

Black gay men, lesbians, have fewer mental disorders than whites

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According to a study conducted at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health among lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations, blacks and Latinos do not have more mental disorders than whites.

Based on the theory that stress related to prejudice would increase risk for mental disorders, researchers typically expect that black lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals face prejudice related to both racism and homophobia and therefore would have more disorders than their white counterparts. Contrary to this expectation, however, the Mailman School study found that black lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals had significantly fewer disorders than white individuals. Latinos had a prevalence of disorders similar to whites. The findings will be reported in the November 2007 *American Journal of Public Health*.

"These findings suggest that black lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals have effective ways to cope with prejudice related to racism and homophobia" noted Ilan H. Meyer, PhD, associate professor of clinical Sociomedical Sciences at the Mailman School of Public Health and principal investigator of the study.

The study of 388 white, black and Latino New York City residents aged 18 – 59 who identified themselves as lesbian, gay, or bisexual is the first population-based study of its kind to examine the prevalence of mental disorders among black and Latino, versus white, lesbians, gay men, and bisexual individuals.

By contrast to the findings about mental disorders, more black and Latino gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals than whites reported a history of serious suicide attempts. “Because these suicide attempts occurred at an early age, typically during the teenage, we can speculate that they coincided with a coming-out period and were related to the social disapprobation afforded to lesbian, gay, and bisexual identities,” Dr. Meyer said. The findings were consistent with the notion that these problems may be more potent among lesbians, gay men, and bisexual youth in Latino and other communities of color. “In the absence of higher prevalence of mood disorders in this population, these findings pose challenge to mental health professionals” said Dr. Meyer. “If this is indeed the case, public health professionals should address what prevention efforts are required to reduce suicide risk among lesbian, gay, and bisexual youths in these communities” Dr. Meyer said.

The study also found that, across all race/ethnic groups, younger cohorts of lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals (those in age groups 18 – 29 and 30 – 44 as compared with 45 – 59 years old) had lower prevalence of almost all mental disorders categories, and the difference was statistically significant for mood disorders. Younger cohorts also had fewer serious suicide attempts than did older cohorts (but this was statistically significant only for the middle cohort).

“The finding regarding younger cohorts of lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals is consistent with social stress theories that predicted that the liberalization of social attitudes toward homosexuality over the past few decades can lead to a decline in stress and related mental disorders and suicide among lesbians, gay men, and bisexual individuals” said Dr. Meyer.

Source: Columbia University

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