

## Mental Health Issues for GLBT People

Mental illness can affect persons of any age, race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, or socioeconomic status. 1 in 5 adults and 1 in 10 children lives with a mental illness. Mental illnesses are biological, and with treatment adults and children can and do recover. Mental illnesses are not the result of personal weakness, lack of character or poor upbringing.

Being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender is **not** a mental illness. However, GLBT people face unique risks to their mental health. Many face discrimination from coworkers, family members and peers, as well as society at large. Recent studies indicate that experiencing social discrimination is a strong predictor of mental health issues<sup>1</sup>.

Some studies have shown that GLBT people are 2.5 times more likely than straight people to experience mental illness. In particular, GLBT adults are more likely to report depression, panic and anxiety disorders, and substance abuse. GLBT youth are especially at risk, being 20-40% more likely than their straight peers to attempt suicide, and more likely to experience anxiety and depression<sup>2</sup>. Being a GLBT person of color, or having a disability or living in poverty, means facing multiple levels of discrimination. In addition, people who both identify as GLBT and live with a mental illness face double stigma; being unable to open up in treatment or support group settings negatively impacts the therapeutic experience and recovery.

NAMI-MN's mission is to champion justice, dignity, and respect for all people affected by mental illness. Through education, advocacy, and support, we strive to eliminate the pervasive stigma of mental illness, affect positive changes in the mental health system, and increase the public and professional understanding of mental illness. NAMI-MN rejects "reparative" therapies which deny the natural diversity of sexual orientation and gender identity, and supports GLBT-affirming therapy, treatment and support groups.

NAMI-MN holds peer-led support groups for people living with mental illness, and for families, friends and loved ones of people living with a mental illness. These groups are open to people of all sexual orientations and gender identities, and you are warmly welcome.

If you, your partner or a family member is experiencing a mental illness, **you are not alone.**

For more information about support, education or advocacy, contact NAMI-MN.

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<sup>1</sup> Diaz, RM., Ayala, G., Bein, E., Jenne, J. & Marin, B.V. (2001). The impact of homophobia, poverty and racism on the mental health of gay and bisexual Latino men: findings from 3 US cities. *American Journal of Public Health*, 91(6), 927-932.

<sup>2</sup> Kitts, R. L. (2005). Gay adolescents and suicide: Understanding the association. *Adolescence*, 40(159), 621-628.