# Stigma against LGBTQ+ community in UK lower than was thought



In a turn up for the books, recent research indicates that stigma against LGBTQ+ people within British society might be significantly lower than commonly perceived. The same study, however, found that people with mental health issues continue to experience a higher level of stigma. These findings were presented at the European College of Neuropsychopharmacology (ECNP) conference currently being held in Milan.

Conducted by academics from the University of Cambridge, led by Professor Karen Ersche and Mr. Charlie Evans, the study aimed to measure the levels of stigma against LGBTQ+ individuals and those with mental health problems. The research utilised the Perceived Discrimination and Devaluation Scale to gather data, providing a nuanced analysis of both personal and societal perceptions.

The researchers administered two separate surveys. The first involved 264 participants who were questioned about societal and personal perceptions surrounding mental health problems. The second survey, comprising 124 participants, focused on societal and personal attitudes towards LGBTQ individuals.

Participants believed that societal stigma against mental health issues was significantly high. An interesting dimension of the study explored whether respondents had personal relationships with individuals who had mental health issues and how this familiarity impacted their perceptions. Despite this, mental health stigma remained robust even among those with direct exposure.

By contrast, societal and personal attitudes towards LGBTQ+ people were found to be more accepting than anticipated. Respondents reported that society was perceived to be moderately accepting of LGBTQ+ orientations, and personal acceptance levels were even higher.

Professor Ersche highlighted the significance of these findings: "Our aim was to look at the level of stigma against LGBTQ people in British society and also to compare this with stigma against people with mental health problems. The results surprised us, as societal stigma concerning LGBTQ individuals was lower than we anticipated, especially compared to that against those with mental health issues."

Mr. Charlie Evans, another key researcher, elaborated on the difficulties inherent in measuring prejudices: "It's challenging for people to acknowledge any prejudice they hold against a specific group. Therefore, we first asked participants about societal perceptions. Respondents consistently perceived that society was less accepting of both LGBTQ+ orientations and mental health problems than they themselves were."

Insights from the study prompt two significant questions. Firstly, why is mental health stigma perceived more strongly than LGBTQ+ stigma? Secondly, why do people with mental health problems tend to self-stigmatize more than LGBTQ+ individuals? Evans suggested that mental health issues might be perceived as personal deficiencies rather than aspects of one's identity, contrasting with how LGBTQ+ identity is often celebrated within the community.

Professor Pedro Morgado from the University of Minho, Portugal, who was not involved in the study, reflected on the implications of these findings: "The clear existence of significant stigma against both LGBTQ+ people and those with mental illnesses is crucial. Even though the results pertain specifically to the UK, they underscore the progress made in reducing LGBTQ+ discrimination through awareness campaigns."

Morgado proposed that similar strategies might be necessary to reduce mental health stigma. He suggested that initiatives to increase the visibility of people with mental health issues and improve public understanding of mental health disorders could be beneficial, mirroring the approaches used to combat LGBTQ stigma. He also called for the study of stigma in different international contexts to garner a more comprehensive perspective.

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