Gay, lesbian and bisexual people are sexually attracted to and/or have romantic relationships with people of the same sex. People who identify as transgender experience a sense of gender identity (their internal sense of gender) that differs from the sex of their birth. ‘Intersex’ is a term used to describe people born with a physical variation in sexual characteristics, such as XXY chromosomes, unusual hormone production levels or atypical genitals.

Same-sex attraction, intersex conditions and gender dysphoria are not risk factors for mental health problems, however they might make individuals more vulnerable to discrimination and negative experiences. Discrimination is a significant matter that can result in reduced emotional and practical support and conflicted familial and social relationships.

The experience of dealing with stigmatisation and marginalisation has led to the LGBTI community experiencing more negative mental health outcomes than the rest of the population as a whole, with discrimination fuelling depression, anxiety and other stress-related mental health problems in LGBTI people.

Note: discrimination and stigmatisation are different issues. Discrimination is the prejudicial or unjust treatment of different categories of people or things (especially on the grounds of race, sex or sexual preference). Stigmatisation, on the other hand, is to describe or regard people or things as worthy of disapproval or disgrace.

The stats:
- Same sex attracted Australians have 3.5-14 x higher rates of suicide attempts than their heterosexual counterparts
- 20% of people who are transgender and 15.7% of those who are gay, lesbian and bisexual report current thoughts of suicide
- In those who are gay, lesbian and bisexual, the average age of first suicide attempt is 16
- 47% of people who identify as transgender have attempted suicide
- 36.2% of people who are transgender and 24.4% of people who are gay, lesbian and bisexual currently meet the criteria for major depression. This compares with 6.8% of the general population
- 38% of same sex attracted females report having experienced depression, compared to 19% of heterosexual females

By why?
Many people in the LGBTI community have experienced considerable discrimination, including:
- Bullying
- Hostility or rejection from friends, family and family
- Harassment
- Casual homophobic comments
- Embarrassed response from professionals such as GPs
- Discrimination from many religions
- Negative portrayal of LGBTI people in the media.

This can lead to issues such as:
- Low self-esteem
- Lack of support from families or damaged relationships
- Leading a "double life" trying to keep sexuality a secret
- Difficulty accepting sexual orientation
- Alcohol and other drug abuse
- Isolation
- Increased risk of self-harm / suicide attempts
- PTSD or depression from long-term bullying.

Getting help
While there is an increased awareness of the mental health and suicide risks that people who identify as LGBTI face, barriers to accessing health services remain, such as fear of rejection, discrimination and breach of confidentiality; fear of lack of understanding about LGBTI issues; and fear of stigma.

The mental health needs of people who are LGBTI are varied and complex. To adequately address these needs, specific effort and a number of interrelated processes are required. These processes include: inclusion, prevention, partnership and targeted initiatives.

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