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REVIEW



## Mental health for LGBTQI people: a policies' review

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### ABSTRACT

The mental health of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersexual (LGBTQI) individuals is significantly influenced by many factors such as difficulties in coming-out, poor acceptance, isolation and discrimination as well as minority-related stress. LGBTQI individuals, in fact, show a significant higher risk of mental health conditions, substance- use disorders and suicide. In addition, mental health services access may be difficult for personal and social barriers as well as a lack of adequate and specific mental health support. This review aims to assess and describe international policies, guidelines, position statements and recommendations regarding the promotion and protection of mental health rights for LGBTQI people. The search has been focussed on peer-reviewed papers, Governmental and Mental Health Association- Guidelines and Position Statements, Health Agencies - Guidelines and Position Statements (with a specific focus on mental health), LGBTQI Alliances and Foundations Publishing (with a specific focus on mental health). In addition, relevant international initiatives, and projects in the field of LGBTQI mental health will be described.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

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### KEYWORDS

LGBTQI; mental health policies; guidelines; recommendations; mental disorders; mental health interventions

## Background

This paper aims to review relevant documents, governmental and mental health guidelines, health agencies' recommendations and position statements (specifically focussed on mental health), as well as international initiatives for LGBTQI people in order to promote their rights, accessibility to mental health care services and to contrast stigma. Increasing evidence point out that LGBTQI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersexual) individuals report a higher risk of mental disorders, suicidal attempts, self-harm behaviour as well as poorer mental health outcomes (Mereish & Poteat, 2015; Mongelli et al., 2019; Plöderl & Tremblay, 2015). In particular, higher prevalence of depression and depressive symptoms

have been detected among people with same-sex sexual attraction with an Odds Ratio (OR) of 1.01 for the comparison of bisexual *vs.* gay/lesbian individuals and 2.09 comparing bisexual *vs.* heterosexual ones; similarly, the indicators of lifetime anxiety disorders/symptoms reported an OR of 1.61 for the comparison of bisexual *vs.* gay/lesbian individuals as well as 3.2 for bisexual *vs.* heterosexual ones (Ross et al., 2018; Stein et al., 2021). Suicidality is a relevant clinical and social issue since gay, lesbian, and bisexual youths are twice as likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers (Centers of Disease Control & Prevention, 2016; Klonsky et al., 2021; Rivers et al., 2018). In fact, the prevalence of lifetime suicide attempts ranges from 12.8 to 28.4% for lesbian and bisexual women

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vs. 4.3% in heterosexual women, and from 9.0 to 14.2% for gay and bisexual men vs. 4.0% in heterosexual ones; similarly the lifetime prevalence of non-suicidal self-harm broadly ranges among gay, lesbian and bisexual individuals (from 5 to 47%) as well as transgender and gender non-conforming people (from 17 to 42%) vs. heterosexual peers (from 3 to 15%) (Blosnich et al., 2016; Jackman et al., 2016). It has been also described that perceived stigma has a negative impact on mental health outcome in general, and on the risk of suicidal behaviour and depressive/anxiety symptoms specifically, whereas social network and connectedness may operate as a protective factor (Kaniuka et al., 2019; Sampogna et al., 2021). In fact, stigma and discrimination mostly based on the socio-cultural concept of *heteronormativity* are still a scourge in the modern era and fight against homophobia ought to be an immediate priority (Ventriglio et al., 2021). *Heteronormativity* is a principle according to which heterosexuality should be considered as a standard for legitimating social and sexual relationships, leading to the assumption that homosexuality, bisexuality and/or trans identities are abnormalities with a subsequent increasing of homophobia across societies (Fisher, 2020; Newcomb & Mustanski, 2010). This kind of assumptions have led some mental health practitioners, influenced by religious beliefs, to adopt a very questionable and harmful practice called 'Conversion therapy', that based on a rapid review, persists also in some European Member States (Bulgaria, Czech Rep., France, Greece, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, UK) (Sherriff et al. 2019). Allport (1954) argued that homophobia is associated with an individual inward direction and internalisation of negative attitudes with self-denigration or identification with heterosexual aggressor feelings. Internalised homophobia is considered as a mediator between stigma, discrimination, homophobic experiences, and physical and mental health consequences described among LGBTIQ people, as proposed by the *Minority Stress Model* explaining the stress deriving from the conflict between being a (social, ethnic, religious, cultural, sexual) minority and dominant social and cultural norms (Meyer, 1995).

Despite an increasing acceptance of homosexuality across American and Western European cultures and recognition of same-sex partnerships, homophobia and discrimination are still a widespread problem and minority stress related mental health consequences call for immediate action at societal-political and health-care levels (Poushter & Kent, 2020). A wide

range of homophobic and discriminatory attitudes among healthcare professionals have also been described, mostly linked to their own socio-cultural background as well as to a lack of a specific professional training on LGBTIQ mental health needs (Taskiran Eskici et al., 2021).

Consequently, there is an urgent need for specific interventions aimed to improve mental health outcomes among LGBTIQ people and increase accessibility for tailored treatments and well-trained health care professionals. In this conceptual framework, the proposal of specific international policies, mental health-care guidelines, position statements regarding the promotion and defense of mental health of sexual variants would be a priority action.

## Methods

The *Italian working-group on LGBTIQ Mental Health*, founded in 2020, aims to conduct research and promote the dissemination of knowledge in the field of LGBTIQ mental health in order to raise international awareness and promote actions in support of sexual variants and their unmet needs. Particular attention has been given to specific therapeutic interventions as well as to socio-political aspects in addressing LGBTIQ mental health needs and rights. In this paper the working group has narratively reviewed the available policies, guidelines or recommendations delivered by governmental, healthcare agencies, scientific societies regarding specific interventions in favour of LGBTIQ mental health. The nature of materials reviewed did not allow any systematic approach in the review process. Reports from socio-cultural, militant and lobbying as well non-scientific or non-governmental agencies were not included in the review. Medline, Scopus, PsycINFO, and EMBASE were searched for themed studies and documents as well as a Google-based search has been performed with no restriction on years or countries of publication. Keywords include: 'LGBT (and) mental health', 'LGBT (and) policies', 'LGBT (and) guidelines', 'LGBT (and) recommendations', 'LGBT (and) mental disorders', 'LGBT (and) prevention', 'LGBT (and) stigma', 'LGBT (and) health care professionals', 'LGBT (and) mental health interventions'. A total number of 66 documents have been selected based on their relevance, quality and reliability of sources: all disagreements on selection were discussed until consensus among authors was reached. Extracted evidences are discussed in the following paragraphs (Table 1).

**Table 1.** International policies and guidelines on LGBTQI mental health..

Source	Year of publication	Document
<i>Governmental policies and actions</i>		
The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)	2021	-Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT)
Public Health Agency of Canada	2020	-2019 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Lesbian, Gay, & Bisexual (LGB) Adults.
United Kingdom Government Equalities Office	2021	Health programs for LGBT + Black Canadians
The European Parliament	2018	National LGBT Survey and Action Plan.
	2017	-Promoting gender equality in mental health and clinical research.
	2021	-Briefing on mental health consequences of pandemic
The European Commission	2020	-Union of Equality: LGBTQI Equality Strategy 2020–2025
The Australian Government	2022	Health-direct-Free Australian health advice you can count on
The French Government	2017	Délégation Interministérielle à la Lutte contre le Racisme, l'Antisémitisme et la Haine anti-LGBT (DILRAH)
<i>General health organisations and agencies</i>		
World Health Organisation (WHO)	2015	-Ending violence and discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people.
	2017	-WHO Clinical Guidelines
	2020	-World Mental Health Day: an opportunity to kick-start a massive scale-up investment in mental health.
		-Mental health and forced displacement.
	2021	-Suicide
the Royal College of General Practitioners in Northern Ireland (RCGPNI)	2016	<i>Guidelines for the Care of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Patients in Primary Care</i>
HealthPartners	2022	Mental health challenges in the LGBTQ Community
The United Kingdom National Health Service (NHS-UK)	2020	-Mental health support if you're lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans (LGBTQ+).
	2020	- Why is the LGBTQ + community disproportionately affected by mental health problems and suicide?
Gay & Lesbian Medical Association (GLMA)	2006	-Guidelines for Care of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Patients
	2022	-Mission
The American College of Physicians	2015	Summary of a Policy Position Papers
The Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine	2013	Recommendations for Promoting the Health and Well-Being of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Adolescents: A Position Paper of the Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine.
<i>Psychiatric and Psychological associations on LGBTQI mental health</i>		
World Psychiatric Association (WPA)	2016	<i>Position Statement on Gender Identity and Same-Sex Orientation, Attraction and Behaviours</i>
The European Psychiatric Association (EPA)	2022	Position Statement on 'Conversion therapies' and LGBTQ Patients
The American Psychiatric Association (APA)	2000	-Position Statement on Issues Related to Homosexuality
	2018	-Statement on Conversion Therapies
		-Issues Related to Sexual Orientation and Gender Minority
	2020	-Diversity & Health Equity Education Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer/ Questioning
The Royal College of Psychiatrists (RcPsych)	2018	<i>Position Statement on supporting transgender and gender-diverse people</i>
The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA)	2022	<i>Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans &amp; Queer identified People and Mental Health</i>
The Association of LGBTQ + Psychiatrists (AGLP)	2020	Education and Advocacy. Position Statements.
The American Psychological Association (APA)	2022	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Health
	2015	Guidelines for psychological practice with transgender and gender nonconforming people
The Indian Psychiatric Society	2020	Position Statement of Indian Psychiatric Society regarding LGBTQ
The College of Psychiatry of Ireland	2016	Lesbian, Gay & Bisexual Patients: The Issues for Mental Health Practice
The Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI)	2022	Good Practice Guidelines for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Clients
The Australian Psychological Society (APS)	2014	APS recommends mental health practices that affirm transgender people's experiences
The British Psychological Society	2019	Guidelines for psychologists working with gender, sexuality and relationship diversity
The Hong Kong College of Psychiatrists	2011	Position Statement on Sexual Orientation
The Hong Kong Psychological Society	2012	Position Paper for Psychologists Working with Lesbians, Gays, and Bisexual Individuals
The Psychological Association of the Philippines (PAP)	2020	Statement of the PAP on Non-Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression
The Psychological Society of South Africa	2017	Practice Guidelines For Psychology Professionals Working With Sexually And Gender-Diverse People
The Singapore Psychological Society	2021	Full Statement Clarifying SPS' Post on Conversion Therapy
Wolf et al.	2015	Empfehlungen zur Psychotherapie und Beratung mit lesbischen, schwulen und bisexuellen Klient_innen
The Puerto Rico Psychological Association	2014	Estándares para el Trabajo e Intervención en Comunidades Lesbianas, Gay, Bisexuales e Identidades Trans (LGBT)
The Lebanese Psychological Association	2018	Guidelines for Psychological Practice With Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Clients – Arabic
Kaos GL Derneği, Turkey	2017	Transgender ve Toplumsal Cinsiyete Uymayan Kişilerde Psikolojik Uygulamalar Kılavuzu
The Hungarian Psychological Association, Budapest	2016	Útmutató a meleg, leszbikus, biszexuális, transznemű és gender-nonkonform kliensekkel folytatott pszichológiai munkához
Conselho Federal de Psicologia, Brazil	2017	Diretrizes para Práticas Psicológicas com Pessoas Trans e em Não Conformidade de Gênero

(continued)

Table 1. Continued.

Source	Year of publication	Document
<i>Foundations and initiatives on LGBT mental health</i>		
<i>Mind</i> [the National Association of Mental Health (NAMH)]	2022	About LGBTIQ + mental health.
The Mental Health America (MHA)	2022	LGBTQ + Communities And Mental Health.
The Mental Health Foundation	2021	Mental health statistics: LGBTIQ + people.
The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)	2021	LGBTQI
The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA)	2006	Written Contribution from ILGA-Europe Green Paper – Improving the mental health of the population: Towards a strategy on mental health for the European Union (COM (2005) 484)
AMIGAY APS	2022	Diritti Sanitari LGBT
The Human Rights Campaign (HRC)	2022	Mental Health and LGBT community.
The Trevor Project	2022	The Trevor Project
Stonewall	2022	Mental health
<i>Special issues in LGBT Mental Health</i>		
Keuroghlian et al.	2014	Out on the street: a public health and policy agenda for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth who are homeless.
Arguello	2020	Developing policies for adult sexual minorities with mental health needs in secured settings.
Livingston et al.	2020	Addressing Diversity in PTSD Treatment: Clinical Considerations and Guidance for the Treatment of PTSD in LGBTQ Populations.

### Governmental policies and actions

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) of United States (US) Department of Health and Human Services delivers an available online section reporting sources on the LGBT population including findings from national surveys, themed federal and agency initiatives (SAMHSA, 2021). In the survey conducted in 2019, the department announced that 47.4% (6.8 million) of American LGB adults was affected by severe mental illness, 18.3% (2.6 million) by substance use disorder (80% of them reporting an alcohol-related disorder) and 12.9% (1.9 million) reported both mental illness and substance abuse. 61.8% of LGBT patients affected by a serious mental illness received a treatment in 2019 while 38.2% received no treatments, with suicidality ranging between 21.2% severe suicidal thoughts, 8.6% suicidal plans, and 3.85% suicidal attempts, respectively (SAMHSA, 2020). The SAMSHA LGBT-focussed initiatives included: *a*) encouraging US States to consider LGBT needs in accessing to SAMHSA Block Grants, which are non-competitive grants for funding substance - abuse and mental health services; *b*) encouraging US States to include a sexual and gender minority focus in any funding announcement, where it is needed/appropriate; *c*) including the sexual orientation topic in the annual National Survey on Drug Use and Health; *d*) providing targeted assistance to grantees issuing ‘guidance on the implementation of the Supreme Court’s decision in *US vs. Windsor* related to the federal definitions of spouse and marriage’; *e*) developing national data collection protocols and expanding health services for LGBT individuals; *f*)

multiple training efforts for behavioural health service providers to improve service delivery and outcomes for LGBT individuals (SAMHSA, 2021). Alongside these specific supportive actions on LGBT mental health, SAMHSA supports the following initiatives: *a*) Health Insurance Enrolment Assistance for LGBT Communities and Behavioural Health Providers (tool-kit); *b*) a Practitioner’s Resource Guide: Helping Families to Support Their LGBT Children (resource guide); *c*) a Provider’s Introduction to Substance Abuse Treatment for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Individuals (manual); *d*) Ending Conversion Therapy: Supporting and Affirming LGBTQ Youth (research report); *e*) LGBT Training Curricula for Behavioural Health and Primary Care Practitioners (curricular training); *f*) Providing Services and Supports for Youth who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex or Two-Spirit (practice brief for policymakers, administrators, and health providers); *g*) Top Health Issues for LGBT Populations Information & Resource Kit (for health professionals); *h*) Healthy People 2020-Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, & Transgender Health (webpage about LGBT Health); *i*) Stop Bullying (federal webpage including specific information on LGBT) (SAMHSA, 2021).

Public Health Agency of Canada, which is part of the federal health portfolio of Government of Canada, aims to promote prevention of diseases and injuries, providing information to support informed decision making (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2021a). In 2021, a press release of the agency announced a governmental initiative for supporting health programs for LGBT + Black Canadians. According to the

document, 40% of Canadians have reported mental health issues in the last years, particularly during the COVID-19 (Coronavirus related disease- 2019) pandemic, and in particular groups facing unique mental health challenges because of racism, discrimination such as blacks and LGBTs (Williams & Etkins, 2021). In the release, the Minister of Health announced an investment of up to \$1.28 million for funding three organisations with the purpose to promote mental health and wellbeing among Black LGBTQI+ citizens (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2021b).

In January 2022, the United Kingdom Government Equalities Office updated the database of documents collection from the National LGBT Survey and Action Plan (Government UK 2022a). In 2018, 23.5% of LGBT surveyed population had accessed mental health services for the onset of mental health issues and 8.1% tried to access unsuccessfully (Government UK 2022b).

In February 2017, The European Parliament has delivered a document published on the *Official Journal of the European Union* promoting gender equality in mental health and clinical research (European Parliament, 2017). The document proposes the following actions focussed, among others, on LGBT people: EP calls a) the Member States, and local authorities to ensure that their mental health strategies address the mental health challenges faced by LGBTI people, taking account of the specific needs of lesbians and bisexual and transgender persons when developing health policies, programmes and protocols; b) to increase the collection of regular data on mental health at EU (European Union) and national level, and in particular on the prevalence of depression, with the data collected being disaggregated at least by sex, gender, age group and socio-economic status and including sexual and reproductive health indicators; c) to ensure that prevention strategies specifically target women who are at risk of intersectional discrimination such as Roma women, women with disabilities, lesbians and bisexual women, migrants and women refugees and women living in poverty, as well as transgender and intersex people. In April 2020 the European Commission released a communication to the European Parliament, Council and Committees, on 'Union of Equality: LGBTQI Equality Strategy 2020–2025' (European Commission, 2020). The strategy proposed actions across four pillars: a) tackling discrimination against LGBTQI people; b) ensuring LGBTQI people's safety; c) building LGBTQI inclusive societies; d) leading the call for LGBTQI equality around the world. Among

recommendations to ensure LGBTQI people safety, the commission calls action for protecting and promoting LGBTQI people's physical and mental health: in particular, it proposes the abolition of particular harmful practices such as intersex genital mutilation, conversion practices, forced abortions and sterilisations with a high impact on physical and mental health. Measures against LGBT hate speech, crime and violence in different settings are also encouraged (European Commission, 2020). In addition, the European Parliament has released a briefing on mental health consequences of pandemic, with a special attention to LGBTI people: the document reports these individuals may experience higher levels of pandemic-related mental distress with adjunctive self-isolation, difficult circumstances, reduction of mental services; it calls for a re-establishment of mental health services with a special focus on the burden of mental health changes due to the pandemic (European Parliament, 2021).

The Australian Government has released a webpage entitled 'health-direct, Free Australian health advice you can count on' advising LGBT people facing: a) homophobic or transphobic attitudes from others; b) internalised phobias or self-image; c) trauma from bullying; d) minority stress (Australian Government, 2020). A set of organisations with their websites and phone-numbers are listed in the dedicated webpage (i.e. 'Head-to-head', 'Reach out.com', 'Suicide Call Back Service' etc.).

The French Government in 2017 launched an ambitious action plan to fight hate against LGBT people and included the reduction of mental health and suicide as relevant aims of these actions (DILRAH, 2017).

### General health organisations and agencies

In August 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has released a plan of initiatives and events for celebrating the World Mental Health Day (10<sup>th</sup> of October 2020). In particular, on October 9, a virtual march entitled '*The 24-hour March for Mental Health*' has been conducted online focussing on different topics including mental health among special populations such as LGBTI (WHO, 2020). More recently, in August 2021, the WHO recognised the need of addressing barriers to receiving mental health among persons with disabilities, migrants, refugees and LGBTQ people (WHO, 2021a). In defense of sexual minorities and preventing discrimination, hate and violence against LGBT, as part of leading causes of

mental distress, the organisation joined an unprecedented joint-statement released by 12 United Nations entities: International Labour Organisation (ILO), The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), United Nations sexual and reproductive health agency (UNFPA), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), United States Women, World Food Programme (WFP), World Health Organisation (WHO) (WHO, 2015). In addition, in 2017 the Organisation has approved the new WHO guidelines for responding to children and adolescents who have been sexually abused and recommended specific actions for addressing the special needs of boys and girls with additional vulnerabilities, such as LGBTI adolescents (WHO, 2017). More recently, in 2021 the WHO has warned a global increase of suicides, suicidal attempts especially among vulnerable groups who experience discrimination, such as refugees, migrants, indigenous people, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons (WHO, 2021b).

In March 2016, the Royal College of General Practitioners in Northern Ireland released the *Guidelines for the Care of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Patients in Primary Care*. In this document, many aspects of LGBT health are discussed and mental health as well as substance abuse-related issues are warned: guidelines-group points out that sexual variants report an increased risk of depression, self-harm, suicidal ideation as well as substance abuse, especially alcohol; general practitioners are invited to screen such disorders among their patients and improve accessibility to appropriate services, when needed; the guidelines also remark that conversion therapy is ineffective, inappropriate and potentially damaging (RCGPNI, 2016).

*HealthPartners* is a US integrated, non-profit healthcare provider and health insurance company. In the official webpage, a specific slot is dedicated to mental health among LGBT people with the aim of raising awareness: the company encourages active listening, inclusive pronouns and language terms in referring to sexual variant people, support, respect, acceptance as well as promoting fairness and opportunity for all (Health Partners, 2022).

The United Kingdom National Health Service (NHS-UK) has delivered a set of informational documents and webpages on mental health issues of

LGBTQI people. In particular, in July 2020, the NHS provided a list of conditions deserving therapy and specific support: difficulty in accepting sexual orientation; coping with other people's reactions to sexuality; body-feeling not reflecting the biological gender (gender dysphoria); transitioning; low self-esteem; self-harm; suicidal thoughts; depression; coping with bullying and discrimination; anger, isolation or rejection from family, friends or the community; fear of violence (NHS-UK, 2020b). Additionally, a set of supportive organisations and services (with their accessible internet links) are proposed alongside the help of general practitioners: Gendered Intelligence; Consortium LGBT; LGBT Foundation; London Friend; Mind LGBTQ; Pink Therapy; Stonewall Find LGBT mental health; Switchboard LGBT + Helpline; etc. (NHS-UK, 2020a). Similarly, the Greater Manchester Mental Health of NHS Foundation Trust in 2020 updated a release concerning the LGBT mental health problems and suicide in the community. The document proposes a set of emerging risk factors for mental health issues, including hate crime against LGBT, bullying and discrimination in healthcare: in 2018, in fact, parliament's Women and Equalities Committee accused the NHS of treating the needs of LGBTQ+ people as '*less important*' than the rest of the population (NHS-UK, 2020b). In addition, a list of supportive resources are proposed: Albert Kennedy Trust; Stonewall; the Proud Trust; IMAAN (for Muslims self-identified as LGBT); Rainbow Noir; Galop; etc. (NHS-UK, 2020b).

GLMA, Gay & Lesbian Medical Association, is a US organisation committed 'to ensuring health equity for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ) and all sexual and gender minority (SGM) individuals, and equality for LGBTQ/SGM health professionals in their work and learning environments. To achieve this mission, GLMA utilises the scientific expertise of its diverse multidisciplinary membership to inform and drive advocacy, education, and research' (GLMA, 2022). In 2006, GLMA released a panel of *Guidelines for Care of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Patients* addressing the mental health and substance-abuse issues related to sexual orientation and gender expression: guidelines invite to explore these issues, provide information on supportive trails and care as well as address stigma and homophobic attitudes (GLMA, 2006).

The American College of Physicians has released an interesting Summary of a Policy Position Papers in 2015 (Daniel & Butkus, 2015), addressing, among others, disparities among LGBT people in mental and

physical health. The working group has specified the following positions: *a)* promotion of non-discrimination and anti-harassment policies in medical schools, hospitals, physicians' offices, and other medical facilities; *b)* inclusion of comprehensive transgender health care services public and private health settings; *c)* inclusion of a larger definition of family, also for those based on same-sex marriages or unions; *d)* inclusion of a caregiver regardless their sexual orientation and relationship with patients; *e)* promotion of same-sex marriages and unions in order to prevent negative impact on discrimination and mental health; *f)* research and data collection on LGBT mental health and disparities; *g)* inclusion of LGBT issues in the curricula of medical students, residents and in continuing medical education programs; *h)* contrast to conversion or reparative therapies.

Some other medical associations have addressed LGBT health-related issues with an interest on mental health, even if not providing specific guidance or recommendation, such as the British Medical Association (BMA) (2022) and the World Medical Association (WMA) (2015).

### Psychiatric and psychological associations on LGBTQI mental health

The World Psychiatric Association (WPA) published in October 2016 the WPA *Position Statement on Gender Identity and Same-Sex Orientation, Attraction and Behaviours* (Bhugra et al., 2016). This statement includes: *a)* the recognition of same rights and responsibilities for LGBT people, including equal access to health care; *b)* the evidence that the same-sex sexual orientation does not imply any personal or psychological dysfunction and it should be accepted across cultures; *c)* the recognition of same-sex attraction as a normal variant of human sexuality as well as the harm of conversion therapies; *d)* the recognition of social stigma and discrimination of LGBT people with significant consequent distress and mental health issues; *e)* the need to decriminalise same-sex sexual orientation and behaviour, support to anti-bullying legislation, anti-discrimination, employment and housing laws, immigration law, hate-crime as well as violence punishment; *f)* the need for further research and development of evidence-based medical and social interventions, including training of mental health-care professionals (Bhugra et al., 2016).

The European Psychiatric Association (EPA) has released a position statement in defense of the mental health of LGBT people. In 2022 the Position

Statement on 'Conversion therapies' and LGBTQ Patients encourages legislation banning such interventions, which may constitute a significant risk of causing harm and violating human rights. Similar positions have been taken by the WPA (Bhugra et al., 2016), the World Medical Association (WMA, 2013), the American Psychiatric Association (APA, 2000b) and the German Psychiatric Association in 2013 (DGPPN, 2013).

The APA has released a set of documents addressing various aspects of LGBT mental health. Several of them address issues related to homosexuality and discuss risk factors related to stigma and being a sexual minority. In the *Position Statement on Issues Related to Homosexuality* (APA, 2000a), the WPA points out that the same-sex attraction implies no impairment in judgement, reliability, and capabilities, as well as that causes of variation may be multifactorial and not to be considered as pathological. It is of note that already in 1973 the APA promoted the exclusion of such sexual variations from the diagnostic categories to reduce stigma and pathologisation of sexual behaviours and orientation. Also, the Association bans any form of therapeutic interventions aimed to change sexual orientation, promotes specific support for LGBT people mental health needs and approves same-sex unions and condemns any form of discriminations (APA, 2000a). More recently, the APA published a statement on Conversion Therapies, affirming that: *a)* the attempts to change individuals' sexual orientation should be inhibited; *b)* identities of these with diverse gender expression should be respected; *c)* psychotherapies for affirming individuals' orientation and aimed to improve psychological wellbeing should be promoted; *d)* legislation should prohibit practice of reparative or conversion therapies (APA, 2018). In 2020, the APA position statement on *Issues Related to Sexual Orientation and Gender Minority Status* reconfirmed the theoretical assumption of the society regarding the integration of same-sex oriented individuals in the society, the condemn of discrimination and conversion therapies and the promotion of specific supports in order to improve mental health and wellbeing in LGBT people (APA, 2020). Moreover, the APA provides a dedicated webpage to LGBT mental health entitled *Diversity & Health Equity Education Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer/Questioning*. This page reports a set of guides, toolkits and learning modules focussed on different aspects related to LGBT mental health. Guides include Best Practice Highlights: Working with LGBTQ Patients; Mental Health Facts for Bisexual

Populations; Mental Health Facts for Gay Populations; Mental Health Facts on Questioning/Queer Populations; Mental Health Facts for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning (LGBTQ); Stress & Trauma Toolkit for Treating LGBTQ in a Changing Political and Social Environment (APA, 2022b). Toolkits specifically include: A Guide for Working with Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Patients; Intimate Partner Violence: A Guide for Psychiatrists Treating LGBTQ IPV (Intimate Partner Violence) Survivors; Stress & Trauma Toolkit for Treating LGBTQ in a Changing Political and Social Environment (APA, 2022b). All sections are highly informative and may include updated information, definitions, explanatory models, recommendations, and tools for assessing or approaching solutions.

The Royal College of Psychiatrists (RcPsych) in 2018 (reviewed in 2021), within the *Equality Action Plan*, has proposed a *Position Statement on supporting transgender and gender-diverse people* supporting the following actions: *a)* training doctors and psychiatrists on specific competences in supporting the wellbeing of transgender and gender diverse people; *b)* professional education and appropriate care and treatment for LGBT patients; *c)* promoting more research in the field of LGBT mental health; *d)* support appropriate staff and policies for the integration of LGBT in the school setting; *e)* de-classify any term or concept of pathologization of sexual variations in the current diagnostic manuals (RcPsych, 2018). Additionally, the society has been involved in the celebration activities of the *Pride*, an initiative to contrast discrimination and promote equality.

The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA, 2022) has a webpage dedicated to *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans & Queer identified People and Mental Health* reporting information for readers and health providers delivered in collaboration with *Rainbow Health Ontario*, a provincial organisation which seeks to promote the health of Ontario's LGBTQ communities. According to these recommendations, health providers should plan: initiative to increase awareness on LGBT mental health; contrast internalised discrimination among LGBT people; promote understanding of LGBT physical and mental health unmet needs; promote their family acceptance; promote appropriate training of professionals dealing with LGBT patients; increase familiarity with resources to support LGBT people (CMHA, 2022).

The Association of LGBTQ + Psychiatrists (AGLP), is defined as a community of psychiatrists that

educates and advocates on LGBTQ mental health issues. A number of position statements have been released over the years, including the recognition of civil rights for LGBT people (same-sex marriage, adoption and co-parenting, religious liberty, access to care, LGBT in the military, diversity training), contrast to conversion therapies and anti-trans legislation (AGLP, 2020).

Finally, the American Psychological Association (APA, 2022a) proposed a detailed review of documents and information on LGBT health and mental health providing a list of topics regarding different populations (Adolescents, HIV patients, Older adults, LGBT families, ethnic minorities and women). A review of Government Agencies connected to LGBT health is also provided. Among others, interesting documents are discussed as the following: gender-affirmation treatments among adolescents; ending conversion-therapies; recommendations for promoting the health and well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender adolescents: a position paper of the Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine (2013). In this last paper, the Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine (2013), supports the following positions: *a)* the need of a focussed training for all health-care providers involved with adolescents; *b)* the consideration of LGBT teens' reaction to social stigma and non-acceptance; *c)* the caution in assigning labels to an adolescent's sexual orientation since it is a dynamic construct; *d)* the promotion of family connectedness and support; *e)* the support to community and school interventions to prevent and contrast victimisation; *f)* the promotion of antidiscrimination policies and guidelines; *g)* the release of supportive policies to ensure physical and mental well-being for LGBT incarcerated adolescents; *h)* the contrast to the practice of reparative therapy; *i)* the promotion of research and education in this field.

In addition, the American Psychological Association in 2015 released the 'Guidelines for Psychological Practice With Transgender and Gender Nonconforming People': this document is primarily intended for clinical psychologists, involved in research, or engaged in education or training; it includes 16 guidelines aimed at helping professionals better understand the lifespan development, stigma, discrimination and barriers to care faced by transgender and gender nonconforming people. The document has been proposed in the Italian Version by Valerio et al. (2018), as part of publications by the Order of Psychologists of Campania Region, Italy. Similarly, Lingiardi and Nardelli (2014), published the

'Guidelines for the psychological consult and psychotherapy for LGB people'. This document provides to psychologists and psychotherapists: *a*) an historical excursus on the de-pathologization of homosexuality; *b*) recommendations on the psychological consult and psychotherapy of LGBT patients; *c*) four appendices including the American Psychiatric Association declaration of exclusion of homosexuality from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders; releases by the Pan American Health Organisation on homosexuality and evidences of the American Psychological Association regarding the inappropriateness of conversion therapy.

In June 2020, The Indian Psychiatric Society (IPS, 2020), delivered a Position Statement on LGBTQ patients pointing out: *a*) homosexuality is not a disease; *b*) all forms of treatment and therapy aimed to change the sexual orientation are based on erroneous principles; *c*) all conversion therapies should be banned.

More recently, the Singapore Psychological Society (SPS, 2021), published a *Full Statement Clarifying SPS' Post on Conversion Therapy*. The Society encourages affirmative therapies and does not recognise the efficacy and benefit of conversion therapy. This position has been also clarified by the workgroup of the Hong Kong Psychological Society (HKPS) in the Position Paper for Psychologists working with LGB Individuals (Hong Kong Psychological Society 2012), inspired by the Position Statement of the Hong Kong College of Psychiatrists on Sexual Orientation (Hong Kong College of Psychiatrists 2011), as well as by Psychological Association of the Philippines (PAP) in the Statement of the PAP on Non-Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression (PAP, 2020). The Australian Psychological Society (APS, 2014) has released a set of documents regarding the LGB Practice, promoting the following therapeutic responses: *a*) affirm a person's gender; *b*) challenge negative attitudes towards gender diversity; *c*) discuss referral options for gender-affirming treatments if desired; *d*) advocate for the support needs of transgender people.

The College of Psychiatry of Ireland, in collaboration with GLEN (Gay and Lesbian Equality Network) and the National Office for Suicide Prevention, has developed guidelines to inform psychiatrists of what they need to know when providing mental health care to lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) persons. These guidelines include a detailed report on the risk factors for mental health among LGBT people as well as a review of literature on mental morbidity

and mental health issues in this vulnerable population. Among recommendations for providing adequate mental health service, we summarise the following: *a*) being aware of LGBT mental health specific stressors (questioning sexual orientation, rejection, fear of coming out, lack of acceptance, homophobic bullying, discrimination, being an older LGB individual, loss of opportunities, bereavement, isolation and loneliness, hiding and secrecy, being exposed to reparative/conversion therapy); *b*) do not assume that everyone is heterosexual; *c*) respond supportively when patient discloses being LGB; *d*) challenge anti-gay bias and take a gay-affirmative approach; *e*) ensure that all documentation and assessments are LGB inclusive (The College of Psychiatry of Ireland, 2016). Similarly, the Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI, 2022) published the *Good Practice Guidelines for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Clients*, in collaboration with GLEN (Gay and Lesbian Equality Network) and the HSE National Office for Suicide Prevention. This document aims to inform psychologists on the following topics: *a*) sexual orientation language and concepts; *b*) mental health issues among LGBT; *c*) recommendations in the practice with LGBT clients; *d*) LGBT affirming therapy; *e*) glossary of terms, list of LGBT services in Ireland and websites.

The British Psychological Society (2019), published the *Guidelines for psychologists working with gender, sexuality and relationship diversity*, addressing the following topics: *a*) psychology and gender, sexuality, and relationship diversity; *b*) the socio-political context and attitudes towards gender, sexuality, and relationship diversity; *c*) gender, sexuality, and relationship diverse identities and practices; *d*) families and friends; *e*) diversity and intersectionality; *f*) lifespan development; *g*) Education, training, and personal development.

In 2017, the Psychological Society of South Africa, released the *Practice Guidelines For Psychology Professionals Working With Sexually And Gender-Diverse People*, aimed to improve professional understanding, awareness of normative social contexts, counteracting stigma - discrimination and violence, expertise in non-conforming family structures and relationships as well as knowledge on affirmative therapy (Psychological Society of South Africa, 2017).

Other guidelines have been delivered by psychological societies and are available even if not translated to English, as following: The Lebanese Psychological Association (2018), *Guidelines for Psychological Practice With Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Clients - Arabic*; Wolf et al. (2015), *Empfehlungen zur*

*Psychotherapie und Beratung mit lesbischen, schwulen und bisexuellen Klient\_innen* [Recommendations for Psychotherapy and Counselling with Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Clients]; Hungarian Psychological Association and Budapest (2016), *Útmutató a meleg, leszbikus, biszexuális, transznemű és gender-nonkonform kliensekkel folytatott pszichológiai munkához*; Conselho Federal de Psicologia and Brazil (2017), *Diretrizes para Práticas Psicológicas com Pessoas Trans e em Não Conformidade de Gênero*; Puerto Rico Psychological Association/Asociación de Psicología de Puerto Rico (Puerto Rico Psychological Association 2014), *Estándares para el Trabajo e Intervención en Comunidades Lesbianas, Gay, Bisexuales e Identidades Trans (LGBT)*; Kaos GL Derneği and Turkey (2017), *Transgender ve Toplumsal Cinsiyete Uymayan Kişilerde Psikolojik Uygulamalar Kılavuzu*.

### Foundations and initiatives on LGBT mental health

Beyond the official position statements of scientific societies and governmental agencies, a variety of foundations, associations and initiatives have been developed in the last decades.

*Mind* is a mental health charity, founded in England in 1946 as the National Association of Mental Health (NAMH), offering information and advice to people with mental health problems in order to raise public awareness and understanding of mental health issues. In particular, it delivers a webpage reporting information and advices on LGBT mental health issues (Mind, 2022). The Mental Health America (MHA), founded in 1909, is the US leading community-based non-profit dedicated to addressing the needs of those living with mental illness and promoting the overall mental health of all. The foundation provides a detailed webpage including epidemiological data on LGBT mental health, societal issues, insurance and access to services, treatments issues and educational material (MHA, 2022). Similarly, the Mental Health Foundation, founded for supporting prevention in mental health, delivers mental health statistic and supportive information and advice for LGBT people suffering from mental health issues (MHF, 2021). The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) is the US largest grassroots mental health organisation providing advocacy, education, support and public awareness so that all individuals and families affected by mental illness can build better lives. Values of the organisation are hope, inclusion,

empowerment, compassion and fairness; a particular concern is directed to LGBT community and those members affected by mental illness (NAMI, 2021).

The the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA) is a worldwide federation of more than 1,700 organisations from over 160 countries and territories campaigning for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex human rights. ILGA includes some regional sections: Pan Africa ILGA, ILGA Asia, ILGA-Europe, ILGA-Latin America Continent, ILGA North American and the Caribbean, ILGA Oceania. The association has actively followed various initiatives in support of mental health around the world and provides regular updates on the web. Among other documents, in May 2006, ILGA-Europe released a written contribution (specifically on mental health) to the *Green Paper – Improving the mental health of the population: Towards a strategy on mental health for the European Union (COM (2005) 484)*, of the European Commission- Health & Consumer Protection, Directorate General (EC, 2006). ILGA-Europe comments to the release included the following priorities: *a)* building mental health in infants, children and adolescents, reducing discrimination and bullying among LGBT young people and in the school-setting; *b)* promoting mental health in the working population; *c)* promoting mental health in older people, especially LGBT vulnerable individuals; *d)* targeting vulnerable groups in society including LGBT people and eliminating gender stereotypes in the EU gender roadmap; *e)* possible initiatives at community level to promote mental health for LGBT subjects; *f)* improving information and knowledge on mental health and mental health for sexual-variants (ILGA, 2006).

In Italy, AMIGAY APs (2022) is an association of LGBTQI and LGBQI-friendly health professionals promoting health and mental health rights as following: *a)* promote an Inclusive Data Collection in the Electronic Healthcare Systems and Clinical Databases; *b)* promote the adherence of National Healthcare System to LGBTI Health Rights; *c)* promote prevention and information on HIV and Hepatitis vaccination; *d)* promote expert centres for Intersex, Gender Variant and Transgender; *e)* support LGBTI health care workers; *f)* denial of Intersex Neonatal Mutilation or Conversion Therapy; *g)* promote Training into Assertive therapy; *h)* promote Training in ‘Sex & Gender Orienting’ and ‘LGBTI Gender Medicine’; *i)* specific prevention strategy on LGBTI mental health burden, substance abuse, familial and scholar support and Scholar Sex Orienting Lessons;

l) social assistance to expelled LGBTI (e.g. homeless) and geriatric patients.

The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) is an initiative for the LGBTQI families aimed to contrast fear and promote equality under the law. A specific panel of information on mental health issues in the LGBT community has been included in the HRC website (HRC, 2022).

Other initiatives and awareness on LGBT mental health have been promoted by *Stonewall*, a team of bold, passionate people fighting for the equity and freedom of LGBT people, and a pamphlet has been published on their website (Stonewall, 2022). Similarly, the Trevor Project - an American non-profit organisation founded in 1998, delivering efforts for suicide prevention among LGBTQ people - provides a toll-free telephone number, a confidential service as well as trained counsellors; it offers help for crisis intervention and guidance and resources to parents and educators (The Trevor Project, 2022).

### Special issues in LGBT mental health

Some spontaneous working groups have proposed recommendations regarding the mental health issues of special LGBT people, such as homeless, those in secured setting, and those affected by Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Keuroghlian et al. (2014) proposed a public health and policy agenda for homeless LGBT young people. After a detailed report on the risk of homelessness and mental illness among LGBT young people, they provided a set of recommendations: *a)* standardised assessment for mental health, substance-abuse, HIV-related problems; *b)* best practice guidelines (for promoting appropriateness, respectfulness, confidentiality, competency, inclusiveness); *c)* integrated mental health services for these vulnerable people; *d)* promotion of HIV testing and condom use; *e)* internet-based initiatives for raising awareness; *f)* critical research and policies.

Arguello (2020) reviewed the following policies on sexual-variant adults suffering from mental health issues in secured setting: *a)* the National Centre for Transgender Equality (NCTE) published *Policies to Increase Safety and Respect for Transgender Prisoners* in 2018; *b)* the National Institute of Correction developed a guide on *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex Persons in Custodial Settings* in 2015; *c)* the Joint Commission (TJC) published *Advancing Effective Communication, Cultural Competence, and Patient-and-Family Centred Care for Lesbian, Gay,*

*Bisexual and Transgender Community: A Field Guide* in 2011. They all recommend: *a)* the endorsement of environmental, behavioural and social procedures to reduce stigma, prejudice, discrimination and harassment; *b)* the increase of personal safety and access to medical and mental health services; *c)* the promotion of dignity, privacy, respect, fairness and compassion; *d)* the implementation of behavioural and environmental interventions that can positively impact the mental health of LGBT residents (Arguello, 2020).

Livingston et al. (2020) pointed out that a gap in assessing and treating PTSD has been described in LGBT people which may experience a difficult access to services or poor training or cultural awareness regarding their sexual orientations among clinicians. The group proposed assessment and screening recommendations including the minority stress issues and suggested strategies for integrating existing treatments for PTSD among LGBT patients. Alongside the available tools for screening and detecting PTSD, the specific assessment may include the following ratings: Everyday

Discrimination Scale; Major Experiences of Discrimination Scale; Chronic Work Discrimination and Harassment: Abbreviated; Gender Minority Stress and Resilience Measure; Perceptions of Local Stigma Questionnaire; Transgender Adaptation and Integration Measure; Heterosexist Harassment, Rejection, and Discrimination Scale; Daily Heterosexist Experiences Questionnaire; Measure of Gay Related Stress; Internalised Homophobia Scale; LGBT People of Colour Microaggressions Scale; Conflict in Allegiances; Homonegative Microaggressions Scale; Sexual Orientation Concealment Scale; Outness Inventory. Experience categories to be specifically investigated in this special population may be: trauma; discrimination; microaggressions; minority stress. Among targeted treatments, the authors proposed: Effective Skills to Empower Effective Men (ESTEEM), a transdiagnostic treatment aimed to target minority stress and associated negative health consequences; cognitive-behavioural therapy for trauma and self-care (CBT-TSC); the Unified Protocol for Transdiagnostic Treatment of Emotional Disorders and focussed on promoting emotion regulation (Chaturvedi & Parameshwaran, 2020; Livingston et al., 2020; Wright, 2020).

### Discussion and conclusions

The review of policies, recommendations or initiatives on LGBT mental health highlight an emerging

interest and attention on the topic both at governmental and scientific and health agencies level. Several foundations and non-profit associations have been contributing actively to the international debate and supported anti-sigma and awareness-raising interventions. This review aimed to summarise the available documents in this field to provide an updated framework for a larger discussion among readers, mental health professionals and, above all, care-providers and policy makers. In summary, emerging areas of concern and interest have been identified as the following: the need of initiatives against stigma and LGBT discrimination; a useful synergy between governments, LGBT rights organisations, mental health associations for improving accessibility to mental health care; the promotion of educational trainings on LGBT mental health among medical students and health professional; the development of specific assessments and treatments; the contrast to conversion and reparative therapies; the promotion of research and data collection on LGBT mental health. The Italian Working-Group on LGBTQI Mental Health endorses these programmatic lines and aims to promote research, data collection and initiatives to improve the knowledge on LGBT mental health, the standards and accessibility of care for patients. It is of interest that guidelines are not currently assessing interventions given limited trials and evidences from the literature. Also, some specific topics of interest, e.g. smoking alcohol cessation, domestic violence, etc., are not specifically discussed even if these issues may be of concern in LGBTQI as well as heterosexual populations. Thus, this review may suggest further research and efforts to identify specific actions to improve the supply of health for LGBTQI individuals and reduce the impact of stigma and minority-stress through the national territory (see other contributions in this special issue).

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