Mental Health Disparities among New York City LGBTQ Youth, 2017

Many high school-age youth identify with a more fluid and diverse range of sexual orientations and gender identities than is captured by common labels, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, or queer (LGBTQ). Among youth whose sexual orientation and/or gender identity differs from heterosexual or cisgender (the societal norms), many often experience events that negatively affect their mental health. While disparities in mental health outcomes have been shown to exist among LGBTQ youth overall, when compared with their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts, meaningful differences may also exist within LGBTQ subgroups (e.g., bisexual vs. lesbian or gay).

Exploring differences among youth who identify as LGBTQ can assist in developing targeted interventions that address the unique mental health needs of specific LGBTQ subgroups. This brief presents data from the 2017 New York City (NYC) Youth Risk Behavior Survey on the mental health disparities experienced by NYC public high school youth who self-identified as LGBTQ.

One in seven youths identified as bisexual, lesbian, gay, or not sure about their sexual orientation

- In 2017, about 14% of New York City youth identified as bisexual, not sure, or lesbian or gay.
- Nine percent reported that they did not describe themselves in any of the ways listed on the survey. These youth may have felt they were not being represented by the options, rejected the use of labels, understood sexual orientation to be a continuum or fluid, or identified with another label, such as queer, pansexual, asexual, or demisexual.

Definitions:
- **Youth** refers to NYC public high school students in grades 9 through 12.
- **Sexual orientation**: A person’s sexual, emotional, or romantic attraction to others.
- Students were asked to describe their sexual orientation by selecting one of the following responses: heterosexual (straight), gay or lesbian, bisexual, not sure, I do not describe myself in any of these ways, I do not know what these answer options mean. The specific terms were not defined in the survey. For the purposes of this brief, we use the following definitions:
  - **Bisexual**: A person who is attracted to others of the same gender, and of other genders.
  - **Lesbian**: A person who identifies as a girl and is attracted to other girls.
  - **Gay**: A person who is attracted to others of the same gender.
  - **Not sure**: Youth who responded “Not sure” may be questioning or exploring their sexual orientation.
  - **Heterosexual**: A person who is attracted to others of the opposite gender.

Percentages do not sum to total due to rounding. Source: NYC Youth Risk Behavior Survey 2017
Bisexual youth were at high risk of some mental health concerns

- More than half (57%) of bisexual youth reported having experienced depressive symptoms in the past 12 months. Youth who identified as gay or lesbian (45%), or were not sure of their sexual orientation (42%) were less likely to report depressive symptoms in the past 12 months than bisexual youth.

- When compared with youth who were not sure of their sexual orientation, bisexual youth were more likely to report having engaged in non-suicidal self-injury in the past 12 months (28% vs. 37%); the prevalence among youth who identified as lesbian or gay was similar to bisexual youth.

- Bisexual youth were more likely to report having seriously considered suicide in the past 12 months than youth who reported not being sure of their sexual orientation (36% vs. 27%).

- A quarter of bisexual (25%) and lesbian or gay (24%) youth reported having attempted suicide in the past 12 months.

- Youth who did not describe themselves in these ways were less likely to report depressive symptoms, non-suicidal self-injury, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts in the past 12 months, compared with bisexual youth.

- Youth who identified as bisexual, lesbian or gay, not sure, or who did not describe themselves in these ways were more likely to report depressive symptoms, non-suicidal self-injury, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts in the past 12 months, compared with heterosexual youth.

### Mental health in past 12 months by sexual orientation, New York City youth, 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Bisexual</th>
<th>Lesbian or gay</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
<th>Did not describe self in these ways</th>
<th>Heterosexual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experienced symptoms of depression</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td></td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged in non-suicidal self-injury</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td></td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seriously considered suicide</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempted suicide</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Symptoms of depression: felt so sad or hopeless almost every day for two or more weeks in a row that they stopped doing some usual activities.

*Percentage is statistically different from bisexual (p<0.05).

Source: NYC Youth Risk Behavior Survey 2017

### Data Source:
**Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) 2017:** The YRBS is a biennial self-administered, anonymous survey conducted in NYC public high schools by the NYC Health Department and the NYC Department of Education. Two percent of respondents did not know what the sexual orientation response options meant and were excluded from the analysis. Three percent of respondents did not know what the gender identity question was asking and were excluded from the analysis. For more survey details, visit https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/data/data-sets/nyc-youth-risk-behavior-survey.page.

### References:
Youth who were transgender or not sure were more likely to have attempted suicide than cisgender youth

- In 2017, about 3% of NYC youth identified as transgender or were not sure if they were transgender.
- In 2017, youth who identified as transgender or who were not sure if they were transgender were more likely than their cisgender peers to report the following during the past 12 months:
  - Symptoms of depression (47% vs. 31%)
  - Non-suicidal self-injury (48% vs. 15%)
  - Serious consideration of suicide (38% vs. 15%)
  - Suicide attempt (38% vs. 9%)

**Mental health in past 12 months by gender identity, New York City youth, 2017**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Transgender or not sure</th>
<th>Cisgender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experienced symptoms of depression</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged in non-suicidal self-injury</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seriously considered suicide</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempted suicide</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Due to small sample sizes, transgender youth and youth who were not sure if they were transgender were combined. Symptoms of depression: felt so sad or hopeless almost every day for two or more weeks in a row that they stopped doing some usual activities.

Source: NYC Youth Risk Behavior Survey 2017

For more information about treatment resources or to talk to someone directly if you are experiencing a crisis, call 1-888 NYCWell (1-888-692-9355) or visit: nycwell.cityofnewyork.us

**Definitions:**

**Gender identity:** A person’s internal sense of being male, female, neither, both, or other gender(s), regardless of the sex assigned to them at birth. Everyone has a gender identity. Transgender: A person who does not identify with the sex assigned to them at birth. The NYC YRBS 2017 described transgender as when a person’s “sex at birth does not match the way they think or feel about their gender.” Students were asked “are you transgender?” and could select one of the following: yes, no, I am not sure, I do not know what this question is asking.

**Cisgender:** A person who identifies with the sex assigned to them at birth. For this Epi Data Brief, cisgender refers to youth who identified as not transgender on the NYC YRBS 2017. The exact survey question text and additional definitions are provided in the appendix.

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Mental Health Disparities among New York City LGBTQ Youth, 2017

Data Tables

Table 1. Sexual orientation, gender identity, and mental health of New York City youth, 2017

Table 2. Mental health disparities by sexual orientation and gender identity among New York City youth, 2017

Figure 1. Additional definitions and relevant New York City Youth Risk Behavior Survey questions, 2017

Data Sources

New York City Youth Risk Behavior Survey 2017 is a biennial self-administered, anonymous survey conducted in NYC public high schools by the NYC Health Department and the NYC Department of Education. For more survey details, visit https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/data/data-sets/nyc-youth-risk-behavior-survey.page
Table 1. Sexual orientation, gender identity, and mental health of New York City youth, 2017

Source: NYC Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2017

Data are weighted to the NYC public high school student population.

Data are not age adjusted.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sexual orientation Φ</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Lower 95% Confidence Interval</th>
<th>Upper 95% Confidence Interval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexual (straight)</td>
<td>76.4</td>
<td>74.9</td>
<td>77.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesbian or gay</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not describe myself in any of these ways</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender identity Ψ</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Lower 95% Confidence Interval</th>
<th>Upper 95% Confidence Interval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cisgender (&quot;No, I am not transgender&quot;)</td>
<td>96.5</td>
<td>95.9</td>
<td>97.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, transgender</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure if transgender</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experienced symptoms of depression during past 12 months λ</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Lower 95% Confidence Interval</th>
<th>Upper 95% Confidence Interval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>33.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>68.4</td>
<td>66.8</td>
<td>69.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Engaged in non-suicidal self-injury during past 12 months δ</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Lower 95% Confidence Interval</th>
<th>Upper 95% Confidence Interval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>83.0</td>
<td>81.7</td>
<td>84.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seriously considered attempting suicide during past 12 months</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Lower 95% Confidence Interval</th>
<th>Upper 95% Confidence Interval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>83.8</td>
<td>82.6</td>
<td>84.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attempted suicide during past 12 months</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Lower 95% Confidence Interval</th>
<th>Upper 95% Confidence Interval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>89.0</td>
<td>87.9</td>
<td>90.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Youth refers to NYC public high school students in grades 9 through 12.

Confidence intervals (CIs) are a measure of estimate precision: the wider the CI, the more imprecise the estimate.

Φ 2% of respondents did not know what the answer options meant and were therefore excluded from the analysis
Ψ 3% of respondents did not know what the question was asking and were therefore excluded from the analysis
λ Felt so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row during the past 12 months
δ Purposely hurt themselves without wanting to die during past 12 months
U When reporting to nearest whole percent, round up
Table 2. Mental health disparities by sexual orientation and gender identity among New York City youth, 2017

Source: NYC Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sexual orientation</th>
<th>Experienced symptoms of depression during past 12 months</th>
<th>Engaged in non-suicidal self-injury during past 12 months</th>
<th>Seriously considered attempting suicide during past 12 months</th>
<th>Attempted suicide during past 12 months</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% Lower 95% Confidence Interval Upper 95% Confidence Interval p-value</td>
<td>% Lower 95% Confidence Interval Upper 95% Confidence Interval p-value</td>
<td>% Lower 95% Confidence Interval Upper 95% Confidence Interval p-value</td>
<td>% Lower 95% Confidence Interval Upper 95% Confidence Interval p-value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexual (straight)</td>
<td>27.9 26.3 29.6 &lt;0.001</td>
<td>13.3 12.0 14.6 &lt;0.001</td>
<td>12.8 11.9 14.6 &lt;0.001</td>
<td>7.5 6.6 8.5 &lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesbian or gay</td>
<td>44.8 37.5 52.3 0.004</td>
<td>31.4 25.4 38.1 0.158</td>
<td>28.1 20.4 37.3 0.125</td>
<td>24.4 19.5 29.9 0.852</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>56.8 53.2 60.3 referent</td>
<td>36.8 32.5 41.4 referent</td>
<td>36.5 D 31.3 42 referent</td>
<td>25.0 21.2 29.3 referent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>41.9 35.8 48.2 &lt;0.001</td>
<td>28.2 21.5 36.0 0.055</td>
<td>26.8 21.2 33.2 0.023</td>
<td>21.1 14.4 30.0 0.330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not describe myself in any of these ways</td>
<td>33.2 28.8 37.9 &lt;0.001</td>
<td>19.3 16.8 22.2 &lt;0.001</td>
<td>18.5 D 15.0 22.6 &lt;0.001</td>
<td>15.4 12.5 18.7 &lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gender identity

| Transgender or not sure if transgender | 47.0 40.1 54.1 referent | 48.2 40.9 55.7 referent | 37.9 30.7 45.6 referent | 37.7 32 43.7 referent |
| Cisgender ("No, I am not transgender") | 30.9 29.2 32.6 <0.001 | 15.2 14.0 16.4 <0.001 | 15.1 14.0 16.3 <0.001 | 9.3 8.4 10.3 <0.001 |

Youth refers to NYC public high school students in grades 9 through 12.

Confidence Intervals (CIs) are a measure of estimate precision: the wider the CI, the more imprecise the estimate.

Bold p-values indicate a statistically significant difference from the reference group at p < 0.05.

Respondents who did not know what the answer options meant or what the question was asking were excluded from the analysis.

Felt so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row that they stopped doing some usual activities during the past 12 months

Purposely hurt themselves without wanting to die during past 12 months

Youth refers to NYC public high school students in grades 9 through 12.

Confidence Intervals (CIs) are a measure of estimate precision: the wider the CI, the more imprecise the estimate.

U When reporting to nearest whole percent, round up.

D When reporting to nearest whole percent, round down.
**Figure 1. Additional definitions and relevant New York City Youth Risk Behavior Survey questions, 2017**


**Additional Definitions**

**Gender expansive:** A person who does not conform to behaviors and conventions of appearance that society traditionally expects from the sex assigned to them at birth.

**Queer:** A broadly defined and flexible term preferred by some LGBTQ people for its inclusivity, simplicity, and implied defiance. Queer was for many years a slur used against LGBTQ people and those perceived to be LGBTQ. Despite its reclamation by many community members, it is still rejected by some, often along generational lines.

**Questioning:** Describes those who are in a process of discovery and exploration about their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or a combination thereof.

**LGBTQ:** An acronym that refers collectively to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or gender expansive, and questioning or queer.

**Pansexual:** Refers to people who are sexually, romantically, or emotionally attracted to people of all genders, or no gender.

**Sex assigned at birth:** Sex is typically assigned at birth or earlier (e.g. by ultrasound) based on the appearance of the external genitalia.

**Relevant New York City Youth Risk Behavior Survey questions**

Which of the following best describes you?

A. Heterosexual (straight)
B. Gay or lesbian
C. Bisexual
D. Not sure
E. I do not describe myself in any of these ways
F. I do not know what these answer options mean

Some people describe themselves as transgender when their sex at birth does not match the way they think or feel about their gender. Are you transgender?

A. No, I am not transgender
B. Yes, I am transgender
C. I am not sure if I am transgender
D. I do not know what this question is asking

During the past 12 months, did you ever feel so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row that you stopped doing some usual activities?

A. Yes
B. No

During the past 12 months, how many times did you do something to purposely hurt yourself without wanting to die, such as cutting or burning yourself on purpose?

A. 0 times
B. 1 time
C. 2 or 3 times
D. 4 or 5 times
E. 6 or more times

During the past 12 months, did you ever seriously consider attempting suicide?

A. Yes
B. No

During the past 12 months, how many times did you actually attempt suicide?

A. 0 times
B. 1 time
C. 2 or 3 times
D. 4 or 5 times
E. 6 or more times