# What can be done about gay mental health struggles?



Over the past year, the LGBTQ+ community has faced a series of devastating losses to suicide and drug-related deaths. Phil Gizzie, a 40-year-old director of a smart-tech clothing brand, has lost four close friends. David Allwood, a 36-year-old choreographer, has similarly lost three friends, while Davide Cini, a 45-year-old digital product manager, has lost two ex-partners, including the popular dancer Robin Windsor.

The tragedies have rekindled conversations about the mental health struggles within the LGBTQ+ community. Cini provides a poignant insight into Windsor's life, stating, “Robin was loved and adored by many, but I could see him slowly giving up in recent years.” Despite efforts from loved ones, Windsor felt a persistent void in his life.

The root of these issues lies deep in societal attitudes and systemic exclusion. Professor Ilan Meyer’s minority stress theory, published in 2003, offers valuable insights. According to Meyer, the stigmas and discrimination faced by queer individuals significantly contribute to higher rates of mental health issues. Subsequent research supports these claims, with studies revealing that nearly half of LGBTQ+ individuals have been diagnosed with depression.

The issue is compounded by the rise of chemsex—a dangerous combination of drug use and sexual activity. The increased accessibility of hook-up apps and the prevalence of drugs like GHB/GBL and crystal meth have led to more frequent chemsex sessions, often with tragic results. Organisations such as Dean Street Clinic and London Friend's Antidote service have noted a surge in support requests over the past decade, highlighting a growing problem.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated these issues. Social isolation and lockdown measures have led to a sharp increase in drug use and associated mental health problems. Ignacio Labayen de Inza, founder of Controlling Chemsex, notes that many turned to online support services as in-person assistance became unavailable. The disruption has left lasting impacts, with many still struggling to regain their mental and emotional wellbeing.

One of the significant challenges is the lack of concrete data. Neither sexual orientation nor the use of specific drugs like GHB/GBL and crystal meth are included in standard toxicology reports or national drug-use statistics. This data gap makes it difficult to fully understand the scale of the problem within the LGBTQ+ community.

Robin Windsor's case is especially heartrending. Known for his time on Strictly Come Dancing, Windsor struggled openly with mental health issues, becoming a volunteer for the mental health charity Sane. Despite his efforts to manage and combat his challenges, he ultimately succumbed to the pressures.

Experts like Yale professor John Pachankis also point to "intraminority stress" as a contributing factor. According to Pachankis, the competitive pressures within the gay community, combined with societal stigma, can significantly exacerbate mental health issues.

David Allwood, who was crowned Mr Gay Great Britain in 2022, echoes these sentiments, expressing a need for more inclusive community support. Phil Gizzie, who came out at 14 years old, underscores the importance of therapy for those from unsupportive families.

Community initiatives are emerging to provide safe spaces and support. Controlling Chemsex, for example, offers online support for those struggling with drug use and sex addiction. Julian Dineen from Antidote stresses the need for better understanding and data to effectively tackle the issue.

The newly established community interest company, You Are Loved, aims to fill this data gap by collecting and analysing premature death-related data, providing a foundation for future interventions and resources.

The recent spate of deaths has underscored the ongoing mental health crisis within the LGBTQ+ community. Without comprehensive data, it's challenging to measure the full extent of the problem or deploy effective interventions. However, the stories of those affected, like Windsor, highlight the urgent need for more support, understanding, and resources.

Individuals and organisations across the community are advocating for greater awareness and more robust support systems to help prevent further tragedies. As each story reminds us, behind every statistic is a life that could have been saved with the right support and understanding.