGI change efforts can cause significant harm. It also indicates that these efforts are not effective in altering sexual orientation. Further, no available research indicates that SOGI change efforts are effective in altering gender identity. No available research supports the claim that these efforts are beneficial to children, adolescents, or families.
- SOGI change efforts are inappropriate practices that should not be provided to children and adolescents.
- Rejection and lack of social and emotional support from families and communities negatively impact the health of sexual and gender minority youth. Such behaviors can cause harm, particularly family rejection of sexual orientation and/or gender diversity.

***Professional Consensus on Appropriate Interventions With Youth of Diverse Sexual Orientation and/or Gender Identity and Their Families***

Appropriate approaches to care for sexual and gender minority youth and their families: Are evidence-based and person-centered

- Reduce the rejection of sexual and gender minority youth
- Increase family, school, and community support
- Are responsive to children's, adolescents', and families' intersectional identities, including age, gender, race, ethnicity, culture, national origin, religion, spirituality, sexual orientation, different abilities, language, and socioeconomic status

Appropriate therapeutic approaches for sexual and gender minority youth do the following:

- Provide accurate information on sexual orientation and gender identity and expression
- Identify sources of distress for children, adolescents, and families and work with them to reduce it
- Facilitate exploration and development of one's sexual and/or gender identity
- Support adaptive coping to improve psychological well-being

- Help youth navigate their sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression within the context of their cultural, religious, and other intersecting identities

Behavioral health providers may want to consult guidelines from major medical and mental health associations such as: American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, American Academy of Pediatrics, American College of Physicians, American Counseling Association, American Medical Association, American Psychiatric Association, American Psychoanalytic Association, American Psychological Association, American School Counselor Association, Endocrine Society, National Association of School Psychologists, National Association of Social Workers, Pediatric Endocrine Society, Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine, World Medical Association, and World Professional Association for Transgender Health.

When working with sexual and gender minority youth, behavioral health providers' ethical and professional responsibilities include delivering care that reflects respect, compassion, and cultural humility. It should be consistent with current professional, evidence-based, multidisciplinary resolutions and guidelines issued by leading health and scientific associations and professional ethical principles.

***Professional Consensus on Education and Training***

Like all youth, sexual and gender minority youth and their families have diverse cultural, ethnic, racial, religious, and other identities that shape their

experiences, values, and behavioral health needs. These are important factors for behavioral health providers to understand and acknowledge. Providers should receive specific training in the development of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, as well as training on culturally responsive approaches to working with sexual and gender minority youth and their families from diverse backgrounds.

While sexual and gender minority youth experience many of the same developmental milestones as other youth, they also encounter unique challenges and may need specific support and resources to thrive. All of those engaged in the care of youth, including parents and caregivers, healthcare providers and staff, school and education professionals, community leaders, social service providers, legal professionals, and policymakers, can benefit from accurate, scientific, nonpathologizing information about sexual and gender diversity.

Person-centered, also known as client-centered, is a long-standing therapeutic approach that affirms and values all aspects of individuals.[89] It emphasizes

**Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Change Efforts With Youth**

Over the past decade, additional high-quality research focused on documenting the practice and effects of SOGI change efforts has provided further evidence that these efforts should not be practiced with youth. This section includes a review of recent research on SOGI change efforts and information about their continued use across the United States. It also includes a detailed description of some of the methodological issues relevant to SOGI change efforts research that may be useful for researchers and policymakers. Finally, this section describes guidance from professional organizations disavowing SOGI change efforts.

***Research on SOGI Change Efforts***

There is now a significant body of research on SOGI change efforts. Overall, it has focused on sexual orientation change efforts more than gender identity change efforts. Although some study populations included both sexual and gender minorities, they often examined SOGI change efforts in ways that obscure whether transgender participants experienced change efforts related to their sexual orientation, gender identity, or both. This is both a methodological shortcoming of some SOGI change efforts research and a reflection of the

realities of its practice, where it is not always possible to distinguish between sexual orientation and gender identity change efforts. For example, SOGI change efforts often include attempts to change children's and adolescents' gender expression to be more consistent with the stereotypical norms expected for their assigned sex at birth, with a goal to prevent both a transgender identity and a future diverse sexual orientation.

In 2009, the American Psychological Association Task Force on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation Change Efforts conducted an authoritative review of peer-reviewed literature published on sexual orientation change efforts. Since its publication, a systematic review of research on sexual orientation change efforts has been published, as well as quantitative and qualitative empirical studies examining sexual orientation change efforts among populations residing in the United States or Canada.

A 2018 systematic review of research on gender identity change efforts published between 1990 and 2017 identified four studies reporting on its use, which consisted of three case reports and one case series. Since then, three studies investigated gender identity change efforts among populations residing in the United States or Canada. One study examined their use in New Zealand, and several studies examined sexual orientation change efforts with transgender and gender-diverse populations in the United States and Canada.

### Conclusion

There is sufficient evidence to conclude that SOGI change efforts are inappropriate, harmful practices based on the knowledge that:

- These efforts are founded on a view of sexual and gender diversity that runs counter to scientific consensus.
- Research demonstrates that sexual orientation change efforts are ineffective, and no research demonstrates the effectiveness of gender identity change efforts.
- There is a growing body of evidence that exposure to SOGI change efforts can cause significant, lasting harm.

Other supportive behavioral health approaches are recommended for individual or family distress associated with sexual orientation and gender identity, as discussed in "Beneficial Therapeutic Approaches and Interventions in LGBTQI+ Youth and Their Families" in Section 2.

## Development, Behavioral Health, and Beneficial Therapeutic Approaches With Youth of Diverse Sexual Orientation and/or Gender Identity: A Research Overview

### Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation consists of sexual identity, sexual and romantic attraction, and sexual behavior. Great shifts in the understanding of sexual orientation have occurred over the past century.120 Though a diverse sexual orientation was once considered abnormal or a medical problem, scientists now understand that sexuality occurs on a continuum and that variations in sexual orientation are part of the normal and healthy range of human sexuality.

Although some people experience changes in sexual awareness, attractions, behaviors, and identities over time, this does not mean that sexual orientation can be willfully changed through their own or others' efforts, such as through sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI; pronounced "SO-gee") change efforts.

Today, many terms are used to describe sexual orientation. In addition to terms such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and straight, many young people use a wider range of descriptive identity labels for their sexual orientation such as pansexual, asexual, queer, and questioning, among others. Research with large, national samples of adolescents has found that approximately one-quarter of adolescents of diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity use newer descriptive labels for their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Use of a wider range of descriptive sexual orientation labels appears to be more common among gender-diverse adolescents than among cisgender adolescents.

The number of people in the United States who feel safe or comfortable to self-identify as a sexual minority is increasing, and most of this increase is occurring among women, people of color, and younger generations. Nearly 5 percent of adults in the United States identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual; this represents an increase of nearly 60 percent of individuals who were comfortable self-identifying as LGB than on surveys conducted 8 years earlier. Among U.S. high school students, nearly 15 percent identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual or are unsure of their sexual orientation; this is nearly double the number of students who were comfortable self-identifying as non-heterosexual in surveys conducted 8 years prior. The true size of sexual minority populations is likely higher than reported in these surveys. Stigmatizing societal attitudes and concerns about confidentiality may limit accurate

reporting of sexual orientation identity and behavior. Additionally, many surveys ask about only a limited number of sexual orientation options (e.g., lesbian, gay, bisexual, or heterosexual), which may miss individuals who use other terms (e.g., pansexual, asexual, or queer). The increase in openly identifying as a sexual minority does not suggest that people are more likely to have the innate characteristics of being a sexual minority, but rather that individuals are increasingly able to publicly identify as LGBTQI+ because of increasing awareness and acceptance of diverse sexual orientations; the expansion of laws, policies, and practices that protect and support individuals regardless of sexual orientation; and an increased willingness and ability among LGBTQI+ people to self-identify due to decreased stigmatization and greater access to civil rights.

***Sexual Orientation Development in Youth***

Sexual orientation is usually conceptualized to begin at or near adolescence with the development of sexual feelings. The average age at which sexual minority individuals reach important sexual orientation identity development milestones, such as becoming aware of same-sex attractions and coming out to others, commonly occurs during adolescence. Various factors affect the trajectory of development related to sexual orientation, and there is no single or simple trajectory experienced by all individuals. Recent generations of sexual minority individuals tend to reach milestones related to sexual orientation identity development and coming out (e.g., first becoming aware of their attractions, disclosing diverse identity, first sexual minority relationship) at similar ages in adolescence. In addition, it is becoming increasingly common for children to identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual in childhood. Youth's earlier public self-identification as having a minority sexual orientation is likely due to reduced stigma related to sexual orientation diversity. As more youth self-identify as sexual minorities, scholars have called for supporting the emotional and mental health needs that children express related to their sexual orientation.

Sexual identity development is influenced by cultural factors that may differ across racial and ethnic groups. However, most research on sexual orientation identity development has included primarily white youth without examining differences related to race and ethnicity or cultural background.124 As such, our cultural and scientific understandings of common experiences and developmental trajectories of sexual minority populations may better reflect the experiences of white sexual minority groups and be less relevant to the experiences of sexual minority people of color.137 Limited research has examined the dual or multiple identity development processes among sexual

minority youth of color.138 Development related to racial/ethnic identity and sexual identity may occur concurrently among adolescents, though
studies have identified cultural constructs and culturally specific expectations that have been identified as influencing sexual identity development among youth of color include familism (i.e., family needs take precedence over individual needs) and specific cultural understandings and expectations of masculinity among Black and Latino adolescent boys in particular.

How many people in the United States are sexual and gender minorities?
An estimated 11.4 to 12.2 million adults identify as LGBTQ+ in the United States, a number roughly equivalent to the population of Ohio.
An estimated 1.99 million adolescents ages 13 to 17 identify as LGBT in the United States, which is roughly equivalent to the combined populations of Dallas, Texas, and Detroit, Michigan.

Significant physical, cognitive, and social development occurs during adolescence. Sexual minority adolescents face the same developmental tasks that accompany adolescence for all youth, including sexual identity development. However, sexual minority adolescents must also navigate an environment lacking awareness and acceptance of socially marginalized sexual identities, potentially without family, community, or societal support.

Sexual identity development includes processes of identity formation (i.e., becoming aware of sexual attractions, exploring sexual feelings) and identity integration (i.e., integrating sexual identity within the larger view of self). For sexual minority adolescents, difficulty with the identity development process, such as difficulty accepting one's sexual orientation and dissonance between one's self-image and cultural, religious, and societal beliefs about sexual minorities, can increase negative views of one's own and others' sexual minority identities and lead to adopting negative societal attitudes and beliefs about being a sexual minority.

Sexual orientation conflict has been linked to negative psychosocial outcomes in adolescents and young adults. Furthermore, a negative self-image as a

sexual minority youth contributes to the relationship between sexuality-specific stressors (e.g., family rejection, victimization) and poorer mental health outcomes.

Positive identity development, however, is associated with better mental health among sexual minority adolescents. For example, one study found that for sexual minority college students, those who reported strong religious beliefs also reported lower psychological distress, but only among those students who had high levels of self-acceptance of their sexual orientation.148 Strong religious beliefs on their own were not protective in terms of psychological distress for students who reported lower levels of self-acceptance of their sexual orientation.

Important areas of focus for behavioral health providers who work with adolescents include helping them address negative views about aspects of their identity and supporting positive identity development. For behavioral health providers who work with sexual minority adolescents, this includes reducing the client's negative views of their own sexual orientation identity and supporting positive identity development. This encompasses the integration of sexual orientation identity into the adolescent's larger sense of self, alongside intersecting identities (e.g., cultural, racial/ethnic, and other identities).

**Gender**

Transgender is a term that refers to individuals whose gender identities are incongruent with their sex assigned at birth. The term gender diverse is a broader term that includes transgender individuals, as well as others whose gender behaviors, appearances, or identities are incongruent with those culturally expected based on sex assigned at birth.

Gender diversity was depathologized with changes made to the 5th revision of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) and the 11th revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD11). These changes make it clear that gender diversity is not a disorder. Instead, current guidelines focus on treating and supporting individuals who may experience feelings of distress (i.e., gender dysphoria) or incongruence between their gender identity and body or sex assigned at birth, as well as any distress associated with stigma and discrimination.Note that throughout this report, "gender dysphoria" (not capitalized) refers to the general concept of distress associated with incongruence between one's gender identity and body or sex

assigned at birth, while "Gender Dysphoria" (capitalized) refers to the DSM diagnosis.

Terms such as nonbinary, gender queer, gender fluid, agender, bi-gender, and others are used by many individuals to express their gender identity. Identifying with more than one identity is also common. There are also many culturally specific terms that have long been used for third gender or nonbinary identities and gender roles, including two-spirit among some Indigenous North American cultures, fa'afafine in Samoan culture, and māhū in Native Hawaiian culture. Identifying as nonbinary appears to be more common among younger generations. This may be related to greater visibility and social acceptance of gender diversity. One study with a large national sample found that nearly one-quarter of adolescents of diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity self-identified as nonbinary. Of note, some people who describe themselves as nonbinary or another gender consider themselves transgender, while others do not.

In this report, "transgender and gender diverse" is used as a broad term that refers to people whose gender identity and/or gender expression are incongruent with their sex assigned at birth, including binary transgender people, nonbinary people, and cisgender people with a diverse gender expression.

Estimates of the size of the transgender and gender-diverse population in the United States vary. It is only in recent years that some national, population-based surveys have started to include questions to assess gender identity, and the practice remains far from widespread. It is estimated that between 0.1 and 2.0 percent of adults in the United States identify as transgender. These figures likely underestimate the size of the transgender and gender-diverse populations, because much of this research has not used current best practices for asking separately about current gender identity and sex assigned at birth and did not consistently include gender-diverse individuals who do not identify with the term transgender. Recent population-based research with adults of diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity has found that 1.2 million adults in the United States identify as nonbinary, including people who both do and do not consider themselves transgender.

Research with high school students has found that between 1.1 and 9.2 percent identify as transgender, nonbinary, or another gender identity that differed from their sex assigned at birth. Studies that specifically asked about identifying as nonbinary and other gender identities in addition to identifying as transgender reported larger proportions of transgender and gender-diverse

youth, emphasizing the importance of asking about nonbinary and other diverse gender identities.

***Gender Development in Youth***

Gender-related development begins in early childhood and progresses through adolescence. Processes of gender-related identity development among transgender and other gender-diverse populations are varied, non-linear, and not necessarily anchored to specific ages or developmental periods. For some individuals, gender identity appears stable across development, while others experience changes in their gender identity over time.

Youth who start to think of themselves as transgender or gender diverse may share this identity with others, and take steps in social transition across a wide range of ages. There is no single developmental trajectory for transgender and gender-diverse youth—that is, there is healthy and normal variation in the age that youth recognize themselves as gender diverse.

Individuals who exhibit gender diversity in childhood include those who:

- Consistently identify with a gender that differs from their sex assigned at birth
- Identify with the gender that aligns with their sex assigned at birth and have a diverse gender expression
- Are exploring their gender identity and/or gender expression

While earlier research from clinics specializing in childhood gender identity suggested that many individuals who exhibited gender diversity in childhood did not later identify as transgender in adolescence, significant methodological weaknesses preclude use of these findings to identify trajectories of gender identity development and their associated frequencies. However, more recent research and clinical expertise suggests that children who consistently identify with a gender different from their sex assigned at birth typically express a similar clarity in adolescence. Research also indicates that children whose gender expression differs from social norms, but who do not identify as transgender or nonbinary, are more likely to have a diverse sexual orientation in adulthood.

Children who identify as transgender early in their development are increasingly supported and affirmed in their identities by many families at young ages. Research with transgender youth who have socially transitioned—that is, who present as their gender identity in everyday life—provides evidence that early in childhood, gender-related development is similar among

Younger generations understand, experience, and communicate their gender-related experiences in different ways than previous generations. These understandings of gender include an increased recognition of the complexity of gender, sexuality, and identity and fewer stereotypes or expectations of what it means to be a certain gender.

transgender and cisgender children with the same gender identity, regardless of sex assigned at birth. These similar areas of gender-related development between transgender and cisgender children include consistency and strength of identification with their gender and expression of gender preferences, stereotypes, behaviors, and beliefs.

Other youth identify as transgender or gender diverse for the first time in adolescence.mPuberty can be a pivotal time when youth become more aware of their gender and experience physical changes that can trigger or exacerbate dysphoria. Some individuals who initially identify as transgender or gender diverse in adolescence do not have a history of gender diversity or gender "non-conforming" behaviors or preferences in childhood. This can make disclosure of a gender identity that differs from sex assigned at birth in adolescence surprising to parents, guardians, and others.

Some adolescents who identify as transgender or gender diverse report that they felt different at a young age but expressed or engaged in behaviors that were stereotypical for their sex assigned at birth earlier in life, while others do not feel differently about their gender until adolescence. Given the advances in scientific understanding of the normal and healthy diversity of gender identities, understanding the current experiences of youth whose gender incongruence presents in adolescence is an important area of study. No singular narrative can describe the totality of transgender and gender-diverse youth experiences.

Identity development is among the key tasks of adolescence for all adolescents, including those who are transgender and gender diverse. Self-acceptance of one's gender identity, identity pride, and valuing self are factors that promote resilience among transgender and gender-diverse adolescents.

However, transgender and gender-diverse adolescents may experience identity conflict when reconciling a gender identity that may diverge from the expectations of their family, peers, and community. This can be particularly pertinent for transgender and gender-diverse adolescents of color, who often experience multiple forms of discrimination (e.g., racial discrimination when seeking out supportive services, or antitransgender stigma in one's racial/ethnic or cultural community) and may perceive incompatibility between their gender identity and racial/ethnic identities.

Conversely, racial/ethnic identity development processes may beneficially impact how youth navigate gender identity development, such as experience coping with adversity and developing a sense of pride in one's identity.195 While self-acceptance and identity pride are associated with well-being, adopting negative societal attitudes and beliefs about being transgender or

> Minority stressors experienced due to anti-LGBTQ+ stigma include major life events, such as assault because of one's sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression, as well as everyday forms of discrimination and non-affirmation, such as receiving poor services, being assumed to be straight, or being misgendered. Minority stress is also caused by policies that limit the opportunities, resources, and well-being of LGBTQI+

gender diverse and having a negative gender-related self-concept have been connected to mental health challenges and greater substance use among transgender and gender-diverse adolescents.

Important areas of focus for behavioral health providers who work with adolescents includes helping them address negative views about aspects of their identity and supporting positive identity development. Therefore, important areas of focus for behavioral health providers who work with transgender and gender-diverse adolescents are reducing negative views of their own gender identity and supporting positive identity development. As with adolescents of diverse sexual orientations, this includes integration of

gender identity and gender self-concept into their larger sense of self, alongside cultural, racial/ethnic, and other identities.

Research on how gender identity development varies by gender, race and ethnicity, and other cultural, social, and environmental factors remains in its early stages. Some studies have identified potential differences in developmental trajectory by gender. Many studies have disproportionately low representation of transgender girls and other gender-diverse youth assigned male at birth, suggesting that transgender girls and women are coming out at later ages.

One study investigating age upon accessing gender-affirming medical care found that it was influenced by contextual factors, such as family religion, having a helpful caregiver, as well as developmental milestones reached upon recognition of gender incongruence and age at coming out or disclosing gender identity. Another study of young transgender women found differences by racial/ethnic group, suggesting that youth of color may achieve some social milestones (e.g., disclosure of gender identity) at younger ages than white youth.

Most research with transgender and gender-diverse youth has been conducted with mostly white, higher income families living in urban areas who have access to specialized pediatric gender clinics. In recent years, more research has been conducted with nonclinical populations of children. Given the tremendous variation in attitudes and expectations related to gender by cultural group and family background, more research is needed with racially and ethnically diverse children and families, lower income families, and families from different cultural and religious backgrounds to better understand the experiences and needs of diverse gender minority children and adolescents and to ensure access to evidence-based care.

**Health and Well-Being of LGBTQI+ Youth**

In the United States and worldwide, sexual-and gender-diverse populations experience inequities in many behavioral health outcomes. This report uses the phrase “health inequities” as opposed to “health disparities” to refer to unnecessary and avoidable health differences. These health inequities are not caused by one’s sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression, but rather by anti-LGBTQI+ stigma that is embedded in proposed and enacted laws, policies, and societal attitudes.

The Minority Stress Model provides an empirically validated conceptual model for understanding how stress due to anti-LGBTQI+ stigma, coupled

with general life stressors, puts individuals of diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity at increased risk for negative behavioral health outcomes. These external experiences of minority stress cause cognitive, affective, and behavioral reactions, such as internalized stigma, identity concealment, and social isolation, all of which are associated with poorer mental health.

Despite the impact of anti-LGBTQI+ stigma, which individuals can experience in tandem with other forms of discrimination, many youth and adults of diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity can adapt, thrive, and demonstrate resilience despite risk exposure, high levels of stress, and other forms of adversity. Resilience refers to a dynamic process of adapting positively within the context of significant adversity. Resilience among sexual- and gender-diverse populations is promoted through:

- Self-acceptance of sexual orientation and gender identity, self-esteem, and identity pride
- Social support and sexuality-and gender-specific support from family, peers, schools, and community organizations
- School and community connectedness
- Inclusive and supportive federal and state policies

It is important to recognize that sexual and gender minorities are not a single, homogeneous population. In addition to including individuals with many distinct sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions, LGBTQI+ populations are also diverse with respect to other identities, including age, race, ethnicity, immigration status, language, national origin, religion, spirituality, ability, and socioeconomic status. Individuals with multiple minority identities experience unique stigma and stressors, as well as unique opportunities for resilience.

To support individual LGBTQI+ youth in achieving their optimal health and well-being, and to take action to address health inequities among LGBTQI+ populations, behavioral and other healthcare providers, families, school administrators, boards, and educators, community leaders, and policymakers must understand the health concerns that may affect LGBTQI+ youth and be knowledgeable about the factors that lead to risk and resilience among LGBTQI+ youth. The following sections provide an overview of behavioral health concerns among LGBTQI+ youth, as well as what is known about the influence of families, school, religion and spirituality, community climate and policies, and gender affirmation on the behavioral health of LGBTQI+ youth.

### Behavioral Health Concerns Among LGBTQI+ Youth

Youth of diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity are at elevated risk for mental illness and substance use due to experiences of discrimination related to sexual orientation, gender identity, rejection, trauma, violence, and a lack of support from families, school systems, and communities. Transgender and gender-diverse children and adolescents may also experience psychological distress related to gender dysphoria. It is important to emphasize that youth of diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity are resilient, and that with sufficient support and access to resources, they can thrive. Behavioral health concerns that behavioral health providers can be aware of and attend to among sexual-and gender-diverse youth are summarized below.

### Behavioral Health Concerns Among LGBTQI+ Children

Recent research has begun to investigate behavioral health among sexual-and gender-diverse children and has found that inequities in behavioral health may begin in childhood. While some sexual-and gender-diverse children are distressed, others are not. Among those who are distressed, the source of distress varies.

Several studies found that more children who self-identify as gay, bisexual, or questioning reported distress, including mood disorders, non-suicidal self-injury, suicide ideation, and suicide attempts than did children who do not identify as gay, bisexual, or questioning. Additionally, two longitudinal studies found that children who later identified as a sexual minority began experiencing mental health challenges as early as age 11. Other studies indicate that mental health concerns among sexual minority children may be linked to experiences of victimization, such as bullying behaviors perpetrated by peers.

Gender-diverse children appear to have elevated rates of mental health concerns, including symptoms of anxiety and depression, history of self-harm, and suicidality, compared to cisgender children. When gender-diverse children have behavioral health concerns, these may be related to invalidation or rejection of their gender diversity, or distress related to current anatomical dysphoria and/or anticipation of future pubertal development incongruent with their current gender. Alternatively, their mental health concerns may be entirely unrelated to their gender.

At the same time, research also suggests that gender-diverse children who receive meaningful gender identity support do not necessarily experience elevated rates of depression and anxiety. Research with a national sample of

socially transitioned prepubescent transgender children found this group to have developmentally normative levels of depression, only minimal elevations in anxiety, and comparable levels of self-worth, suggesting that behavioral health concerns are not inevitable among this group.

**Behavioral Health Concerns Among LGBTQI+ Adolescents**

As LGBTQI+ adolescents navigate the challenges of adolescence, some experience a variety of behavioral health concerns and psychosocial challenges. Compared to their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts, some adolescents of diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity are at disproportionate risk of behavioral health symptoms, driven by increased exposure to stigma, rejection, and victimization. It is also important to note that behavioral health concerns may be unrelated to sexual and gender diversity. Exposure to SOGI change efforts is a key risk factor that has been shown to increase risk of suicide attempt among adolescents and young adults of diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

Compared to heterosexual and cisgender peers, adolescents of diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity are more likely to experience psychological distress, symptoms of depression, and symptoms of anxiety. Studies indicate large differences in rates of suicidal ideation and attempts among adolescents in the United States by sexual orientation and gender identity. The Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) documented increased odds of suicide risk among both sexual minority and gender minority high school students compared to heterosexual and cisgender students, including suicide attempt requiring medical treatment. A recent public health study with data from six states found that while suicide rates are dropping, sexual minority adolescents in this study were three times as likely to attempt suicide relative to heterosexual adolescents. Research with gender minority adolescents has documented that between 25 percent and 51 percent of transgender and gender-diverse adolescents have attempted suicide, with the highest rates among transgender boys and nonbinary youth.

Research using YRBSS data indicates that some adolescents of diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity are more likely than heterosexual and cisgender adolescents to engage in substance use. Research found that adolescents of diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity also experience greater incidence of eating disorders and disordered eating behaviors than their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts.

Adverse mental health outcomes tend to be more prevalent among gender minority youth compared to sexual minority youth due to specific stigma and discrimination against transgender individuals.61 The higher rates of substance use and suicidality are partly explained by experiences of discrimination, victimization, and higher rates of depressive symptoms reported by transgender and gender-diverse adolescents as compared to cisgender adolescents.

Among transgender and gender-diverse adolescents, some research suggests that mental health outcomes may be worse among nonbinary adolescents and transgender boys. Gender dysphoria, which can initiate or intensify in adolescence, can cause psychological distress among transgender and gender-diverse adolescents. Increased experiences of victimization, rejection, and exposure to discriminatory policies may also drive the higher rates of adverse mental health seen among transgender and gender-diverse adolescents compared to sexual minority adolescents.

Trauma is also a common behavioral health concern among adolescents of diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity, who have an increased likelihood of experiencing child maltreatment, school-based victimization, violence, and homelessness, and who are overrepresented in both the child welfare system and the juvenile correctional system.

A number of studies suggest that some neurodiverse youth are gender diverse. The most recent clinical guidelines suggest that such youth benefit from an individualized approach to treatment.

The fact that research consistently demonstrates large inequities in behavioral health among LGBTQI+ adolescents indicates that this is a vulnerable population that needs psychosocial support, equitable social conditions, and access to affirming mental health care. At the same time, it is important to emphasize that many LGBTQI+ adolescents are resilient and although experiencing discrimination and behavioral health challenges can thrive.

### *Influences on Health and Well-Being*

The increased risks of behavioral health distress that LGBTQI+ youth face are not a function of their identities. Rather, these risks stem from the stresses of stigma, discrimination, rejection, and violence. The presence of sexual orientation-and gender-related stressors—and opportunities for emotional support and connection— encompasses multiple social systems, including, for instance, family, culture, values, school, and community networks. Therefore,

when LGBTQI+ youth are evaluated by a behavioral health provider, assessment should routinely include family, school, and community systems in which they live to identify both sources of distress and sources of support and connection as protective factors. By increasing LGBTQI+ youth's access to support and resilience-promoting resources across their daily environments, and decreasing exposure to stigma and discrimination in communities and healthcare systems, more LGBTQI+ youth can achieve optimal health and well-being.

**Family**

Family response to youth's sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression has a significant impact on the youth's well-being, with effects that appear to extend into young adulthood. Parents, caregivers, and families can serve as both a source of stress and a source of support for youth of diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Negative parental responses to sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or gender expression are associated with mental health concerns including psychological distress, depression, suicidality, and substance use. Alternatively, parent-child relationships characterized by closeness and support are an important correlate of mental well-being.

Strong parental support for a child's gender identity may offset the mental health challenges commonly documented among gender-diverse children. The use of a transgender or gender-diverse adolescent's chosen—rather than given—name has been linked to decreased depressive symptoms, suicidal ideation, and suicidal behavior. Among adolescents of diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity, high levels of sexual orientation and gender identity acceptance from parents and other relatives has been associated with reduced suicidality. Further, the behavioral health benefits from high levels of family acceptance of youth's diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity appear to last through young adulthood. The limited research that has focused on family members outside of parents and primary caregivers suggests that siblings and extended family members can be key sources of support for youth of diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

Studies have found that some adolescents of diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity report strikingly high rates of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). High ACE scores and parental rejection have been associated with suicidality in youth of diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity261 and may put these adolescents at greater risk for being victimized in other settings.262 Notably, though some scholars and practitioners consider SOGI

Youth of diverse sexual orientation and gender—and particularly those youth of color—are overrepresented among youth experiencing homelessness, as well as across multiple state-based systems [213, 263, 264]
Up to 40% of all youth experiencing homelessness and housing instability are youth of diverse sexual orientation and gender.
Up to one-third of youth in foster care systems are youth of diverse sexual orientation and gender.
Up to one-fifth of youth in the juvenile justice system are youth of diverse sexual orientation and gender.

Parent or caregiver rejection due to sexual orientation and gender diversity is just one of many reasons for these inequities; other factors such as parental mental health and substance use, poverty, and racism are common drivers of housing instability and system involvement among youth of diverse sexual orientation and gender.

change efforts from family members potentially traumatic events, ACE measures do not capture youth's experiences of SOGI change efforts.
It is important to note that some LGBTQI+ youth who lack family and/or parental support find resilient ways to access needed support and guidance. Many people of diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity, including those with and without supportive families of origin, form "chosen families" with sexual-and gender-diverse friends who provide social support and resources.265 In urban areas across the United States, LGBTQI+ adolescents and young adults of color—particularly Black and Latino youth—may join informal communities and LGBTQI+ family structures.

**Religion & Spirituality**

When considering family and community influences, a child's or adolescent's religious background is an important factor. Religious beliefs and background are far-reaching influences that encompass multiple arenas of one's life, including personal and family religious identity, beliefs, and coping; family attitudes, beliefs, and relationships; and community character and support. Religious views of sexual and gender diversity in the United States vary widely and can have a large influence on sexual-and gender-diverse adolescents' mental health and well-being.When working with youth of diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity, it is important to consider the intersection of religion with youth's racial and ethnic identity and cultural background.

Religion and spirituality are complex, nuanced aspects of human diversity. Parents from all backgrounds have a full range of reactions to their child's sexual orientation and gender identity and expression regardless of religious or spiritual traditions (e.g., confusion, desire for information, questions about social implications, love and loyalty, coming to terms with differences, growth and expansion of spiritual understanding, and for some a sense of loss). Rather than focus on faith beliefs, where they might lack expertise, behavioral health providers can focus on encouraging key measurable behaviors among families and caregivers that have been found to be supportive and protective for children, as well as informing families how some of their behaviors and interactions might lead to negative behavioral health outcomes.

LGBTQI+ adolescents may experience a myriad of sexual orientation-and gender-related stressors in the school environment, where they spend a large portion of their time. Despite increasing cultural visibility and acceptance of people of diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity, the climates of U.S. secondary schools remain generally unsupportive and unsafe for many sexual- and gender-diverse youth, who experience high levels of verbal and physical harassment and assault, sexual harassment, social exclusion and isolation, and other interpersonal problems with peers. School bullying and victimization is often linked to nonconformity to gender norms. Across racial/ethnic groups, approximately half of all sexual-and gender-diverse students of color were bullied or harassed based on their racial/ethnic identity. Further, sexual-and gender-diverse students of color were at greater risk of experiencing multiple forms of victimization and were more likely to feel unsafe at school than their white sexual-and gender-diverse peers. This mistreatment has a significant effect on sexual-and gender-diverse adolescents' mental health and well-being. Victimization due to sexual orientation or gender expression is associated with depressive symptoms, low self-esteem, and suicidality, as is not having access

to appropriate bathrooms and feeling unsafe in bathrooms and other school facilities.

Experiences of victimization and discrimination are also linked to negative academic outcomes among sexual-and gender-diverse youth. Victimization from peers and school staff, combined with discriminatory policies, likely contributes to the over-representation of sexual and gender minorities in the juvenile justice system. Sexual-and gender-diverse youth of color, particularly girls, are extremely overrepresented among incarcerated youth. Research shows that youth of diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity are not only more likely to experience exclusionary discipline at school, but also appear to be sanctioned more harshly than heterosexual, cisgender teens for the same behavior and are at an increased risk for juvenile justice involvement.

School and peer networks can also be a place where youth of diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity find support. High levels of support from friends, classmates, and school professionals is associated with better mental health and lower suicidality among youth of diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity.49 Additionally, when youth have access to high levels of peer or school support, this may reduce the negative impact that experiencing victimization has on their mental health. Friends of diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity may be of particular importance, because they are more likely to provide support for sexuality-and gender-related stress. Many youth of diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity connect with peers and access social support online that may be unavailable to them in person.283,284 Online sources of support have become increasingly important for youth of diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity during the COVID-19 pandemic.

School policies and resources that create an inclusive, safe environment positively influence student behavioral health and well-being. Specifically, these school policies reduce substance use and planned suicide and suicide attempts. GSA is a student-led, school-based club that aims to provide a safe space for LGBTQI+ students. “GSA” originally referred to “Gay-Straight Alliance,” but many GSAs now use the acronym to refer to “Gender and Sexuality Alliance” to acknowledge the full spectrum of sexual orientation and gender diversity.

Both the presence of and participation in a GSA has beneficial outcomes for sexual-and gender-diverse students and others, including increased feelings of safety, lower truancy, and decreased threats of violence in school. School

policies associated with improved health and well-being of students of diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity include:

- Antidiscrimination and antibullying policies that enumerate sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression
- Policies that allow youth to use facilities that align with their gender identity and/or that provide gender-neutral facilities

Policies that allow students to use their chosen name and pronouns277,278 Training school staff and educators about how to support youth of diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity is related to lower suicide attempts among these students when provided.286 Finally, curricula that are inclusive of students and families of diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity are associated with beneficial outcomes such as fewer instances of biased language against students of diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity, students feeling safer, fewer reported instances of victimization, increased peer acceptance, and lower levels of depression; these benefits may be related to the curricula helping to reduce negative stereotypes against LGBTQI+ students.48 These policies and practices not only are associated with benefits for students of diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity but also have school-wide beneficial effects across behavioral health and psychosocial outcomes among heterosexual youth.

**Community Climate & Policies**

Community climate and policies also have an impact on the health and well-being of youth of diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Community climate—defined by the presence or absence of supportive policies, places of worship that are open and inclusive, other LGBTQI+ people, and anti-LGBTQI+ rhetoric—is associated with behavioral health outcomes among LGBTQI+ adolescents. Studies have found that adolescents of diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity living in areas with a more supportive community climate have better mental health and are less likely to use substances.

State and federal laws and policies also affect the health and well-being of sexual-and gender-diverse populations, including youth. More research has been conducted with adults, where supportive and protective policies—such as protection from discrimination in schools and ability to change name and gender on identity documents—have consistently been linked with better mental health, reduced substance use, and increased access to health care. Meanwhile, policies that permit discrimination against people of diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity are linked with poorer behavioral

In the most recent National School Climate Survey of LGBTQ+ youth, the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN) found that:
60% felt unsafe
69% were verbally harassed
58% were sexually harassed
26% were physically harassed
11% were physically assaulted
45% were cyberbullied

60% of students of diverse sexual orientation and gender surveyed experienced policies that are discriminatory based on sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression at school. Transgender and gender-diverse students were most likely to report incidences with discriminatory policies and practices, including being prevented from using their chosen name and pronouns, and bathrooms and locker rooms aligned with their gender identity.

health outcomes. It appears that state and federal laws and policies have a similar effect on youth of diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity, with the presence of supportive laws and policies associated with reduced suicidality among high school students.

Behavioral health professionals provide youth and their families with developmentally sensitive, culturally appropriate, and client-centered interventions that emphasize acceptance, support, and understanding and that match the child and adolescent's cognitive and emotional development.

Appropriate therapeutic approaches with LGBTQI+ youth do the following:

- ❖ Provide accurate information on sexual orientation and gender identity and expression.
- ❖ Identify sources of distress, including internalized stigma and minority stress, and work with children, adolescents and families to reduce distress experienced by children and adolescents.
- ❖ Support adaptive coping to improve psychological well-being.
- ❖ Support youth as they learn more about their sexual orientation and gender identity.
- ❖ Help children and adolescents navigate their sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression within the context of their intersecting identities.

### *Client-Centered Individual Approaches*

Behavioral health providers offer developmentally sensitive, affirmative interventions to youth. Developmentally sensitive approaches account for appropriate developmental emotional and cognitive capacities, developmental milestones, and emerging or existing behavioral health concerns. Affirmative approaches recognize and communicate that being of diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity does not constitute a mental disorder.Affirmative approaches recognize that when behavioral health issues exist, they often stem from stigma and negative experiences rather than being intrinsic to the child or adolescent.When working with children and adolescents, providers examine not only risk factors but also sources of resilience across the multiple environments that influence the health and well-being of young people.

Effective approaches support youth in identity exploration and development without seeking predetermined outcomes related to sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.188,304 Key aims are to dispel negative stereotypes and provide accurate information in developmentally appropriate terms for children and adolescents.

Scientists and researchers are constantly discovering more about sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression. For some youth, a focus on identity development and exploration that allows them the freedom of self-discovery within a context of acceptance and support is vital to improving behavioral health and well-being. It is important to note, however, that identity exploration is not relevant or needed by all youth or a required focus of therapy for youth of diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

Additionally, it is important for behavioral health providers to respect what the identity exploration process looks like to each individual. Taking steps in social transition is one way for gender-diverse youth to explore their gender.

Practices that attempt to change or prevent youth from identifying as sexual- and gender-diverse or from expressing their sexual orientation and gender identity are harmful and are never appropriate. This includes approaches that discourage youth from identifying as transgender or gender-diverse and/or from expressing their gender identity. Sometimes these are misleadingly referred to as "exploratory therapy." Additionally, providers support youth in age-appropriate tasks, such as integrating sexual orientation and gender identities with other identities, safely navigating coming out or sharing their identities with others, and fostering positive relationships with caregivers, families, and peers.

Exposure to laws and policies that do not support youth of diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity, and other negative experiences, including bullying and family rejection, drive risk for certain behavioral health concerns among these youth. Behavioral health providers should assess for ACEs, other family rejecting behaviors, additional experiences of victimization, trauma-related disorders, and suicidality, and be prepared to address these concerns with LGBTQI+ youth in treatment. Appropriate interventions may aim to reduce or remove stressors a child or adolescent is experiencing that are associated with poor behavioral health. Alternatively, interventions may aim to change the cognitive, affective, and behavioral ways that youth of diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity react to these stressors.
Several cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) interventions for youth of diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity have been developed, including EQuIP,[309] AFFIRM,[310] and Rainbow SPARX.[311] LGBTQ-affirmative CBT appears to be particularly efficacious for Black, Latino, and Asian American and Pacific Islander young people of diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity, potentially because the focus on stressors may also help young people of color navigate stressors related to being a racial/ethnic minority.[213,312] There is also evidence supporting the use of mindfulness-based coping for sexual orientation-related school-based victimization. Evidence-based trauma-focused interventions designed for youth of diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity and their families can reduce symptoms of past trauma and enhance coping and wellbeing.

Behavioral health providers should be aware of and share crisis services specific to LGBTQI+ youth, local resources for LGBTQI+ youth, and online platforms where LGBTQI+ youth can find affirming social connections and

support. Given the increased rates of suicidality seen among youth of diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity, LGBTQI+ crisis services, such as those provided by The Trevor Project are vital. The Trevor Project offers direct suicide and crisis intervention services for LGBTQI+ youth by phone, text, or online chat.

Behavioral health providers should be aware of available community resources that support LGBTQI+ youth and their families, such as local provides a safe social-networking community for LGBTQI+ youth and their friends and allies. This online platform became even more critical during the pandemic because it allowed youth to find affirming connections even when physically isolated. PFLAG, which is the largest organization in the United States focused on providing support, education, and advocacy for LGBTQI+ people and their loved ones and has more than 325,000 members with hundreds of local chapters. PFLAG can serve as another resource of support for LGBTQI+ youth and their families.

Behavioral health providers should describe their treatment plan and interventions to children, adolescents, and their parents and families to ensure they understand the goals, potential benefits, and any risks of treatment. Behavioral health providers should obtain informed consent with all parties—including minors—for treatment, and should always involve parents and caregivers in decisions about a minor's care if the minor is not old enough to legally give consent. When obtaining informed consent/assent, it is important to be aware of and attend to power dynamics between parents/caregivers and youth, as well as between the provider and youth. Interventions that attempt to change sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression, or any other form of SOGI change efforts are inappropriate and can cause significant harm. Informed consent/assent for clinical care would include ensuring understanding of various components, including associated risks, expected benefits, and alternative treatment options; therefore, by definition, informed consent/assent cannot be provided for an intervention known to cause significant harm and does not have any known benefit to the client.

### *Family Approaches*

Wherever it is safe to do so for the child, parental and caregiver involvement is an important part of supporting LGBTQI+ youth. Parental and caregiver attitudes and behaviors play a significant role in the adjustment of children and adolescents. Parent and caregiver distress may be the cause of a referral for treatment. Reducing family rejection, hostility, and violence (verbal or

physical), and increasing family acceptance and support, contributes to the mental health and safety of the child and adolescent.

Interventions that increase family and community support and understanding while decreasing rejection directed at LGBTQI+ youth are recommended for families. Behavioral health providers supply family members with accurate, developmentally appropriate information regarding diversity in sexual orientation and gender, and strive to dispel myths regarding the lives, health, and psychological well-being of individuals of diverse sexual orientation and/ or understanding and addressing parent and caregiver concerns regarding current or future sexual orientation and gender identity is important. Further, behavioral health providers can attempt to help families and caregivers modify rejecting behaviors by explaining the link between family rejection and negative health problems, identifying rejecting and accepting behaviors, and providing recommendations for increasing supportive behaviors on the part of the family. gender identity. Family therapy that provides anticipatory guidance to parents and caregivers about the significant mental health risks caused by rejection of their child's sexual orientation and gender identity is vital.

Some affirming approaches to family therapy that include youth of diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity aim to demonstrate how family members' identities—such as their race and ethnicity, immigration, socioeconomic status, and more—affect their ability to understand and support their youth. Attachment-based approaches to family therapy have been used with suicidal sexual minority adolescents. Trauma-focused CBT is an evidence-based treatment for trauma-impacted youth aged 3 to 17 and their parents or primary caregivers. This intervention has been adapted for use specifically with youth of diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity by integrating the treatment framework with the Family Acceptance Project.314 Family therapists and researchers often focus on reframing family concerns—even their disapproval and rejection of sexual orientation and gender diversity—as a manifestation of care and love and focus on teaching non-rejecting ways to communicate those positive emotions. For example, providers can help the family create an atmosphere of mutual respect as a natural extension of seeing each person as having intrinsic worth. This can help ensure the safety of each person from being hurt or bullied in the home. This communicates an important message to a young person that their safety is important to the provider and to the family. Eventually, this mutual respect and communities with diverse values and beliefs, and focus on viewing these values and beliefs with humility and mutual respect. This includes understanding how to translate between psychology and deeply held values rather than judging those beliefs. Certain language, such as acceptance and/or affirmation, might not

resonate with some communities, whereas the concept of unconditional love might.

Many parents and caregivers must also navigate their own process of “coming out” and resolve fears of discrimination or negative social reactions if they disclose their child’s sexual-and gender-diverse identity within their communities, at work, and to other family members. Parents and caregivers often have fears for their child’s emotional and physical safety, among other worries for their future. Behavioral health providers can help parents plan in an affirmative way for the unique life challenges that they may face as parents of an LGBTQI+ child.

Further, behavioral health providers can address other stresses, such as managing life celebrations and transitions and coping with feelings of loss, and aid parents in advocating for their children in school situations—for example, when they face bullying or harassment. Groups for multiple families led by behavioral health providers, as well as online groups or forums for parents and caregivers of LGBTQI+ children and adolescents, may be helpful to build connections and share resources.

## 11. Terms

**Agender:** Describes individuals who do not identify as any gender.

**Asexual:** Describes individuals who do not experience sexual attraction. An individual can also be aromantic, meaning that they do not experience romantic attraction.

**Behavioral health:** A broad term that includes mental health, resilience, and well-being; the treatment of mental and substance use disorders; and the support of those who experience and/or are in recovery from these conditions, along with their families and communities.

**Behavioral health provider:** A broad term used here to describe individuals across settings and disciplines who are engaged in the provision of care and/or support related to behavioral health. Behavioral health providers include both licensed and non-licensed professionals, including mental health counselors, marriage and family therapists, pastoral counselors, psychiatrists, psychologists, psychiatric nurses, school counselors and health providers, peer support professionals, social workers, substance use counselors, addiction

medicine specialists, and all staff of mental health and substance use treatment facilities.

**Bisexual:** Describes an individual who has the capacity to form enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attractions to those of the same gender or to those of another gender.

**Cisgender:** Describes individuals whose gender identity is congruent with their sex assigned at birth.

**Developmentally sensitive approaches:** Clinical and educational approaches that account for the appropriate developing emotional and cognitive capacities, developmental milestones, and emerging or existing behavioral health concerns.

**Diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity:** A term to describe persons who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, those who are questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity, and others who are not cisgender or straight/heterosexual. Diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity is used interchangeably with "LGBTQI+" and "sexual and/or gender minority" (or similar language) throughout this report.

**Fa'afafine:** Describes individuals assigned male sex at birth who identify themselves as having a third gender or nonbinary in Samoan culture.

**Gay:** Describes individuals whose enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attractions are to people of the same gender.

**Gender-affirming care:** A specialized model of care used in the treatment of gender dysphoria that uses evidence-informed treatment options to promote patient health and prevent the risk of poor mental and physical health outcomes. Not all youth need to undergo medical intervention; indeed, this is often not the case. Gender-affirming care is highly individualized and focuses on the needs of each individual. Gender-affirming care may include psychoeducation about gender and sexuality (appropriate to the age and developmental level), parental and family support, social interventions, and gender-affirming medical interventions.

**Gender diverse:** A broad term that includes individuals whose gender identities and/or gender expressions are incongruent with those culturally expected based on sex assigned at birth. This includes those who are exploring their gender and is used interchangeably with "gender minority."

**Gender expression:** The external ways a person communicates their gender, such as clothing, hair, mannerisms, activities, or social roles.

**Gender fluid:** A term used to describe individuals whose gender changes over time.

**Gender identity:** A person's deep internal sense of being female, male, or another identity.

**Genderqueer:** Describes individuals who experience their gender identity and/or gender expression as falling outside the categories of man and woman.

**Intersex:** An umbrella term used to describe people with variations in sex characteristics, including chromosomes or hormones that do not fit typical definitions of male and female.

**Lesbian:** A woman who has romantic and/or sexual orientation toward women.

**LGBTQI+:** Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, those who are questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity, and others who are not cisgender or straight/heterosexual. LGBTQI+ is used interchangeably with "sexual and/or gender minority" and persons of "diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity" (or similar language) throughout this report.

**Māhū:** Describes individuals who identify as a third gender or nonbinary in Native Hawaiian culture.

**Nonbinary:** Describes individuals whose gender identity is not exclusively male or female. Individuals may identify as nonbinary or other identities, including, but not limited to, genderqueer, two-spirit, agender, bigender, and genderfluid.

**Pansexual:** Describes individuals who experience sexual, romantic, physical, and/or spiritual attraction for members of all gender identities/expressions.

**Queer:** Historically, this has been a pejorative term used to describe LGBTQI+ people, but is now used by some people, particularly younger people, whose sexual orientation is not exclusively straight/heterosexual. Some people may use queer, or more commonly genderqueer, to describe their gender identity and/or gender expression.

**Questioning:** A term used to describe individuals who are unsure about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

**Sex assigned at birth:** The assignment of male, female, or intersex when an individual is born, typically made based on the appearance of external genital anatomy.

**Sexual and/or gender minority:** Sexual and gender minority populations include, but are not limited to, individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, asexual, transgender, Two-Spirit, queer, and/or intersex. Individuals with same-sex or -gender attractions or behaviors and those with a difference in sex development are also included. Sexual and gender minority is used interchangeably with "LGBTQI+" and persons of "diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity" (or similar) throughout this report.

**Sexual orientation and gender identity change efforts (SOGI change efforts):** Practices that aim to suppress or alter an individual's sexual orientation or gender to align with heterosexual orientation, cisgender identity, and/or stereotypical gender expression. Though not therapeutic, these practices are often referred to as "conversion therapy" or "reparative therapy."
**Sexual orientation:** A person's emotional, sexual, and/or relational attraction to others.

**Transgender:** Describes individuals whose gender identity is incongruent with their sex assigned at birth.

**Two-Spirit:** Two Spirit refers to someone who is Native and expresses their gender identity or spiritual identity in indigenous, non-Western ways. This term can only be applied to a person who is Native. A Two Spirit person has specific traditional roles and responsibilities within their tribe. Not all Native LGBTQ people identify as Two Spirit.

**Victimization:** The act or process of singling someone out for cruel or unfair treatment, typically through physical or emotional abuse.

*This is not an exhaustive list of terminology relevant for LGBTQI+ youth. Additional key terms and concepts are defined at* Youth.gov.

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