Risk and Protective Factors for Mental Health Among Sexual and Gender Minority Older Adults

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Background

- Nearly 6 million sexual and gender minority (SGM) older adults in the U.S. will be aged 60 and older by 2030.
- SGM older adults experience greater mental health disparities compared to their heterosexual peers.
- More than 30% of SGM older adults report having depressive symptoms and/or mental health distress.
- Less is known about risk and protective factors for the mental health of SGM older adults.

Resilience Framework
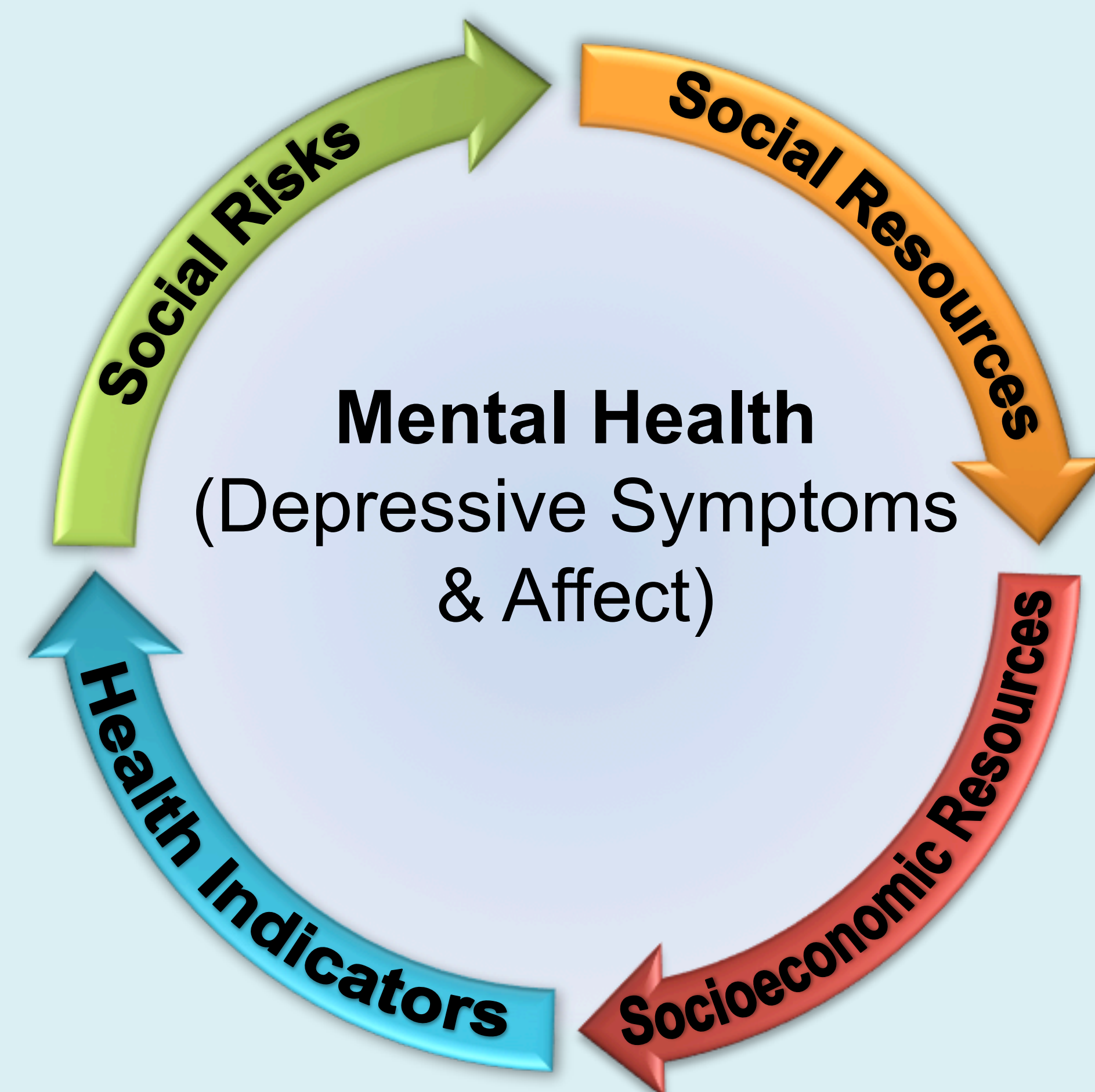
Source: Adapted from Fredriksen-Goldsen, Kim, Shiu, Goldsen, & Emlet, 2015.

Objectives

- To examine the influence of key health indicators and risk and protective factors for mental health.
- To identify correlates of positive affect among a sample of SGM older adults.

Study Overview & Methods

- In 2010-2011, a community-based sample of SGM older adults was recruited from the Center on Halsted, a comprehensive LGBT community center in the Midwest.
- Cross-sectional study: SGM adults aged 50 and older (N=210) completed a self-administered survey.
- Multivariable regression was used to examine the associations between health indicators and risk and protective factors with depressive symptoms and positive affect.

Mental Health Outcomes

- Ten-item measure from the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (**CES-D**) (Irwin, Artin, Oxman, 1999).
- Rated from 0–30, with higher scores suggesting greater depressive symptoms; cut off score of 10 or higher indicates presence of significant depressive symptoms.
- Positive affect was measured using a 5-item measure (only positive items; range of 0–20) from the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule or PANAS (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988).

Participant Characteristics

Characteristics (N=210)	N (%)
Demographics	
Age, mean (SD)	59.6 (8.0)
Gender, Female	50 (60.3)
Transgender	11 (5.2)
Gay/Lesbian	163 (80.3)
Bisexual	27 (13.3)
Person of Color	72 (34.2)
Social Risks	
Discrimination from healthcare providers	22 (10.5)
Religion unaccepting of LGBT status	46 (23.2)
Negative social support	99 (50.3)
Social Resources	
Married or partnered	71 (34.6)
Have children	64 (30.5)
Social network size, mean (SD)	10.61 (7.4)
Social support, mean (SD)	4.13 (3.4)
Socioeconomic Resources	
Education, ≥ some college	163 (79.9)
Income adequacy	80 (38.8)
Employment	58 (27.9)
Health Indicators	
Self-rated health, good to excellent	157 (75.5)
HIV	71 (33.8)
Health service needs in past year	163 (77.6)
Functional impairment, 1 or more	84 (40.4)
Mental Health	
Depressive symptoms, mean (SD)	8.3 (5.9)
Depression, (CES-D ≥ 10)	75 (35.7)
Positive affect, mean (SD)	12.1 (4.3)

Mental Health by SGM Subgroups

	Depressive Symptoms Mean (SD)	Positive Affect Mean (SD)
Gay	7.8 (6.2)	12.0 (3.7)
Lesbian	7.7 (4.5)	12.3 (4.2)
Bisexual	10.8 (6.6)	10.9 (4.7)
Transgender	10.1 (5.6)	10.7 (4.4)

Independent Associations with Mental Health Outcomes

Characteristics	Depressive Symptoms	Positive Affect
Demographics		
Age	**-.26****	.10
Gender, Female	.11	-.03
Person of Color	**.19***	.08
Social Risks		
Discrimination from healthcare providers	**.20****	-.08
Religion unaccepting of LGBT	**.18***	-.06
Negative social support	**.37****	-.05
Social Resources		
Married or partnered	**-.13**+	.03
Have children	.05	-.06
Social network size, mean (SD)	-.04	.11
Social support, mean (SD)	.06	.06
Socioeconomic Resources		
Education, ≥ some college	-.09	.09
Income adequacy	**-.31****	**.23***
Employment	-.10	**.14***
Health Indicators		
Self-rated health, good to excellent	**.37****	**-.31****
HIV	**.18***	-.07
Health service needs in past year	**.18****	-.04
Functional impairment, 1 or more	**.34****	**-.17***

Model 1: Depressive Symptoms

Characteristic	β	95% CI	P-Value
Health Indicators			
Self-rated health	-.21	-4.8, -1.0	.004
Functional impairment	.20	0.7, 4.0	.006
Risk Factors			
Negative social support	.32	2.2, 5.2	<.001
Protective Factors			
Income Adequacy	-.08	-2.6, 0.7	.25

Note: Adjusted for age, gender, sexual orientation, race; β = Standardized coefficient; R^2 = .37

Model 2: Positive Affect

Characteristic	β	95% CI	P-Value
Health Indicators			
Self-rated health	.24	0.87, 3.94	.006
Protective Factors			
Income Adequacy	.18	0.26, 2.89	.03

Note: Adjusted for age, gender, sexual orientation, race; R^2 = .20

Discussion

- Functional impairment, poor self-rated health, and experiencing negative social support were associated with greater levels of depressive symptoms.
- Similarly, reporting better health and having an adequate income were associated with higher levels of positive affect.
- Limitations: Results are cross-sectional and based on self-reported physical, social and mental health outcomes.

Health Implications

- These results provide insight into the potential correlates of mental health in SGM older adults.
- There is a need for longitudinal studies aimed at understanding risk and protective factors for mental health among SGM populations in late life.
- Future research should consider developing and testing targeted interventions for SGM older adults at risk for depression and negative affect.