



SUICIDAL BEHAVIOR AMONG LESBIAN, GAY, AND BISEXUAL YOUTH 2016 YOUTH

Overview

- For Americans between the ages of 15 and 24, suicide is the second leading cause of death.ⁱ Though this is true regardless of sexual orientation, research implicates **that risk of suicidality is greater for youth who identify as lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB).**ⁱⁱ
- In 2015, the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention conducted a study on the behavior of youth in the US in the past year. They observed the following:ⁱⁱⁱ
 - In the past 12 months, **60.4% of LGB youth felt hopeless or sad every day for 2+ weeks**, compared to 26.4% of heterosexual youth
 - In the past 12 months, **42.8% of LGB youth seriously considered suicide**, compared to 14.8% of heterosexual youth.
 - In the past 12 months, **38.2% of LGB youth made a suicide plan**, compared to 11.9% of heterosexual youth.
 - In the past 12 months, **29.4% of LGB youth attempted suicide**, compared to 6.4% of heterosexual youth.
 - In the past 12 months, **9.4% of LGB youth made a suicide attempt that required the attention of a medical professional**, compared to 2% of heterosexual youth.
- **Most LGB youth who attempt suicide demonstrate some symptoms of psychopathology**, with mood and anxiety disorders being the most prevalent diagnoses. LGB youth are also more likely to be diagnosed with an eating disorder.^{iv}
- Lesbian and gay youth are **three times more likely** to report thoughts of suicide than their heterosexual counterparts, while bisexual youth are **five times more likely** to report such thoughts than their heterosexual counterparts.^{iv}
- According to a 2013 study, **7.2% of US college students identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual**. Studies show that these students report increased feelings of loneliness, are more likely to be diagnosed with depression, and endorse fewer reasons for living.^v

Resources

Center Link: The Community of LGBT Centers: YouthLink

<http://www.lgbtcenters.org/youth-link.aspx>

International Associate for Suicide Prevention: LGBT Resources

www.iasp.info/resources/Groups_at_Risk/LGBT/

It Gets Better Project www.itgetsbetter.org

Suicide Prevention Resource Center: Suicide Risk and Prevention for LGBT Youth

www.sprc.org/sites/default/files/migrate/library/SPRC_LGBT_Youth.pdf

The Trevor Project www.thetrevorproject.org

RISK FACTORS

While belong to the LGB youth community is not itself a risk factor for suicide, those who make up this population become at risk for suicide when they experience the following:^{ii, iv, v}

- Conflict with family or friends because of sexual identity
- Stigma
- Threat of violence
- Institutional discrimination
- Homelessness
- Physical and verbal abuse, including bullying and cyberbullying
- Exposure to suicide of a family member or friend
- Substance abuse
- Psychopathology, especially depression, anxiety, and bipolar disorder
- High risk sexual behavior
- Isolation and exclusion
- Maladaptive coping strategies

Protective Factors

Despite the obstacles LGB youth face, there is much that can be done to diminish the suicide rate among this population.

Protective factors for LGB youth include:^{ii, iv, v}

- Support from family and peers
- Safe and affirming school environments
- The presence of organizations such as Gay-Straight Alliances in schools
- Family connectedness
- Access to mental health care that suits their unique needs
- A sense of self-efficacy

ⁱ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2015). Fatal injury reports, national and regional, 1999-2014. Retrieved from http://webappa.cdc.gov/sasweb/ncipc/mortrate10_us.html

ⁱⁱ Russell, S.T., & J.N. Fish. (2016). Mental health in lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, 12, 465-487.

ⁱⁱⁱ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2016). *Youth risk behavior surveillance system (YRBSS)*. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/index.htm>

^{iv} Marshal, M.P., Dietz, L.J., Friedman, M.S., Stall, R., Smith, H.A., McGinley, J. Thoma, B.C., Murray, P.J., D'Augelli, A.R., & Brent, D.A. (2011). Suicidality and depression disparities between sexual minority and heterosexual youth: a meta-analytic review. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 49(2), 115-123.

^v Johnson, R.J., Oxendine, S., Taub, D.J., & J. Roberston. (2013). Suicide prevention for LGBT students. *New Directions for Student Services*, 141, 55-69.

If you or someone you know is suicidal, please contact a mental health professional or call 1-800-273-TALK (8255).