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LGBTQ+ young people's experiences and perceptions of self-managing their mental health

Background

- Young people self-manage their mental health using self-care strategies (Wolpert et al., 2019), coping methods (Stapley et al., 2019), or self-help techniques (Bennett et al., 2019), which may better meet their needs or be preferable to attending specialist mental health services.
- LGBTQ+ young people are more likely than their peers to experience a mental health difficulty (NHS Digital, 2018) and may be less likely to draw on specialist support due to fears of discrimination (Stonewall, 2018).
- However, little is known about LGBTQ+ young people's experiences and perceptions of self-managing their mental health.

Methods

- LGBTQ+ young people in the United Kingdom (UK; $n = 20$, $M_{age} = 19.30$) participated in a telephone interview or an online focus group.
- Research questions focussed on LGBTQ+ young people's experiences and perceptions of self-managing their mental health, what they perceived to stop or help them to self-manage and any perceived challenges to self-management specifically relating to being LGBTQ+.
- Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2019) led to three key themes: (1) self-management strategies and process, (2) barriers to self-management and (3) facilitators to self-management.
- A selection of sub-themes is presented below.

Facilitators

Asking for help and vulnerability

"So, self-management also involves the ability to be vulnerable, and the ability to speak to other people about things that you're going through." (Focus Group 1, Participant 2)

Benefits of the Covid-19 lockdown

"Mostly since lockdown, 'cause obviously I've, you know, I've had a lot of time to just sort of self-evaluate, self-reflect, and I've found that maybe this is something that I was neglecting." (Interviewee 11)

The LGBTQ+ community helps

"And I suppose there's also ways that it makes it, not easier, but, in other ways more positive, such as having this community, the LGBTQ+ community, who understand you, without even having to know you" (Focus Group 2, Participant 1)

Intrinsic benefits of self-management

"A lot of those things are, are things that do make me happy anyway. It's not all just a slog of having to do these things to keep my mental health, you know, working well." (Interviewee 2)

Barriers

Self-management can be hard work

"I feel like one of the biggest inhibitors of self-management is if your emotions get too loud and [if] those thoughts get too loud, it's very hard to try and think over them." (Interviewee 6)

'Outness' affects self-management

"I didn't feel like I had anyone I could talk to about it, because I didn't feel comfortable to come out to anyone yet." (Interviewee 4)

Prejudice against LGBTQ+ people

"I have a lot of in-built insecurities that I didn't experience until I came out, and a lot of sadness and trauma inherited from the community almost. And so, it adds something else to tackle, so it just means you may have more to be contending with." (Focus Group 2, Participant 2)

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Discussion

- Participants' most frequently mentioned self-management strategy was 'speaking to or meeting up with friends or a partner'.
- Both barriers and facilitators to self-management were identified which participants perceived to relate to LGBTQ+ identity.
- Social support, LGBTQ+ youth groups and community support were identified as key facilitators to participants' self-management of their mental health, which should be investigated in future research.
- These findings also have important implications for policy and intervention development concerning LGBTQ+ young people's mental health.
- Any questions or comments? Please do get in touch! ✉ rosa.town.13@ucl.ac.uk