

LGBT Youth in the District of Columbia

A major obstacle in the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth in the District and nationwide is harassment from both peers and school faculty. Both in DC and nationwide data, youth face emotional and sometimes physical risks as a result of being perceived as LGBT.

One likely consequence of the added stresses from harassment is that LGBT identified students in DC and nationwide engage in high risk behaviors at a much higher rate than their heterosexual counterparts. In DC, LGB students are more likely to persistently use marijuana and to use ecstasy, and ten times more likely to use crystal meth than heterosexual students. DC LGB students are also significantly more likely to experience suicidal thoughts and actions than heterosexual students.

More data is needed on LGBT Youth in DC, and specifically, transgender youth. The city's 2007 Youth Risk Behavior Survey did not ask about gender identity in the most recently released survey, but nationwide transgender youth face harassment and a high rate of high risk behavior similar to and, often, worse than their non-trans LGB peers.

Identifying as Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual

- According to DC Public School 2007 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 88% of high school students identify as heterosexual, 3.4% as lesbian or gay, and 5.2% as bisexual. 3.4% say they are not sure.¹
- Young women were less likely than men to identify as heterosexual, with 13.2% identifying as lesbian, bisexual, or saying they were not sure, compared to 10.1% of men identifying as gay, bisexual, or not sure.¹
- While young men were more likely to report sexual contact than young women (68.3% compared to 57.1%), young women were more likely to report same sex sexual contact, with 8.8% of females and 6.9% of males reporting same sex sexual contact.¹

Homelessness

- Service providers estimate that 25 to 40% of homeless youth nationwide may be LGT. These rates might be even higher since many youth fear disclosure of their identities.²

Harassment

- In the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 9.6% of males and 9.2% of females report having been harassed because someone thought they were LGB at least once in the past year.¹ Also in this study:
- 1.7% of males and 1.2% of females report being harassed 12 or more times in the last year because someone thought they were LGB.¹
- 26.3% of LGB identified DC high-schoolers reported staying home because they felt unsafe in school or on the way to school.¹

Depression and Suicide

In the 2007 Youth Risk Behavior Survey:

- 40.3% of LGB identified youth in the District of Columbia reported feeling sad and hopeless every day for two weeks in a row to the extent that they stopped doing normal activities, compared with 25.7% of heterosexual identified youth.³

¹ "Youth Risk Behavior Survey: Sexual Minority Baseline." District of Columbia Public Schools. <http://www.k12.dc.us/offices/oss/hivaid/pdf/GLBT_fact_sheet.pdf> Accessed on 18 May 2009.

² "GLBTQ Youth." Advocates for Youth. <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=424&Itemid=177> Accessed on 19 May 2009.

- 30.6% of these youth identified youth reported seriously considering attempting suicide, compared with 13.8% of heterosexual identified youth.³
- 28.9% of these youth identified youth reported making a plan about suicide, compared with 10.3% of heterosexual youth.³
- 32.6% of these youth identified youth reported attempting suicide, compared with 8.6% of heterosexual identified youth.³

Drug Use

In the Youth Risk Behavior Survey:

- LGB youth in the District of Columbia were almost ten times as likely to use crystal meth as heterosexual youth- 23.3% of LGB youth compared with 2.5% of heterosexual youth.³
- LGB youth were also more likely to report ecstasy or persistent marijuana use- 24.8% reported ecstasy and 39.1% reported persistent marijuana use, compared with 3.9% and 17.03% of heterosexual youth.³

Transgender Youth

- Transgender students in one study reported hearing staff make homophobic remarks (32%), sexist remarks (39%), or negative remarks about someone's gender expression (39%) sometimes, often, or frequently.⁴
- More than a quarter of transgender students in this study reported being physically assaulted because of their gender expression (26%). More than half had been physically harassed for their gender expression (53%). Most transgender students (87%) had been verbally harassed.⁴
- In this study most transgender students (54%) did not report harassment to staff. Of those who did, only 33% believed staff had addressed the issue effectively.⁴

HIV/AIDS

- Young men who have sex with men in DC are at elevated risk for contracting HIV. Male to male sexual contact accounted for 33% of new HIV cases and 34% of new AIDS cases among youth in DC from 2001 to 2006.⁵
- 57% of new reported HIV cases among young men were transmitted by male to male sexual contact from 2001 to 2006.⁵

In Summary

One of the most significant omissions from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey is a series of questions on gender identity. The most recent YRBS asked students about gender identity, but that has yet to be released. Nationwide data, however, suggests that transgender students are harassed more and, subsequently, are at higher risk than their non-transgender peers.

However, the data on LGB youth shows a marked pattern of harassment and high risk behavior. DC needs to set concrete goals for improving the troubling statistics facing LGBT identified youth in DC - reducing disproportionate rates of harassment, drug use, and depression.

³ "Youth Risk Behavior Survey: Sexual Minority Baseline." District of Columbia Public Schools. <http://www.k12.dc.us/offices/oss/hiv/aids/pdfs/GLBT_fact_sheet.pdf> Accessed on 18 May 2009.

⁴ "Harsh Realities." GLSEN. <<http://www.glsen.org/cgi-bin/iowa/all/library/record/2388.html?state=research&type=research>> Accessed on 19 May 2009.

⁵ "Snapshot of HIV/AIDS among youth in the District of Columbia." DC Department of Health. November 2007. <http://doh.dc.gov/doh/frames.asp?doc=/doh/lib/doh/services/administration_offices/hiv_aids/pdf/factsheets/youth.pdf> Accessed on 20 March 2009.