

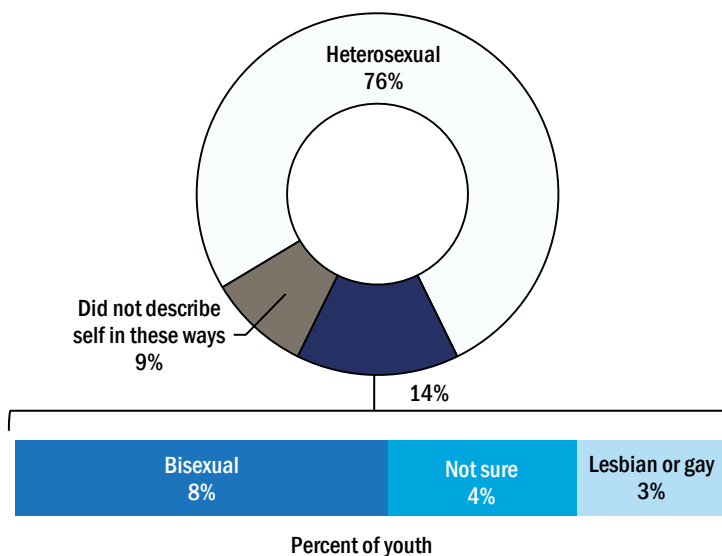
Mental Health Disparities among New York City LGBTQ Youth, 2017

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.¹⁻³ 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).³

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

Sexual orientation of New York City youth, 2017



Percentages do not sum to total due to rounding.

Source: NYC Youth Risk Behavior Survey 2017

- 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.⁵

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.⁴

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.⁴

Lesbian: A person who identifies as a girl and is attracted to other girls.⁴

Gay: A person who is attracted to others of the same gender.⁴

Not sure: Youth who responded "Not sure" may be questioning or exploring their sexual orientation.

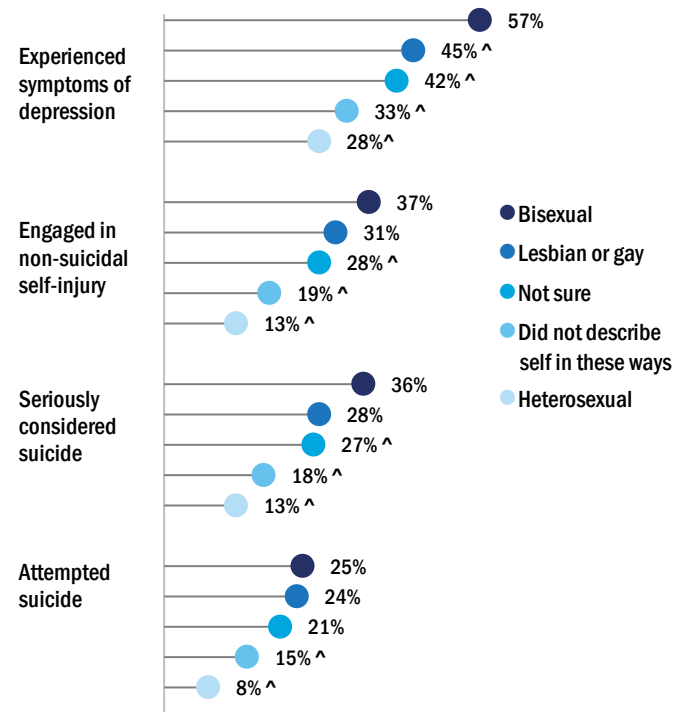
Heterosexual: A person who is attracted to others of the opposite gender.

A person does not need to be sexually active to be any of the above.⁴

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



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>.

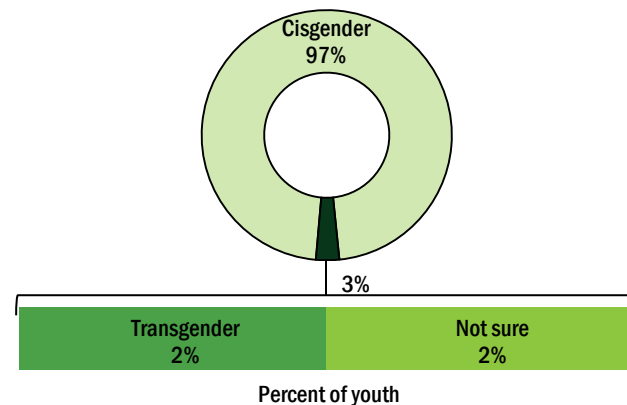
References:

- 1 Hanson RF, Borntrager C, Self-Brown S, et al. Relations among gender, violence exposure, and mental health: The National Survey of Adolescents. *Am J Orthopsychiatry*. 2008;78:313–321.
- 2 School climate in New York (2015 state snapshot). GLSEN.
- 3 Russell ST, Fish JN. Mental health in lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth. *Annu Rev Clin Psychol*. 2016;12:465–487.
- 4 Definitions are adapted from: PFLAG national glossary of terms. PFLAG. <https://pflag.org/glossary>. Accessed January 8, 2019, or definitions related to sexual orientation and gender diversity in APA documents. American Psychological Association. <https://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/sexuality-definitions.pdf>. Accessed January 8, 2019.
- 5 White, AE, Moeller J, Ivcevic Z, Brackett MA. Gender identity and sexual identity labels used by U.S. high school students: A co-occurrence network analysis. *Psychol Sex Orientat Gen Divers*. 2018;5:243–252.
- 6 Definitions are adapted from: LGBTQ+ definitions. Trans Student Educational Resources. <http://www.transstudent.org/definitions>. Accessed September 6, 2018.

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:

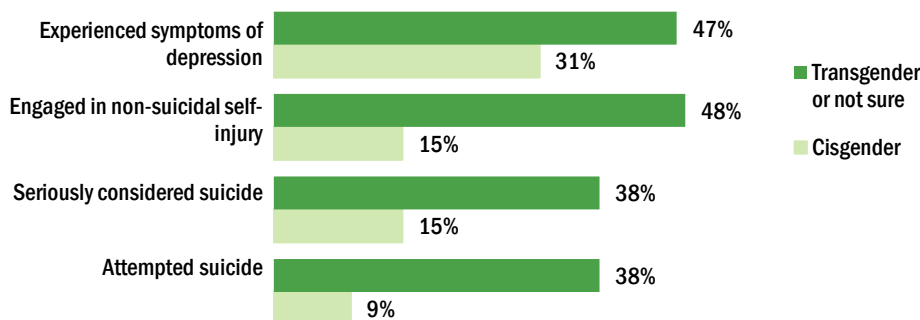
Gender identity of New York City youth, 2017



Percentages do not sum to total due to rounding.
 Source: NYC Youth Risk Behavior Survey 2017

- 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



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

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.^{4,6}

Transgender: A person who does not identify with the sex assigned to them at birth.⁶ 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.

Not sure: Youth who responded “not sure” may be questioning or exploring their gender identity.

Cisgender: A person who identifies with the sex assigned to them at birth.⁶ 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.

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

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Epi Data Tables

August 2019, No. 114

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.

	%	Lower 95% Confidence Interval	Upper 95% Confidence Interval
Sexual orientation Φ			
Heterosexual (straight)	76.4	74.9	77.9
Lesbian or gay	3.1	2.6	3.7
Bisexual	7.6	6.8	8.4
Not sure	3.8	3.4	4.3
I do not describe myself in any of these ways	9.1	8.3	9.9
Gender identity Ψ			
Cisgender ("No, I am not transgender")	96.5 U	95.9	97.0
Yes, transgender	1.6	1.2	2.0
Not sure if transgender	1.9	1.6	
Experienced symptoms of depression during past 12 months λ			
Yes	31.6	30.1	33.2
No	68.4	66.8	69.9
Engaged in non-suicidal self-injury during past 12 months δ			
Yes	17.0	15.8	18.3
No	83.0	81.7	84.2
Seriously considered attempting suicide during past 12 months			
Yes	16.2	15.1	17.4
No	83.8	82.6	84.9
Attempted suicide during past 12 months			
Yes	11.0	9.9	12.1
No	89.0	87.9	90.1

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 that they stopped doing some usual activities 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

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

Data are not age adjusted.

	Experienced symptoms of depression during past 12 months λ				Engaged in non-suicidal self-injury during past 12 months δ				Seriously considered attempting suicide during past 12 months				Attempted suicide during past 12 months			
	%	Lower 95% Confidence Interval	Upper 95% Confidence Interval	p-value	%	Lower 95% Confidence Interval	Upper 95% Confidence Interval	p-value	%	Lower 95% Confidence Interval	Upper 95% Confidence Interval	p-value	%	Lower 95% Confidence Interval	Upper 95% Confidence Interval	p-value
Sexual orientation κ																
Heterosexual (straight)	27.9	26.3	29.6	<0.001	13.3	12.0	14.6	<0.001	12.8	11.9	14.6	<0.001	7.5 U	6.6	8.5	<0.001
Lesbian or gay	44.8	37.5	52.3	0.004	31.4	25.4	38.1	0.158	28.1	20.4	37.3	0.125	24.4	19.5	29.9	0.852
Bisexual	56.8	53.2	60.3	referent	36.8	32.5	41.4	referent	36.5 D	31.3	42	referent	25.0	21.2	29.3	referent
Not sure	41.9	35.8	48.2	<0.001	28.2	21.5	36.0	0.035	26.8	21.2	33.2	0.023	21.1	14.4	30.0	0.330
I do not describe myself in any of these ways	33.2	28.8	37.9	<0.001	19.3	16.8	22.2	<0.001	18.5 D	15.0	22.6	<0.001	15.4	12.5	18.7	<0.001
Gender identity κ																
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 $p < 0.05$.

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

λ 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

δ Purposely hurt themselves without wanting to die during past 12 months

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

Sources: PFLAG national glossary of terms. New York, NY: PFLAG. 2018; and Definitions related to sexual orientation and gender diversity in APA documents. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. 2016; Owen L. About the Q. <https://www.pflag.org/blog/about-q>. Published October 10, 2014. Accessed August 6, 2018.; NYC Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 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
-