

Health and Safety of LGBT Youth

IN CALIFORNIA

The California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) has collected health information from middle and high school students for over 20 years. The survey questions cover a wide range of health-related topics, including physical activity, nutrition, drug use, bullying, mental health, and protective factors at school. Beginning with the 2013-15 administration of the survey, students were asked to self-identify as heterosexual, gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Students were also asked to self-identify as male, female, or transgender. These two questions allow for the comparison of health-related behaviors and experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth (LGBT) with those students who do not identify as LGBT (non-LGBT).

Chapman University in conjunction with ACLU of Southern California has analyzed the data from the 2013-15 administration of the CHKS to better understand the health-related status of LGBT youth in California. Data were derived from 623,731 survey responses from 7th, 9th, and 11th graders representing a wide demographic sample of California youth. Below are some of the highlights of the results that speak to the health status of LGBT youth.

How Many LGBT Youth?

In 2013, 5.0% of California middle and high school students identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, with 95% of students identifying as non-LGB and 0.8% of students identifying as transgender. Based on enrollment for middle schools and high schools during the 2013-15 survey administration this percentage translates to approximately 144,514 students identifying as LGB in California and approximately 23,122 students identifying as transgender in this age group. The number of self-identified LGBT youth is likely to be low, given that enrollment figures do not include private school and home school youth and many youth this age are questioning their sexual orientation and gender identity.

Attendance

LGB Youth were almost 7 times more likely (7.3%) than their non-LGB peers (1.1%) to miss school in the previous 30 days because they did not feel safe at school. Transgender youth were more than twice as likely (3.6%) to miss school than non-transgender students for the same reason (1.4%).

Safety

Transgender youth were 5 times more likely than their non-transgender peers to report not feeling safe at school (27.3% versus 5.1%). For LGB youth, 15.9% admitted to not feeling safe at school compared with 4.9% for their non-LGB peers. Transgender youth (21.8%) were more likely to report being afraid of being beaten up than their non-transgender peers (13.0%) in the past 12 months. The same is true for LGB youth (24.4% versus 12.5%).

*California Middle School and
High School Youth*
144,514 LGB 23,122 Transgender

Bullying

Transgender youth were more likely (32.7%) to report having been pushed, shoved, slapped, hit, kicked by someone 1 or more times on a school campus than their non-transgender peers (21.2%). LGB youth were also more likely to report the same (30.8% versus 20.9%).

LGB youth were more likely to report having been threatened with harm or injury at school (25.2% versus 10.0%) in the past 12 months. Transgender youth reported similar experiences with 29.1% reporting having been threatened with harm or injury at school versus 10.5% for non-transgender students. Almost half (47.2%) of self-identified LGB youth report being bullied because they were lesbian, gay, bisexual or someone thought they were. For non-LGB youth, 5.9% report being bullied because someone thought they were lesbian, gay or bisexual. Among transgender youth, 32.7% were bullied for the same reason versus 7.3% among non-transgender youth.

Alcohol and Drug Use

Looking at lifetime use of alcohol and other drugs across grades 7 through 12, there were noticeable differences. Lifetime use measures the number of youth who have ever used a particular drug. Lifetime use of alcohol was higher for LGB youth (53.7%) than for their non-LGB peers (29.1%). Transgender youth also showed a higher rate (42.0%) than non-transgender youth (30.2%).

Lifetime use of marijuana was 43.1% for LGB youth and 19.7% for youth identifying as non-LGB. A similar disparity was evident for transgender youth (33.1% versus 20.7%).

LGB youth reported a higher use of methamphetamine and cocaine during their lifetime than their non-LGB peers (8.5% versus 3.0%) with transgender youth reporting a similar disparity (13.1% versus 3.3%).

In an average class of 30 students in California, two of those students will identify as LGBT

Mental Health

The 2013 data revealed indicators of mental health challenges for LGBT youth. When asked *Did you miss school because you felt very sad, hopeless, anxious, stressed, or angry during the past thirty days?* 35.9% of LGB responded in the affirmative, compared with 10.9% of their non-LGB peers. Transgender youth reported similar experiences with 18.2% having missed school because they felt very sad, hopeless, anxious, stressed, or angry versus 12.0% of non-transgender youth.

When asked *Did you seriously consider attempting suicide during the past 12 months?* 50.0% of LGB youth reported that they had seriously considered attempting suicide versus 16.7% of their non-LGB peers. Similar results were found for transgender youth, with 31.8% admitting to having seriously considered suicide versus 18.5% of non-transgender youth. When translated into real numbers, this indicates that in one year in California approximately 81,000 middle school and high school LGBT youth seriously considered attempting suicide.

Protective Factors

Protective factors are the conditions and structures at a school that help to shield students from potential harmful outcomes. These are the human relationships and programs at a school site that “protect” against the risk factors already mentioned here.

Youth Engagement and Connection to School

LGB youth were more likely to say that they *did not feel close to people at this school* than did their non-LGB peers (19.4% versus 10.3%). Transgender-identified students were even less likely to report feeling close to people at school (23.4%) in comparison to non-transgender students (12.7%).

When presented with the statement *I feel like I am a part of this school*, LGB youth were less likely to agree with the statement (26.2%) when compared with non-LGB peers (13.7%). Transgender youth were more than twice as likely to say that they did not feel like they were a part of their school (32.5%) as compared to non-transgender students (16.5%).

Responding to the statement *Teachers at my school treat students fairly*, 17.9% of LGB identified students were more likely to disagree with the statement compared to 13.3% of their non-LGB peers. Transgender students were even more likely to disagree with the statement than non-transgender students (32.1% versus 17.3%).

Moving Forward

The results of the CHKS survey responses highlight the importance of increasing positive connections and protective factors as a way to create safe and inclusive environments for our lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth. These protective factors should:

- Guarantee that all youth—and especially LGBT identified youth—have caring and supportive adults to speak with and to mentor them.
- Create school environments that are safe, supportive, and inclusive of all.
- Implement policies, programs, and resources that promote health equity among LGBT youth.
- Create opportunities for LGBT youth to engage in meaningful participation in schools and communities.



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