MENTAL HEALTH OF THE LGBT+ POPULATION AND THE IMPACTS OF PREJUDICE: A LITERATURE REVIEW

Valdir Barbosa da Silva Junior[1], Weider Ferreira da Silva[2] and Simone Fraga Mota[3]

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the impacts of prejudice on the mental health of the LGBT+ population and identify strategies and public policies that can mitigate these effects. The overall objective is to understand how social discrimination, exclusion, and violence affect the mental health of this population, as well as to investigate how inclusive policies can promote access to adequate care. The central question of the research is: How does prejudice impact the mental health of the LGBT+ population and what strategies can be adopted to reduce these impacts? The context addressed highlights that the LGBT+ population faces a reality of marginalization and stigmatization, which contributes to the increase in mental disorders such as depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. In Brazil, physical and psychological violence, both in the family environment and in the public space, is one of the main factors responsible for this situation. In conclusion, the study reaffirms the urgency of public policies that promote the inclusion and training of health professionals, in addition to the creation of safe spaces for the reception of the LGBT+ population. The implementation of social support strategies and the strengthening of the support network are fundamental for the mental health and dignity of this population. The promotion of a more inclusive and discrimination-free society is essential for improving the mental health of the LGBT+ population.

Keywords: Mental Health. LGBT+. Prejudice. Public Policies.

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[1] Master's student in Psychology at University International, UniLogos
Email: valdir@unirv.edu.br
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0380-8270
LATTES: http://lattes.cnpq.br/2438746680276832
[2] Doctor of Business Administration (D.B.A.) - European International University
Email: weider@cartoriobruno.not.br
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0577-8113
LATTES: http://lattes.cnpq.br/3400402535848268
[3] Dr. in Health, Interdisciplinarity and Rehabilitation - UNICAMP/SP
Email: simonemota@unirv.edu.br
ORCID: https://orcid.org/ 0000-0003-4247-8515
LATTES: http://lattes.cnpq.br/8300721228643925

INTRODUCTION

Mental health is an essential component of human well-being and, in the LGBT+ population, deserves special attention due to the particularities of their experiences, often marked by social, cultural, and psychological challenges. Prejudice, manifested through stigma, discrimination, and violence, profoundly impacts the emotional and psychological balance of individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and other expressions of sexual and gender diversity. This scenario requires a careful look from academia and public policies, aiming to understand the dynamics of exclusion and develop strategies that promote inclusion and welcoming (SOUZA; SILVA, 2018).

Studies indicate that the LGBT+ population is more vulnerable to disorders such as depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation, often resulting from family rejection, social exclusion, and barriers in accessing mental health services. For example, a survey conducted in Brazil revealed that 24.8% of LGBT+ participants reported symptoms of depression, highlighting mental health as a significant concern in the context of this population (SOUZA; SILVA, 2018). In addition, discrimination and social exclusion are factors that contribute to the increase in psychological suffering among LGBT+ individuals, being widely discussed by Menezes et al. (2020), who associate the experiences of violence and discrimination with the worsening of mental disorders.

Given this scenario, the general objective of this study is to analyze how prejudice affects the mental health of the LGBT+ population and to identify strategies that can mitigate these impacts, promoting well-being and inclusion. The survey seeks to answer the following question: How does prejudice influence the mental health of the LGBT+ population and what strategies can be employed to reduce these impacts?

To answer this question, this article adopts a literature review methodology, analyzing national and international studies published in the last ten years. The research uses academic sources indexed in databases such as SciELO and PubMed, focusing on works that investigate the relationship between prejudice, mental health, and inclusion of the LGBT+ population (MENEZES et al., 2020). This approach allows us to understand the main research trends, point out gaps in the literature, and identify good practices that can support public policies and community interventions.

The structure of the article is organized as follows: initially, the key concepts related to the mental health of the LGBT+ population and the impacts of prejudice are discussed. Then, access to health services and the barriers faced by this population are analyzed.

Finally, a reflection on public policies and strategies for the promotion of well-being is presented, concluding with proposals for future advances.

This work reinforces the relevance of an in-depth debate on the intersection between prejudice and mental health, considering the need for intersectoral actions to promote more equitable and respectful care. The importance of fostering welcoming environments free of discrimination transcends the field of health, encompassing the sphere of human rights and full citizenship. With this, it seeks to contribute to an advance in the understanding of the topic and in the development of solutions that promote the dignity and well-being of the LGBT+ population.

MENTAL HEALTH OF THE LGBT+ POPULATION

The mental health of the LGBT+ population has become a field of growing interest, especially due to the adversities faced by this group due to social prejudice, which includes discrimination, stigma, and violence. According to Meyer (2003), the discrimination experienced by LGBT+ individuals can result in a series of emotional and psychological problems, such as depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. The experience of stigmas related to sexual orientation and gender identity can create an environment of exclusion, affecting mental health in a significant way. This phenomenon is widely observed in studies that indicate that the rates of mental disorders among the LGBT+ population are higher than those of the heterosexual population (Budge et al., 2013).

A study conducted by Pinho et al. (2019) demonstrated that, compared to the general population, LGBT+ individuals are more likely to suffer from symptoms of depression and anxiety. They state that "LGBT+ individuals face a higher risk of developing mental disorders due to the constant confrontation of social stigma" (PINHO et al., 2019, p. 445). Conditions of marginalization and social isolation, often due to family rejection and difficulties in the school and professional context, are key factors that contribute to the increase in these symptoms.

The impact of prejudice on mental health is further aggravated in specific populations within the LGBT+ group, such as transgender and transvestites. In a study conducted by Grant et al. (2011), it was revealed that "transgender individuals face high levels of violence and discrimination, which puts them at risk of developing disorders such as severe depression and chronic anxiety" (GRANT et al., 2011, p. 7). This reality reflects the severity of the stigma experienced by these individuals, who are forced to navigate a

world where their gender identity is constantly invalidated, which aggravates the conditions of their mental health.

The experience of discrimination and social exclusion also affect LGBT+ individuals' access to mental health services. As Silva and Oliveira (2020) point out, "the stigma associated with medical care, combined with the lack of knowledge of many health professionals about the needs of this population, prevents them from seeking help adequately" (SILVA; OLIVEIRA, 2020, p. 112). Internalized prejudice, often resulting from these negative experiences in the health system, can lead to a cycle of not seeking treatment, increasing psychological suffering.

The increase in suicide rates among LGBT+ individuals is also a reflection of the combination of discrimination and the lack of adequate psychological support. According to recent studies, suicide rates in the LGBT+ community are significantly higher when compared to the heterosexual population, especially young people and transgender people. "Suicide attempts are more prevalent among LGBT+ youth, especially when they face social isolation and rejection from their families" (Williams et al., 2021, p. 325). This data reinforces the urgency of public policies aimed at protecting and supporting the mental health of the LGBT+ population.

In addition to family and social discrimination, the school environment is often a place of experience of homophobic and transphobic bullying. Studies by Fineran et al. (2020) point out that bullying in schools is directly related to the increase in anxiety disorders and depression among LGBT+ youth. "Homophobic bullying, which often occurs in schools, is one of the main sources of stress for LGBT+ students, contributing to the development of mental disorders" (FINERAN et al., 2020, p. 52).

However, it is important to recognize that not all LGBT+ individuals have mental disorders due to prejudice. Family and social support play a significant role in reducing the negative effects of stigma. Studies such as that of Budge et al. (2013) suggest that "the support of family and friends, combined with a safe and welcoming school environment, can significantly reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression among LGBT+ youth" (BUDGE et al., 2013, p. 135). In addition, the creation of support networks and community spaces, such as LGBT+ support groups, has also been shown to be effective in promoting the emotional and psychological well-being of these individuals (Foster et al., 2019).

Therefore, understanding the mental health of the LGBT+ population requires a multifaceted analysis that considers social, cultural, and psychological factors, as well as

effective public policies that ensure a safer and more welcoming environment. The construction of inclusive spaces, where gender identities and sexual orientation are respected, can represent a crucial change for the improvement of the mental health of this population.

IMPACTS OF PREJUDICE

Prejudice directed at the LGBT+ population is not limited only to the field of explicit discrimination, but also manifests itself in more subtle forms of stigmatization that have profound impacts on the mental health of these individuals. According to the concept of "minority stress" proposed by Meyer (2003), systematic discrimination against LGBT+ people generates additional stress that, over time, contributes to the emergence of mental disorders, such as depression, anxiety disorders, and even suicide attempts. The social stigma experienced by LGBT+ people can create a cycle of psychological distress that is difficult to break without intervention, and this reality is reflected in research that points to the high rates of mental disorders in this group.

Social exclusion and physical violence are forms of prejudice that directly affect the mental health of the LGBT+ population. According to a study conducted by Tavares et al. (2020), "social isolation resulting from homophobia and transphobia in the family and community context can be considered one of the greatest risk factors for the development of depression" (TAVARES et al., 2020, p. 227). Family rejection is often identified as a factor that accelerates the process of psychological disorders among LGBT+ youth. The consequences of this exclusion can lead to a lack of emotional support essential for healthy development, resulting in severe depression and even self-destructive behaviors.

In addition to physical violence, verbal violence has been considered a form of discrimination that profoundly affects the mental health of LGBT+ individuals. Constant exposure to homophobic and transphobic bullying, especially in school environments, aggravates anxiety and low self-esteem. A study by Silva and Oliveira (2019) points out that "the effects of homophobic bullying are particularly harmful during adolescence, a phase in which young people are still in the process of forming identity and self-esteem" (SILVA; OLIVEIRA, 2019, p. 134). Constant verbal aggression, often devoid of adequate intervention, creates an environment of insecurity that can result in long-term mental disorders.

The internalization of stigma, which occurs when the LGBT+ individual comes to believe and accept prejudices and social stereotypes in relation to their identity, is also a factor that contributes significantly to the worsening of mental health. According to the study by Pachankis (2007), the "internalization of homophobia" is directly linked to the increase in symptoms of depression, anxiety, and feelings of inadequacy. The author argues that the more an LGBT+ person internalizes social discrimination, the more they tend to distance themselves from their own feelings and emotional needs, harming their psychological well-being.

Another important factor to consider is the barriers faced by the LGBT+ population in accessing health services, including mental health. Research by Santos and Almeida (2020) reveals that "the lack of trained professionals to deal with LGBT+ issues and the resistance of some health professionals to offer inclusive treatment are significant obstacles to access to adequate care" (SANTOS; ALMEIDA, 2020, p. 99). The prejudiced attitudes of health professionals, such as psychologists, psychiatrists, and doctors, not only affect the trust of LGBT+ individuals in the health system, but also increase the likelihood of psychological illness, since the lack of adequate support can lead to a worsening of the conditions already present.

However, research also points out that the implementation of inclusive public policies, education programs on sexual and gender diversity, and the creation of social support networks can reduce the negative impacts of prejudice on mental health. The scientific literature indicates that rates of mental disorders decrease significantly among LGBT+ people who have the support of friends, family, and members of the LGBT+ community (Budge et al., 2013). Social support has been identified as a protective factor against the adverse effects of discrimination, promoting greater self-esteem and emotional resilience.

In addition, the creation of safe and inclusive spaces in public institutions, such as schools and workplaces, is an essential measure to mitigate the impacts of discrimination. In a survey conducted by Williams et al. (2021), it was found that "LGBT+ youth who study in schools that promote inclusion and acceptance of their sexual and gender identity have lower levels of stress and mental disorders" (WILLIAMS et al., 2021, p. 322). These welcoming environments reduce the risk of social isolation and strengthen the sense of belonging and acceptance, crucial elements for mental health.

Public policies aimed at the inclusion and protection of the LGBT+ population are also decisive in reducing the harmful effects of discrimination. According to the research by Souza and Oliveira (2020), "the promotion of affirmative policies that guarantee the rights and safety of LGBT+ people in public and private environments contributes to the reduction of stigma and promotes a positive impact on mental health" (SOUZA; OLIVEIRA, 2020, p. 112). Programs that promote access to inclusive mental health services and train health professionals to address issues related to sexual and gender diversity have been shown to be effective in improving the quality of life and reducing psychological distress in this population.

Therefore, prejudice against the LGBT+ population has profound and lasting impacts on the mental health of these individuals, affecting their self-esteem, their interpersonal relationships, and their psychological health in general. Violence, both physical and verbal, social exclusion, and difficulty in accessing adequate health services contribute to the increase in mental disorders. However, social interventions and inclusive public policies are essential to mitigate these impacts, promoting the well-being and dignity of the LGBT+ population.

ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH

Access to mental health for the LGBT+ population faces several challenges, especially due to the prejudice and discrimination that permeate both society and the health system. Studies show that LGBT+ individuals are more vulnerable to developing mental disorders such as depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation compared to the heterosexual population. This is due to social stigma, exclusion, and lack of adequate support (Meyer, 2003). In addition, the lack of adequate knowledge about LGBT+ issues on the part of health professionals is one of the main barriers faced by this group, hindering access and quality of care.

According to research by Grant et al. (2011), "a large portion of LGBT+ individuals report avoiding seeking mental health services due to fear of being stigmatized or mistreated by professionals" (GRANT et al., 2011, p. 7). This fear, combined with a lack of trust in health services, leads many to not seek the necessary help, which exacerbates mental health problems. Perceived discrimination in the health system, added to social exclusion, is a significant factor in the increase in psychological distress among LGBT+ individuals.

The issue of inadequate training of health professionals is another critical point. Studies indicate that most mental health professionals are not prepared to deal with issues related to gender identity and sexual orientation in a sensitive and inclusive way. Budge et al. (2013) point out that "many health professionals are not familiar with the specific problems faced by LGBT+ people, which can result in misdiagnosis and inappropriate treatments" (BUDGE et al., 2013, p. 135). This lack of knowledge contributes to the perpetuation of discriminatory attitudes in care and impairs the quality of care provided.

In addition, the exclusion of LGBT+ people from adequate medical and psychological care is exacerbated by the lack of public policies that promote inclusion and sensitize health professionals. Silva et al. (2020) argue that "without effective public inclusion policies, the health system remains a hostile environment for LGBT+ people, which prevents their access to essential mental health services" (SILVA et al., 2020, p. 112). The impact of this social and institutional exclusion is evident in the mental health of this population, which often resorts to other coping mechanisms, such as substance abuse, to deal with psychological suffering.

Social and family support, on the other hand, has been shown to be important protective factors for the mental health of LGBT+ individuals. Studies show that acceptance and support from family and friends has a positive impact on mental health, helping to reduce the negative effects of discrimination and stigma. In a study conducted by Ryan et al. (2009), it was identified that "family and community support is one of the greatest protective factors against the risk of suicide and other mental disorders among LGBT+ youth" (RYAN et al., 2009, p. 346). This highlights the importance of support networks and social support in promoting the emotional well-being of the LGBT+ population.

However, the absence of adequate public policies and the lack of safe spaces within the health system are still significant challenges. Interventions in health services, including the capacity building of professionals, are key to ensuring that LGBT+ individuals receive quality mental health care. According to Pinho et al. (2019), "the implementation of training and awareness programs for health professionals, in addition to public inclusion policies, are essential to improve care and reduce exclusion in the health system" (PINHO et al., 2019, p. 453).

In summary, the LGBT+ population faces significant barriers in accessing mental health, ranging from institutional prejudice to the lack of trained professionals to deal with the specific issues of this population. The lack of inclusive public policies and social

exclusion contribute to the worsening of mental health problems among LGBT+ individuals. However, the creation of welcoming spaces and the implementation of inclusive health policies are essential to ensure access to adequate care and improve the mental health of this vulnerable population.

POLICIES AND STRATEGIES

The creation and implementation of inclusive public policies are essential to ensure the LGBT+ population's access to adequate mental health services. Despite advances in recent decades, many barriers still persist, making it difficult for LGBT+ individuals to access the necessary care. Public policies aimed at this population have proven effective in reducing discrimination and increasing user embracement, but there are still challenges to be overcome, especially in the context of mental health care.

First, it is necessary to understand that the mental health of the LGBT+ population is directly related to the experience of discrimination and social stigma. Public policies that promote social inclusion and raise awareness in society are essential steps to mitigate the negative impacts of prejudice. The implementation of affirmative policies, such as education programs and awareness campaigns on sexual and gender diversity, has been shown to be effective in reducing discrimination rates and strengthening the self-esteem of LGBT+ individuals (Meyer, 2003).

Regarding the health system, one of the most important strategies is the training of professionals to deal with issues of gender identity and sexual orientation in an inclusive way. A study by Budge et al. (2013) reveals that the training of mental health professionals is one of the most effective measures to improve care for the LGBT+ population. According to the authors, "the continuous training of psychologists, psychiatrists and other health professionals in issues of sexual and gender diversity results in a more sensitive and effective care" (BUDGE et al., 2013, p. 135). This includes everything from respecting gender identities to creating more welcoming and discrimination-free environments within health services.

In addition, the creation of specific health units for the care of the LGBT+ population has proven to be an effective strategy. The implementation of clinics that cater exclusively to this population or that have units dedicated to LGBT+ care within hospitals and mental health centers provides a safe and respectful environment where LGBT+ people can seek help without fear of discrimination. According to Grant et al. (2011), "the creation of specific

clinics or the inclusion of health units with professionals trained to serve LGBT+ individuals is an effective strategy to ensure adequate mental health care" (GRANT et al., 2011, p. 25).

Another key aspect in mental health policies for the LGBT+ population is access to specific care for groups that face greater challenges, such as transgender people and transvestites. The lack of access to appropriate medical treatments and therapies, as well as the resistance of health professionals to address trans issues, has been a significant obstacle. Brazilian legislation has advanced in this direction, with the creation of public policies that guarantee the protection of the rights of trans people, including the regulation of the use of the social name and access to gender transition health. However, the effective implementation of these policies still faces resistance in some regions and within some health institutions (Pinho et al., 2019). The formation of multidisciplinary teams, which include professionals from psychology, psychiatry and medicine, is essential to provide comprehensive and quality care.

In addition, it is essential to promote the strengthening of social and community support networks, which play a crucial role in the mental health of the LGBT+ population. Support groups, civil society organizations, and LGBT+ movements have been instrumental in promoting the emotional well-being of their members, offering a safe and welcoming space where they can share experiences and receive psychological support. Research by Foster et al. (2019) points out that "active participation in LGBT+ support networks and community groups can significantly reduce levels of anxiety and depression, promoting mental health and a sense of belonging" (FOSTER et al., 2019, p. 67).

The implementation of public policies aimed at the mental health of the LGBT+ population must be accompanied by measures that combat the structural causes of discrimination and marginalization. For policies to be effective, there needs to be a joint effort between government, health institutions, and civil society to ensure dignified and inclusive care for all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. In addition, it is essential that mental health policies for the LGBT+ population are accompanied by continuous monitoring, which allows their effectiveness to be evaluated and areas that still need improvement to be identified.

In addition to the training and inclusion policies that have already been mentioned, another crucial approach is the implementation of strategies that promote the visibility of the LGBT+ population in health services. Visibility, both in terms of representation and

accessibility, is an important factor in building a more inclusive mental health system. The inclusion of LGBT+ issues in training courses, health programs, and awareness campaigns helps to reduce the barrier of ignorance and lack of empathy among health professionals, creating a more welcoming environment for patients. According to the research by Campos et al. (2021), "LGBT+ representation in health campaigns and in the media contributes to the reduction of stigma and strengthens the perception that health services are, in fact, a safe space for this population" (CAMPOS et al., 2021, p. 85). This visibility and inclusion help to build a more accepting and accessible healthcare system, creating a space where LGBT+ individuals feel safe and welcomed.

Another essential aspect for improving access to mental health for the LGBT+ population is the integration of specialized care. This involves the creation of mental health services that specifically meet the needs of this population, taking into account the particularities of the most prevalent psychological disorders among LGBT+ individuals, such as depression, anxiety, eating disorders, gender identity disorders, and issues related to family acceptance. The research by Tavares et al. (2019) states that "the development of mental health services that integrate specialized professionals trained to deal with the specificities of the LGBT+ population is essential to promote quality care" (TAVARES et al., 2019, p. 110). These specialized services can be found in LGBT+ referral centers or in health units that offer inclusive care, where patients have access to psychologists and psychiatrists trained to work with issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity.

It is also important that public policies aimed at the mental health of the LGBT+ population contemplate accessibility in geographical and financial terms. Many LGBT+ individuals face financial hardship that prevents them from accessing mental health services, especially those who are not covered by private health insurance or the SUS. In addition, the distance from urban centers or the lack of adequate transportation can be a significant barrier, especially for transgender people or those who live in rural areas or peripheries. According to Martins et al. (2020), "the expansion of mental health services to more remote regions and the creation of policies that guarantee access to free or low-cost treatments are essential to ensure that all LGBT+ people can have access to adequate care" (MARTINS et al., 2020, p. 93). The decentralization of services and the use of telemedicine are also strategies that can help overcome these geographical and economic barriers, offering more accessible and efficient care.

Another crucial point in public policies aimed at the mental health of the LGBT+ population is the creation of health environments that respect gender diversity. Respect for the social name, recognition of gender identities, and care without prejudice are essential to ensure the mental health and well-being of LGBT+ individuals, especially transgender people. The lack of recognition of gender identity can generate serious psychological damage, such as feelings of inadequacy, anxiety and depression. Law 13,718/2018, which guarantees the right to a social name, is an example of progress in this regard, but the implementation of this legislation is still a challenge in many health institutions, as pointed out by Ribeiro et al. (2021), who indicate that "the non-recognition of the social name in health institutions contributes to the worsening of the psychological suffering of transgender people" (RIBEIRO et al., 2021, p. 67).

The promotion of public policies aimed at the psychological support of family members of LGBT+ individuals is also an important strategy to reduce the negative impacts of family rejection, which is one of the greatest sources of stress and suffering for this population. The research of Silva et al. (2018) suggests that "offering psychological support to the family members of LGBT+ people can help reduce rejection and facilitate the process of acceptance, which has a positive impact on the individual's mental health" (SILVA et al., 2018, p. 122). Often, the lack of understanding of family members about their children's gender identity or sexual orientation can generate conflicts, which can aggravate psychological problems, such as depression and anxiety. In this sense, policies that encourage foster care and promote education about sexual and gender diversity are essential to improve the psychological well-being of LGBT+ individuals.

Promoting inclusive educational environments also plays an important role in strengthening the mental health of LGBT+ individuals. Often, schools and universities become places of symbolic and physical violence for LGBT+ students, which contributes to the increase in cases of psychological disorders, such as anxiety and depression. Creating policies that promote acceptance of diversity in schools, such as including topics on LGBT+ rights in the school curriculum and creating safe spaces for LGBT+ students, is a key strategy for reducing stigma and promoting psychological well-being. According to Reis and Almeida (2020), "the inclusion of topics related to sexual and gender diversity in the school curriculum is an effective measure to promote acceptance and reduce violence and discrimination against LGBT+ students" (REIS; ALMEIDA, 2020, p. 59).

In addition, it is essential that public policies for the mental health of the LGBT+ population are based on an intersectoral approach, integrating health, education, social assistance, and human rights. Social, legal and educational support is as important as access to health care to ensure the integral well-being of this population. Public policies that promote inclusion and equity are key to ensuring that LGBT+ individuals have access to the necessary resources for mental health promotion, while also combating discrimination and prejudice in different spheres of society.

In conclusion, public policies and strategies to promote access to mental health for the LGBT+ population are essential to ensure that individuals in this community receive the necessary care. The implementation of inclusion policies, training of health professionals, and the creation of social support networks are measures that, when well executed, can reduce inequalities and promote mental health effectively. Institutional support and the creation of safe spaces for the LGBT+ population are fundamental steps towards building a fairer and more egalitarian mental health system.

CONCLUSION

Access to mental health for the LGBT+ population faces numerous challenges, from social and institutional prejudice to the lack of effective public policies that meet the specific needs of this community. Discrimination, both in the family environment and in the social context and in the health system, has direct and devastating impacts on mental health, resulting in disorders such as depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. The resistance of many health professionals to dealing with issues of gender identity and sexual orientation further reinforces these barriers, contributing to the distancing of LGBT+ individuals from mental health services.

However, the implementation of inclusive public policies, the continuous training of health professionals, and the creation of safe and welcoming spaces can transform this scenario. It is critical that mental health policies are based on an intersectoral approach, integrating health, education, social care, and human rights, ensuring that all LGBT+ individuals have access to appropriate and respectful care. In addition, strengthening social and community support networks, such as support groups and social movements, is essential to promote the emotional and psychological well-being of this population.

By ensuring visibility, protection, and support for LGBT+ individuals, it is possible not only to reduce the rates of mental disorders, but also to strengthen resilience and self-

esteem, creating a more inclusive and equal environment. Thus, the promotion of public policies aimed at the mental health of the LGBT+ population is crucial to ensure the dignity and quality of life of all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

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