

# Prejudice linked to depression, anxiety in gay and bisexual black men

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The harassment, discrimination and negative feelings about homosexuality that black gay and bisexual men often experience can contribute significantly to mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety, a small new study finds.

“Racism, homo-negativity and the experience of violence and discrimination contribute significantly to mental disorder burden and morbidity in this community,” said Louis F. Graham, DrPH, lead study

author and a Kellogg Health Scholars postdoctoral fellow in the School of Public Health at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.

Using online surveys, Graham and colleagues asked 54 African-American gay or [bisexual men](#) about [depression](#) and anxiety symptoms and how often they experienced harassment and discrimination in the community and at work. The men also answered questions regarding their feelings about their own sexuality.

The study appears in the latest issue of the journal *Depression Research and Treatment*.

Thirty percent of men in the study reported depression and 33 percent reported anxiety, which is higher than rates for people in the general population. Discrimination and harassment were extremely common, with 95 percent of the study participants experiencing them at least once in the last year. Eleven percent of participants said they experience discrimination and harassment weekly. Most of the men said that both race and sexuality played a part in their experiences of discrimination and [harassment](#).

The researchers also found that men who reported higher levels of internalized homo-negativity — feelings of shame or disapproval of their same-sex sexual orientation — proved more likely to feel depressed or anxious.

“If we think about a whole pie that represents factors that may cause depression and anxiety among this population, findings suggest that discrimination and internalized homo-negativity make up over 50 percent of the pie,” Graham said. However, he also said that the factors they examined were not exhaustive and they did not follow the study group over time.

Ramani Durvasula, Ph.D., an associate professor at California State University, Los Angeles, and a licensed clinical psychologist, said that the study findings were not “bringing much new to the table,” due to the small number of study participants and the fact that the authors surveyed the group only at one period in time, rather than following them long-term. She had no affiliation with the study.

“Discrimination in any form is stressful and can be a risk factor for developing symptoms of depression and anxiety. In addition, depression and anxiety can make perceptions of racism, classism and other forms of [discrimination](#) far worse,” Durvasula said.

Graham said that the findings indicate that black gay and bisexual men experiencing [anxiety](#) or depression are not alone in their feelings.

“We sometimes think of mental disorders or [mental health](#) problems as being experienced on a very individual level, and that they’re caused by or related to personal shortcomings or specific situations or incidents. This study shows that mental disorders and mental health problems occur at a community level,” Graham said.

**More information:** Graham LF, et al. Factors influencing depression and anxiety among black sexual minority men. *Depression Research and Treatment*, ID 587984, 2011.

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