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Article

Stigma and mental health of homosexuals in palopo city: a correlation study



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ABSTRACT

This study explores the correlation between stigma and mental health issues among homosexual individuals in Palopo City, Indonesia. Homosexuality remains a highly stigmatized and marginalized subject in many societies, particularly in conservative regions where cultural and religious beliefs influence attitudes towards sexual minorities. The objective of this research is to understand how stigma, both external and internalized, affects the mental well-being of homosexuals in Palopo. Utilizing a qualitative research approach and literature review method, this study examines existing research, case studies, and theories on stigma and mental health in the context of sexual minorities. The findings reveal that homosexual individuals in Palopo experience significant psychological distress due to societal rejection, discrimination, and exclusion. Internalized stigma, characterized by self-hatred and low self-esteem, is prevalent among this group and is linked to various mental health challenges, including depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. Moreover, the literature suggests that societal attitudes towards homosexuality in Palopo, influenced by conservative values, exacerbate these mental health issues, leading to a cycle of isolation and poor mental health outcomes. The study also highlights the importance of education, legal reforms, and supportive communities in mitigating stigma and improving mental health outcomes for homosexuals in the region. This research provides valuable insights for policymakers, mental health professionals, and advocacy groups aiming to address the mental health needs of sexual minorities in conservative regions.

Keywords:

Stigma
Mental health
Homosexuality

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Introduction

Homosexuality is still often viewed as a deviation or abnormality, this topic continues to cause debate on both sides. Sexual stigma, or negative perceptions of sexual minority groups, especially homosexuals, is a result of this abnormality. The stigma against homosexuals is still very strong. Individuals with different sexual orientations often face unfair treatment. According to research conducted by (Mallory et al., 2021) shows that stigma can have negative impacts on LGBT individuals, including in terms of economic instability and mental health. Research shows that gay men and transgender people often experience wage differences compared to heterosexual men. In addition, this study has linked experiences of stigma, as well as living in a state with laws and society that do not support LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) can cause higher rates of mood and anxiety disorders, depression, suicide attempts, self-harm, and substance use. Data from the West Virginia Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System survey by BRFSS (The Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System) shows that LGBT adults in the state are more likely to experience mental health problems.

A person's emotional stability, positive self-concept, effective behavior and coping strategies, and satisfying interpersonal relationships are indicators of mental health, which includes emotional, psychological, and social well-being (Nair et al., 2024). Mental health includes regular good emotional experiences such as joy, contentment, satisfaction, meaning, purpose, and hope as well as being free from disorders such as depression, anxiety, psychotic conditions, or personality problems (McCombie et al., 2020). A healthy mindset enables people to recognize their strengths and weaknesses, cope with stress and challenges, work efficiently, and make a contribution to society.

In Indonesia, the prevalence of mental illness is still increasing, thus impacting the country's ability to handle the problem and reducing human output in the long term. According to Riset Kesehatan Dasar (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020) In Indonesia, there has been an increase in the prevalence of emotional mental illness by 9.8%. Anxiety disorders and depression are common mental illnesses, with an estimated 3.6% of people worldwide suffering from anxiety disorders and 4.4% suffering from depressive disorders, according to WHO data.

Sexual orientation, or a person's preference for romantic, sexual, emotional, and physical attraction and (Khotlele, 2023) for relationships with people of the same sex, has an impact on their mental health. According to (Kausar et al., 2022) states that it is not sexual orientation that causes mental health problems, but rather social and structural factors that contribute to mental health disparities based on sexual orientation. The stigma and violence that homosexual individuals experience throughout their lives related to their sexual and gender minority status undeniably affects their mental health status. Referring to (Wald, 2020) Because of social stigma, homosexuals may increasingly hide their identity, withdraw from others, or engage in other behaviors that negatively impact their mental health.

According to (Dagar et al., 2022) in the LGBT stigma report stated that in 2018, as many as 253 individuals experienced stigma and violence based on sexual orientation, identity, and gender expression outside of binary heteronormative norms. They are spread across various regions with various types of stigma and violence. The majority of victims were from the LGBT group with a total of 234 people, followed by the transgender group with 11 people, the lesbian group with 5 people, and the gay group with three people. The monitoring results show that the LGBT Community group occupies the top position as a victim. The LGBT community in question includes individuals who identify themselves as part of LGBTQIAAP (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Allies, Asexual, and Pansexual). Based on the results of interviews obtained from 4 people who associate themselves as part of homosexuals in Palopo City, 2 of whom are women who are lesbians and 2 of whom are men who identify themselves as gay. The interviewees came from different backgrounds, but all had similar experiences such as family and community pressure, then criticism that came along with the stigma that made them feel isolated and had to hide their sexual orientation identity (van Wyk & Kagee, 2023).

These data indicate that individuals who identify as LGBT are at high risk of experiencing stigma and violence. Therefore, this study aims to see how stigma impacts homosexual mental health in Palopo City (Wang & Cheng, 2020). The aim of this study was to determine the impact of stigma and discrimination on the mental health of homosexual individuals (Mørk et al., 2020).

Methods

Type of Research

Study This using cross-sectional study For see the relationship between variables studied (El Sayed et al., 2021).

Place and Time of Research

Study This conducted in Palopo City on August 18 - October 15 , 2024.

Population and Sample

The population used is homosexuals (gays and lesbians) aged 18 years and over, who live in Palopo City. The sampling technique for this research uses the Snowball sampling technique, with amount sample of 68 people (Lingiardi & Nardelli, 2024).

Data Collection

Data collection using questionnaires with scale Likert For measure the stigma they encounter because of their sexual orientation and questionnaire containing questions related to aspects of anxiety, depression, loss of control so that it can understand the extent to which stigma and discrimination contribute to psychological conditions such as anxiety, depression, and loss of control in homosexual individuals. Questionnaire shared via google form for guard confidentiality respondents (M. Kim et al., 2022).

Data Analysis and Processing

Grouping involves calculating the total score of each component of the questionnaire assessment and the average value. Data analysis uses frequency distribution and Pearson product moment correlation analysis (Kano et al., 2022).

Results and Discussion

General data includes respondent characteristics such as age, education, gender, and occupation. Meanwhile, specific data includes respondents' experiences related to stigma and the impact of stigma on the mental health of homosexuals in the City Palopo

Respondent Characteristics

The following table presents the frequency distribution and percentage of demographic characteristics of respondents based on gender, age, last education, and occupation. These data provide an overview of the background of respondents in this study (Ertorer, 2024).

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Respondent Characteristics

No.	Characteristics	Frequency	Presentation
Gender			
Man		18	26
Woman		50	74
Total		68	100
Age			
18-25		53	78
26-30		10	15
30-40		5	7
Total		68	100
Work			
Students/Students		41	60
Employee		12	18
Doesn't work		15	22
Total		68	100

Source: Primary Data (2024)

Based on Table 1 (Haas & Lannutti, 2024), the gender of the respondents is mostly female, which is 50 people (74%) of the total 68 respondents. Meanwhile, there are 18 men (26%). This shows that the majority of respondents in this study are female.

The age group of respondents is mostly 18-25 years old, as many as 53 people (78%). Respondents aged 26-30 years old number 10 people (15%), while the age group of 30-40 years is only represented by 5 people (7%) (Lourenco Calling, 2020). This data shows that the majority of

respondents are individuals who are relatively young, in the age range of 18-25 years (Colella & Santuzzi, 2024).

The majority of respondents' occupations are students or pupils, which is 41 people (60%). As many as 12 people (18%) work as employees, while 15 people (22%) do not have jobs. This shows that the majority of respondents are still in the education process.

Level of Stigma Experienced by Homosexuals in Palopo City

The following table presents the frequency distribution and percentage of stigma experienced by respondents in this study (Parrott et al., 2021). This data provides an overview of how low/high the stigma is felt by homosexuals in Palopo City.

Table 2. Distribution of Respondents based on the Level of Stigma Experienced by Respondents

Stigma	Frequency	Percentage of Tase (%)
Tall	49	72
Low	19	28
Total	68	100

Source: Primary data (2024)

Based on Table 2 above, it can be concluded that out of a total of 68 respondents, 49 people (72%) experienced high levels of stigma (E. Kim et al., 2024). This shows that the majority of respondents felt a significant impact from the stigma related to their sexual orientation, such as anxiety about family reactions, feelings of inferiority, feelings of not being worthy of respect, and concerns about discrimination (Tsang, 2020). Meanwhile, around 28% of respondents experienced low stigma, which shows that although there are a small number who feel mild stigma, the majority face greater challenges. This shows that some of these respondents lack an inclusive environment or adequate social support (Labrague, 2021).

Mental Health Level of Homosexuals in Palopo City

The table below presents the frequency and percentage distribution of respondents' mental health conditions.

Table 3. Distribution of Respondents Based on Mental Health Level

Mental Health	Frequency	Percent (%)
Bad	40	60
Currently	27	40
Total	68	100

Source: Primary data (2024)

Based on Table 3 above, it can be concluded that from a total of 68 respondents, most respondents (60%) of the respondents' mental health conditions are in the poor category. More than half of the respondents feel mental health disorders because they experience high stigma so that respondents feel depression, anxiety, difficulty relaxing, or feelings of hopelessness (Harvery et al., 2021). Meanwhile, around 40% of respondents consider their mental health conditions to be in the moderate category. This shows that some respondents face less extreme impacts of stigma compared to respondents who experience poor mental health (Rantanen et al., 2021).

The Relationship of Stigma to the Mental Health of Homosexuals

This study aims to explore the relationship between stigma and mental health in individuals who are the subjects of the study. Pearson correlation analysis is used to measure the extent of the relationship between the two variables. Pearson correlation is considered relevant because this method can identify the strength and direction of the linear relationship between two variables. The data used in this study involved 68 respondents, and the results of the analysis are presented in the following table 4.

Based on Table 4, it shows that the results of the analysis between stigma and mental health show a very strong and positive relationship, with a correlation coefficient of 0.978 (Soyobi et al.,

2024). This means that the greater the stigma a person feels, the greater the impact on their mental health. In addition, the significance value (Sig. 2-tailed) of 0.000 indicates that this relationship is statistically significant at a 99% confidence level ($p < 0.01$). Thus, it can be concluded that stigma significantly affects mental health (Lim et al., 2020).

Table 4. Correlation test

		Stigma	Mental health of homosexuals
Stigma	<i>Pearson Correlation</i>	1	.978
	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>		.000
	<i>N</i>	68	68
Mental health of homosexuals	<i>Pearson Correlation</i>	.978	1
	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	.000	
	<i>N</i>	68	68

. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Influence of Respondent Characteristics on Stigma Experiences and Their Impact on Mental Health

Based on gender characteristics, the majority of respondents in this study were women, with a total of 74% of the 68 respondents. Research shows that women are often more open in expressing their feelings and experiences related to discrimination or stigma. Therefore, the greater number of women in this study may affect the results. According to data (Fang et al., 2021) With a ratio of 2: 1, women are more likely to experience mental health problems than men. According to a study from Homewood Health in the UK, women are 47.5% more likely to experience mental health problems than men. According to (González Sanguino et al., 2023) also confirmed that men and women react differently to stress in different ways. Stress triggers a negative warning reaction in the female brain. According to the researcher's hypothesis, women who experience a lot of mental stress and do not get enough support are more likely to turn to deviant relationships as a means of escape because stress causes the release of certain hormones in women that lead to feelings of fear and anxiety. Mental pressure that comes from stress, feelings of anxiety (Pan et al., 2023), and fear contribute greatly to their decision-making in undergoing social relationships that may be unhealthy or self-defeating. In contrast, men are generally able to handle and even enjoy tension and competition, and they even believe that stress can be a source of constructive motivation. Some argue that women are more likely to experience stress and poor mental health when they are under pressure or involved in conflict (Vagheei et al., 2018).

Based on age characteristics, the majority of respondents aged 18-25 years dominated with 78%, indicating that this study mainly involved young age groups. This age group is vulnerable to social pressure and stigma because they are still in the process of finding their identity and are often more exposed to social dynamics that criticize their sexual orientation. This is in line with research conducted by Budiman dan Utami (2024) which states that young age is also often associated with emotional instability and unsettled experiences in dealing with stigma, which can worsen mental health conditions. The stigma felt by individuals in this age group is likely to affect their social relationships, search for identity, and psychological development.

Based on job characteristics, the majority of respondents were students (60%), indicating that they are still in the process of education and may not be fully financially or socially independent. Students are usually in an environment where social pressure and stigma are very strong, both in academic environments and in personal life. The lack of stable financial and social support can also exacerbate the impact of stigma on their mental health. For those who are unemployed (22%) or still students, this instability can lead to increased stress and anxiety, worsening the impact of the stigma they experience. This is in line with research conducted by which states that on average students have poor mental health because they have a minority sexual orientation. In addition, at the family level, experiences of childhood trauma and adverse experiences including, for example, neglect, or abuse, are strongly associated with poor mental health in young people at university.

Students with more adverse childhood experiences have a much greater risk of mental health than students who have not experienced childhood trauma.

To prevent the negative impact of stigma on the mental health of homosexuals, it is important to create a more inclusive environment by strengthening social support from family, friends, and community. Positive emotional support and greater acceptance can help individuals overcome negative feelings and strengthen their mental resilience. In addition, education about sexual orientation diversity can reduce stereotypes and prejudices, and raise public awareness of the importance of respecting individual rights. Providing friendly mental health services and understanding the context of sexual minority groups is also very important to reduce the negative impact of stigma. For example, many homosexuals face bullying in the form of teasing or insults related to their sexual orientation, such as being called "deviant" or "abnormal", as well as discriminatory treatment at work or school, which often leads to exclusion. This kind of bullying worsens their psychological condition, triggering feelings of unacceptability and low self-esteem, and increasing the risk of mental disorders such as anxiety and depression. In this study, there are several theoretical gaps that need further attention. First, although research shows that women tend to be more open in expressing feelings related to discrimination or stigma, there is a gap in theory that examines differences in gender responses to stress and mental health. Most mental health theories have not fully accounted for how discrimination and social stress affect women, particularly in the context of deviant social escape. More research is needed to better understand the relationship between emotional stress, fear, and anxiety in women, and how social support may mitigate the negative impacts of these stressors.

Second, in the 18-25 age group, this study revealed that they are more vulnerable to social pressure and stigma, especially in the process of searching for self-identity. However, there is a gap in the theory that connects young age to the changing social dynamics, especially in the context of the influence of social media. Previous research has not sufficiently explored how social media and digital representations can exacerbate or even help overcome the stigma faced by individuals in this age group, especially related to their sexual orientation. Therefore, there is a need for research that digs deeper into the role of social media in shaping perceptions and experiences of stigma among young age groups.

Third, related to employment status, the majority of respondents in this study were students or students who were not yet fully financially or socially independent. study stated that there was a relationship between adverse childhood experiences and students' mental health, there is still a gap in theory that examines the role of social support outside the family in overcoming the impact of stigma on students, especially those with minority sexual orientations. Existing theories do not sufficiently explain how financial and social instability in the academic environment can worsen their mental health, as well as how experiences of sexual discrimination affect students in the context of campus life. Thus, further research is needed to understand the interaction between students' socio-economic status, experiences of stigma, and social support in shaping their mental health.

The Impact of Stigma on Mental Health of Homosexuals in Palopo City

Based on the data presented in the table, the impact of stigma on the mental health of homosexuals in Palopo City shows that stigma has a negative impact on the mental health of homosexuals in Palopo City. This is evidenced by the data obtained, around 72% experienced high levels of stigma. This shows that respondents experienced a very high level of negative judgment from society, causing severe emotional and psychological impacts, such as anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. Individuals in this category feel unaccepted, experience exclusion, and have difficulty accessing support, which worsens their mental health. High stigma can also lead to internalization of stigma, where individuals begin to believe in negative views of themselves.

Based on the results of the interview, respondents also usually experience concerns about discrimination, both in the social environment and in the workplace. In addition, respondents also showed signs of hopelessness, such as feelings that nothing can be done to change the situation or a

bleak future. Some respondents also experienced physical changes such as difficulty sleeping (insomnia) or sleeping too much, as well as drastic changes in eating patterns (overeating or loss of appetite). The impact of this high stigma is clearly visible in the mental health of respondents, where around 60% of respondents have poor mental health conditions. High levels of stigma have a direct and significant impact on an individual's mental health, especially in terms of causing various psychological problems, including depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem and feelings of hopelessness.

On the other hand, 28% of respondents experienced low stigma, indicating that although they faced stigma, the intensity was not as severe as that experienced by the majority of respondents. This result is related to their mental health conditions which are in the moderate category, with 40% of respondents reporting this condition. This shows that although the impact of stigma remains, the level of disturbance experienced is not as severe as in the group with high stigma. This is supported by the results of the interviews conducted that respondents showed the ability to maintain emotional stability and were not easily disturbed excessively by the stigma they faced. They were able to overcome negative feelings well and remain positive in difficult situations. In addition, there was support from family, friends, or communities that provided a sense of security and acceptance, so that respondents felt they were not alone in facing stigma. This support can be in the form of emotional or practical support in everyday life. Despite the impact of stigma, respondents were still able to maintain mental balance and did not show signs of severe mental disorders. They were still able to carry out daily activities quite well. This is in line with research conducted supporting this finding, stating that stigma is not only psychologically detrimental but also affects the social aspects of the lives of individuals or groups who are the targets of stigma. Stigma can limit their access to better opportunities, lower self-esteem, and significantly reduce a person's quality of life.

Based on the results of statistical tests, the correlation analysis between stigma and mental health shows a very strong and positive relationship, with a correlation coefficient of 0.978. This means that the higher the level of stigma felt by an individual, the greater the impact on their mental health. This is in line with research conducted by that social stigma against homosexuals can cause various psychological problems, including depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem. Social stigma causes stigmatized individuals to feel ashamed and worthless, which has a negative impact on their mental health. This finding is also in line with the *Minority Stress theory* developed by This theory explains that individuals who belong to minority groups, such as homosexuals, are more susceptible to additional stress caused by external factors, such as stigma, discrimination, and social rejection. These stressors are chronic and ongoing, which not only cause psychological disorders such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), but also contribute to a decrease in overall quality of life. Individuals who live under this pressure tend to face a greater risk of experiencing emotional difficulties, as well as an increased risk of committing suicide.

Based on the description above, it can be concluded that high stigma has a very detrimental impact on the mental health of homosexuals in Palopo City. Severe stigma not only increases anxiety and despair but also worsens overall mental health. Although some individuals experience less extreme impacts, stigma still has a negative effect on mental health. Therefore, it is important to create a more inclusive environment and provide adequate social support to reduce the negative impact of stigma on their mental health. Good support and a more understanding and accepting social environment can help reduce the psychological burden experienced by homosexuals and improve their overall quality of life.

Based on the results of the study above, there are several theoretical gaps that need further attention. Although this study shows that stigma against homosexuals in Palopo City has a significant impact on mental health, especially in groups with high stigma who experience anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem, there is still a gap in theory that examines how specific mechanisms of stigma interact with individual factors in influencing mental health. The Minority Stress Theory developed by has provided a strong foundation, but the gap that exists is the lack of a deeper understanding of how individuals with lower stigma experiences (28% of respondents in this

study) can still maintain their emotional stability. Most mental health theories focus more on the direct impact of high stigma without sufficiently exploring protective factors that can help individuals with lower levels of stigma to overcome negative feelings and maintain their mental balance. This study shows that social support from family, friends, or community plays a major role in mitigating the impact of stigma, but existing theories have not fully examined how the role of this social support varies based on different cultural or social contexts, especially in a society such as Palopo City.

Furthermore, there is also a gap in understanding the role of internalization of stigma experienced by individuals with high stigma, where they begin to believe negative views about themselves. Although there is evidence to support the negative impact of stigma on mental health, there is still a lack of research examining how this internalization of stigma can be a prolonged process and affect an individual's psychological condition in the long term. Existing theories do not adequately explain the psychological mechanisms that occur when individuals begin to internalize these negative views, and how this contributes to deeper feelings of hopelessness and anxiety.

Finally, in the analysis of the relationship between stigma and mental health, although the results of the analysis show a very strong and positive relationship (correlation coefficient of 0.978), existing theories have not fully examined the dynamics between social stigma, discrimination, and individual personal experiences in a broader context, such as the role of social media and social changes at the local level that can worsen or even improve perceptions of homosexual groups. More in-depth research on these factors is needed to develop a more holistic approach to understanding the impact of stigma on mental health, as well as how social interventions and support can be more effective.

Thus, although Minority Stress theory and previous research provide a strong foundation, there are still several theoretical gaps that need to be addressed, particularly regarding individual protective factors, mechanisms of stigma internalization, and the more contextual role of social support in mitigating the negative impact of stigma on mental health.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis of demographic data of respondents in this study, the majority of respondents were female and aged 18-25 years, indicating that this study mainly involved young age groups and was dominated by women. Most respondents were students, who were still in the process of education and may not be fully financially or socially independent. This condition has the potential to influence how they experience stigma related to sexual orientation, where lack of social support can worsen the impact of stigma on the mental health of homosexuals in Palopo City.

The results of the study also showed that around 72% of respondents experienced high stigma, which reflects a very high level of negative judgment from society, resulting in serious emotional and psychological impacts such as anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. Individuals in this category of respondents felt unaccepted, isolated, and had difficulty accessing support, which further worsened their mental health. High stigma can also lead to internalization of stigma, where individuals begin to believe in negative views of themselves. The data showed that around 60% of respondents with high stigma had poor mental health, confirming how stigma can have a significant negative impact on the mental health of homosexuals in Palopo City.

The results of the study showed that the results of the analysis between stigma and mental health showed a very strong and positive relationship. This means that the greater the stigma a person feels, the greater the impact on their mental health. In addition this relationship is statistically significant at a confidence level.

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