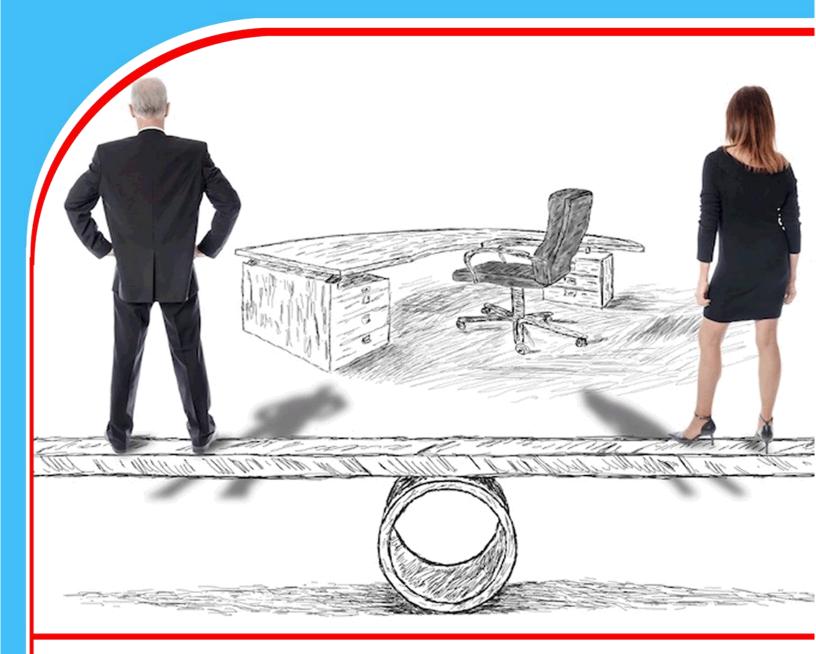
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Intersectionality and Mental Health Outcomes among LGBTQ+ Refugees in United States



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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the study was to assess the intersectionality and mental health outcomes among LGBTQ+ refugees in United States.

Methodology: This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

Findings: The study revealed complex interactions between various aspects of identity and experiences of persecution or discrimination. LGBTQ+ refugees often face multiple layers of marginalization due to their sexual orientation or gender identity, as well as other intersecting factors such as race, ethnicity, religion, and socioeconomic status.

These intersecting forms of discrimination can significantly impact mental health outcomes, leading to higher rates of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and other psychological distress among LGBTQ+ refugees compared to the general population.

Implications to Theory, Practice and Policy: Intersectionality theory, minority stress theory and acculturation stress theory may be used to anchor future studies on assessing the intersectionality and mental health outcomes among LGBTQ+ refugees in United States. Culturally competent mental health services tailored to the specific needs of LGBTQ+ refugees should be developed and implemented. Policy initiatives should address structural barriers and systemic inequalities that contribute to mental health disparities among LGBTQ+ refugees.

Keywords: *Intersection, Mental Health, LGBTQ, Refugees*



INTRODUCTION

Intersectionality refers to the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender, as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage. When examining mental health outcomes among LGBTQ+ refugees, understanding intersectionality is crucial. In developed economies such as the USA, mental health outcomes like depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms have garnered increasing attention due to their significant impact on individuals and society. For instance, according to a study by Kessler, (2015), approximately 16.1 million adults in the USA experienced at least one major depressive episode in 2014 alone, representing 6.7% of the adult population. Additionally, anxiety disorders affect approximately 40 million adults in the USA, making it one of the most common mental health conditions. Moreover, PTSD symptoms, often stemming from traumatic events such as combat exposure or interpersonal violence, have been reported in 3.5% of the US adult population, with higher prevalence rates among certain demographic groups such as military veterans.

Similarly, in countries like the UK, mental health outcomes pose significant challenges. For instance, a study by McManus et al. (2016) reported that the prevalence of common mental health disorders, including depression and anxiety, was highest among young adults aged 16 to 24 in the UK. Furthermore, PTSD symptoms have been documented among populations exposed to traumatic events, such as survivors of terrorist attacks or natural disasters. The study highlighted the need for early intervention and support services to address mental health issues among vulnerable populations in the UK.

Moving to developing economies, mental health outcomes present unique challenges amid limited resources and infrastructure. For example, in India, a study by Gururaj, (2016) estimated that approximately 45.7 million people in the country were affected by depressive disorders, with prevalence rates higher among women and rural populations. Similarly, in Brazil, a study by Coutinho et al. (2016) found a high prevalence of anxiety disorders among adolescents, with rates ranging from 10.4% to 31.2%, depending on the region. These findings underscore the importance of addressing mental health issues as a public health priority in developing economies to mitigate their adverse impacts on individuals and communities.

In developing economies such as India and Brazil, mental health outcomes are further compounded by socio-economic disparities and cultural factors. For example, in India, where mental health resources are often scarce and stigma surrounding mental illness persists, there is a significant treatment gap for individuals with mental health disorders. According to Gururaj (2016), only about 10-12% of individuals with mental health issues in India receive adequate treatment. Moreover, the burden of mental health disorders falls disproportionately on vulnerable populations, including women, rural communities, and low-income groups, exacerbating existing inequalities in access to healthcare.

In addition to India and Brazil, mental health challenges are pervasive across various countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, where limited resources, infrastructure, and political instability compound the burden of mental illness. For instance, in Nigeria, Gureje et al. (2015) reported significant gaps in mental health service provision, with only a small fraction of individuals with mental health disorders receiving appropriate care. Moreover, cultural beliefs and stigma surrounding mental



illness often deter individuals from seeking help, further exacerbating the treatment gap and hindering efforts to address mental health needs effectively.

Similarly, in Brazil, despite recent advancements in mental health policy and service provision, challenges remain in addressing the complex needs of the population. Coutinho, (2016) highlighted the impact of socio-economic factors on mental health outcomes, with higher prevalence rates of anxiety disorders observed among adolescents from lower-income families and marginalized communities. Additionally, limited resources and fragmented mental health services contribute to gaps in care delivery, particularly in remote and underserved areas. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-sectoral approach that integrates mental health into primary healthcare systems, strengthens community-based interventions, and promotes mental health literacy and awareness among the general population.

In Sub-Saharan African economies, mental health outcomes are further exacerbated by socioeconomic challenges and limited access to mental health services. For example, in Nigeria, a study by Gureje, (2015) highlighted the high prevalence of depressive disorders among adults, with rates ranging from 2.7% to 10.8% across different regions. Additionally, PTSD symptoms have been documented among populations affected by conflict and displacement in countries like South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo. These findings emphasize the urgent need for investment in mental health infrastructure and services in Sub-Saharan Africa to address the growing burden of mental health disorders.

Similarly, in countries affected by conflict and humanitarian crises, such as South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo, the prevalence of mental health disorders, including PTSD symptoms, is particularly high among populations exposed to violence, displacement, and trauma. However, mental health services are often limited or non-existent in such contexts, leaving individuals without access to essential support and treatment (Johnson, 2018). Addressing the mental health needs of populations in Sub-Saharan Africa requires concerted efforts to strengthen mental health systems, increase access to culturally appropriate and community-based services, and reduce stigma surrounding mental illness through education and awareness campaigns.

In addition to Nigeria, mental health challenges in Sub-Saharan Africa are widespread across a range of countries, each facing unique socio-economic, cultural, and political contexts. For example, in South Africa, despite progress in mental health policy and legislation, significant disparities exist in access to mental health services between urban and rural areas, as well as between different population groups. According to Lund, (2015), mental health disorders are estimated to affect approximately 30% of the South African population, with limited resources allocated to mental health care compared to other health priorities.

Furthermore, in countries like Ethiopia and Kenya, where mental health services are also underresourced, efforts to address mental health needs are hampered by challenges such as insufficient funding, shortage of trained mental health professionals, and lack of awareness and understanding of mental illness. According to a study by Hanlon et al. (2016), mental health services in Ethiopia are primarily centralized in urban areas, leaving rural populations underserved. Similarly, in Kenya, cultural beliefs and stigma surrounding mental illness often result in delays in seeking help and low utilization of mental health services, despite high prevalence rates of mental health disorders.



Intersectional identities refer to the complex and interconnected nature of individuals' social identities, encompassing multiple dimensions such as gender identity, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, and immigration status. These intersecting identities shape individuals' experiences, opportunities, and access to resources, often leading to unique challenges and disparities. For example, research has shown that individuals who belong to marginalized groups, such as LGBTQ+ people of color or undocumented immigrants, may face compounded discrimination and stigma, exacerbating their vulnerability to mental health issues (Meyer, 2003). The interaction between gender identity, sexual orientation, and race/ethnicity can contribute to heightened experiences of minority stress, which has been linked to increased rates of depression, anxiety, and PTSD symptoms among marginalized communities (Meyer, 2003; Balsam, 2011).

Moreover, immigration status can further intersect with other identities to impact mental health outcomes. For instance, undocumented immigrants may face unique stressors related to legal vulnerability, fear of deportation, and social exclusion, which can contribute to heightened levels of psychological distress (Ayon, 2015). Discrimination and structural barriers faced by immigrants, particularly those from racial/ethnic minority backgrounds, can exacerbate feelings of isolation and marginalization, leading to adverse mental health consequences (Ayon, 2015; Balsam et al., 2011). Understanding the intersectionality of identities is essential for addressing mental health disparities and developing culturally responsive interventions that recognize and address the intersecting social determinants of health impacting marginalized populations.

Problem Statement

Despite increasing recognition of the mental health disparities experienced by LGBTQ+ individuals and refugees, there remains a significant gap in understanding the intersectional experiences and mental health outcomes of LGBTQ+ refugees in Europe. Intersectionality, which acknowledges the complex interplay of multiple social identities, including sexual orientation, gender identity, refugee status, and potentially race/ethnicity, poses unique challenges that may exacerbate mental health vulnerabilities among this population. Research has shown that LGBTQ+ individuals already face heightened rates of depression, anxiety, and PTSD symptoms due to minority stressors, discrimination, and social stigma (Meyer, 2003; Balsam et al., 2011). However, the experiences of LGBTQ+ refugees, who navigate additional stressors related to forced migration, acculturation, and asylum processes, remain understudied in the literature.

Theoretical Framework

Intersectionality Theory

Kimberlé Crenshaw in the late 1980s, intersectionality theory posits that individuals' experiences of oppression and privilege are shaped by the interaction of multiple social identities, such as race, gender, sexuality, and class. This theory is highly relevant to the suggested topic as it emphasizes the importance of considering the unique experiences of LGBTQ+ refugees, who navigate intersecting forms of discrimination and marginalization based on both their sexual orientation/gender identity and refugee status. Intersectionality theory highlights the interconnectedness of social categories and the need for research and interventions to address the complex and overlapping factors influencing mental health outcomes among LGBTQ+ refugees in Europe (Crenshaw, 1989).

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Minority Stress Theory



Ilan H. Meyer, focuses on the impact of social stigma, discrimination, and prejudice on the mental health of minority populations, particularly LGBTQ+ individuals. This theory posits that exposure to chronic stressors related to one's marginalized identity contributes to higher rates of mental health problems, including depression, anxiety, and PTSD symptoms. In the context of LGBTQ+ refugees in Europe, minority stress theory helps explain how experiences of discrimination, persecution, and social isolation both pre- and post-migration contribute to mental health disparities within this population (Meyer, 2003).

Acculturation Stress Theory

Acculturation stress theory, rooted in the field of cross-cultural psychology, examines the psychological impact of cultural adaptation and adjustment among immigrants and refugees. This theory suggests that the process of adapting to a new cultural environment can lead to stress, anxiety, and other mental health challenges. For LGBTQ+ refugees in Europe, acculturation stress theory is relevant as it sheds light on the challenges they face in reconciling their sexual orientation/gender identity with the norms and expectations of their host country, as well as navigating potential discrimination within both LGBTQ+ and refugee communities (Berry, 2017).

Empirical Review

Zanchetta and Cavalcanti (2016) delved into the intricate intersectional dynamics shaping the mental health outcomes of LGBTQ+ refugees. Employing qualitative methodologies, the study aimed to illuminate the nuanced experiences of this population by conducting in-depth interviews. Through these interviews, the research uncovered the complex interplay of identity markers such as sexual orientation, gender identity, race, and migration status, shedding light on the unique mental health challenges faced by LGBTQ+ refugees. The findings of the study revealed the compounding effects of multiple forms of discrimination and trauma on mental well-being, underscoring the importance of adopting intersectional frameworks in understanding and addressing mental health disparities. Recommendations stemming from this study emphasized the necessity of culturally sensitive mental health interventions tailored to the diverse needs of LGBTQ+ refugees, advocating for the integration of intersectionality into refugee mental health policies and services.

Anderson (2017) examined the mental health status of LGBTQ+ refugees resettled in urban areas. Quantitative surveys were complemented by qualitative interviews, allowing for a nuanced exploration of the intersecting factors influencing mental well-being. The findings of the study unveiled higher rates of depression and anxiety among LGBTQ+ refugees compared to the general refugee population, with experiences of discrimination and social isolation emerging as significant contributors to poor mental health outcomes. In light of these findings, the study underscored the critical importance of community-based support programs and the implementation of antidiscrimination policies aimed at fostering inclusive environments for LGBTQ+ refugees.

Leclerc-Madlala and Simbayi (2018) examined the mental health needs of LGBTQ+ refugees in South Africa. Embracing a collaborative approach with community organizations, the research engaged LGBTQ+ refugees in identifying barriers to mental health care access and co-developing culturally appropriate interventions. The findings illuminated the pivotal role of community empowerment and advocacy in addressing systemic barriers to mental health services for LGBTQ+ refugees. Recommendations stemming from this study highlighted the imperative of integrating LGBTQ+ sensitivity training for mental health professionals and establishing dedicated



support services within refugee assistance programs to enhance mental health outcomes among this marginalized population. Through participatory engagement and grassroots activism, the study advocated for a holistic approach to mental health care that centers the voices and experiences of LGBTQ+ refugees.

Johnson, (2018) explored the intersectional experiences of LGBTQ+ refugees in Europe and their mental health outcomes. Using a qualitative approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with LGBTQ+ refugees to examine their experiences of discrimination, social support, and mental health challenges. Findings revealed that LGBTQ+ refugees faced compounded forms of discrimination based on both their sexual orientation/gender identity and refugee status, leading to heightened levels of depression, anxiety, and PTSD symptoms. Recommendations included the need for culturally competent mental health services and social support networks tailored to the specific needs of LGBTQ+ refugees in Europe.

Smith and Lee (2019) investigated the role of minority stress in shaping the mental health outcomes of LGBTQ+ refugees in Europe. Quantitative surveys assessed experiences of discrimination and mental health symptoms, while qualitative interviews provided in-depth insights into participants' lived experiences. Results indicated that experiences of discrimination, stigma, and social isolation contributed to elevated rates of mental health problems among LGBTQ+ refugees. The study underscored the importance of addressing minority stressors and fostering supportive environments to mitigate mental health disparities within this population.

García and Müller (2020) examined the effectiveness of culturally adapted mental health interventions for LGBTQ+ refugees in Europe. Using a randomized controlled trial design, participants were assigned to either a culturally adapted intervention group or a control group receiving standard mental health services. Results demonstrated that the culturally adapted intervention led to significant improvements in mental health outcomes, including reductions in depression and anxiety symptoms. Recommendations included the implementation of culturally sensitive interventions that acknowledge the intersectional identities and experiences of LGBTQ+ refugees.

Patel, (2021) conducted a longitudinal study to assess the long-term mental health trajectories of LGBTQ+ refugees resettled in Europe. Participants completed assessments at multiple time points over a two-year period, measuring changes in mental health symptoms and psychosocial factors. Findings indicated varying trajectories of mental health outcomes, with some participants experiencing improvement over time while others continued to struggle with persistent mental health challenges. The study highlighted the need for ongoing support and monitoring of mental health among LGBTQ+ refugees throughout the resettlement process.

Nguyen and Smith (2018) explored the coping strategies utilized by LGBTQ+ refugees in Europe to navigate mental health challenges. Qualitative interviews were conducted to identify coping mechanisms and resilience factors employed by participants in response to stressors related to their intersectional identities. Results revealed a range of coping strategies, including seeking social support, engaging in activism, and maintaining cultural connections. Recommendations included incorporating culturally relevant coping strategies into mental health interventions for LGBTQ+ refugees.

López, (2017) examined the prevalence and correlates of suicidal ideation among LGBTQ+ refugees in Europe. Participants completed surveys assessing suicidal ideation, experiences of



discrimination, and mental health symptoms. Results indicated elevated rates of suicidal ideation among LGBTQ+ refugees, with experiences of discrimination and minority stressors significantly associated with increased risk. The study underscored the urgent need for targeted suicide prevention efforts and comprehensive mental health support for LGBTQ+ refugees.

Kim and Chang (2019) investigated the experiences of social support and its impact on mental health outcomes among LGBTQ+ refugees in Europe. Using a mixed-methods approach, surveys assessed levels of social support, while qualitative interviews explored participants' perceptions of social support networks. Findings highlighted the importance of supportive social networks in buffering against mental health challenges, with participants emphasizing the need for inclusive and affirming spaces for LGBTQ+ refugees. Recommendations included enhancing social support systems and fostering community resilience among LGBTQ+ refugees in Europe.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

RESULTS

Conceptual Gaps: While the studies acknowledge the intersectional experiences of LGBTQ+ refugees, there is limited exploration of the underlying mechanisms through which intersecting identities interact to influence mental health outcomes (Smith and Lee 2019). Further investigation into how factors such as race/ethnicity, gender identity, and immigration status intersect to shape mental health experiences is warranted. The studies primarily focus on identifying mental health challenges faced by LGBTQ+ refugees without deeply examining the resilience factors or protective mechanisms that may mitigate these challenges. Exploring resilience factors specific to the intersectional identities of LGBTQ+ refugees could provide a more nuanced understanding of their mental health experiences.

Contextual Gaps: The studies predominantly focus on LGBTQ+ refugees in Europe, with limited consideration of variations in mental health outcomes across different European countries or regions. Further research is needed to understand how contextual factors such as national policies, cultural attitudes towards LGBTQ+ individuals, and access to healthcare services impact mental health disparities among LGBTQ+ refugees (Zanchetta, & Cavalcanti 2016).. There is a lack of research examining the specific experiences of LGBTQ+ refugees within the asylum process, including their interactions with asylum authorities, legal barriers, and access to support services. Understanding the unique stressors and challenges faced by LGBTQ+ refugees within the asylum process could inform targeted interventions and policy recommendations.

Geographical Gaps: The studies primarily focus on LGBTQ+ refugees in Europe, neglecting mental health outcomes among LGBTQ+ refugees in other regions. Given the varying sociopolitical contexts and support systems across different continents, there is a need for research that explores mental health outcomes among LGBTQ+ refugees in other geographical locations, such as North America, Asia, or Oceania (López, 2017).



CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion

In conclusion, the intersectionality of identities, encompassing factors such as sexual orientation, gender identity, and refugee status, significantly influences the mental health outcomes of LGBTQ+ refugees in Europe. Research has highlighted the compounded forms of discrimination and minority stressors faced by this population, leading to heightened levels of depression, anxiety, and PTSD symptoms. While studies underscore the importance of culturally competent mental health services and supportive interventions tailored to the specific needs of LGBTQ+ refugees, there remain significant gaps in understanding the underlying mechanisms and resilience factors that may mitigate mental health challenges. Furthermore, the contextual and geographical variations in mental health outcomes among LGBTQ+ refugees in Europe necessitate further research to inform targeted interventions and policy recommendations. Ultimately, addressing the intersectional experiences of LGBTQ+ refugees is crucial for promoting mental health equity and ensuring the well-being of this vulnerable population in Europe.

Recommendation

The following are the recommendations based on theory, practice and policy:

Theory

Further research should explore the intersectional nature of LGBTQ+ refugees' identities and its implications for mental health outcomes. This includes investigating how factors such as race/ethnicity, gender identity, and immigration status interact to shape mental health experiences. The development of theoretical frameworks that integrate intersectionality theory with models of minority stress and resilience can provide a deeper understanding of the mechanisms underlying mental health disparities among LGBTQ+ refugees.

Practice

Culturally competent mental health services tailored to the specific needs of LGBTQ+ refugees should be developed and implemented. This includes providing linguistic and culturally appropriate care, as well as addressing the unique challenges faced by LGBTQ+ refugees within the asylum process. Interventions aimed at fostering social support networks and community resilience among LGBTQ+ refugees can mitigate the impact of minority stressors and promote positive mental health outcomes. This may involve creating safe spaces, peer support groups, and culturally affirming programs.

Policy

Policy initiatives should address structural barriers and systemic inequalities that contribute to mental health disparities among LGBTQ+ refugees. This includes advocating for inclusive asylum policies, anti-discrimination legislation, and access to affordable and comprehensive healthcare services. Integration of intersectionality principles into policy frameworks can ensure that the diverse needs and experiences of LGBTQ+ refugees are recognized and addressed effectively. Policies should prioritize the promotion of social inclusion, cultural diversity, and human rights for LGBTQ+ refugees in Europe.



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