



Suicidal Behavior Among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Youth Fact Sheet

Suicidal Behavior Among LGBT Youth

- Many studies have found that LGB youth attempt suicide more frequently than straight peers. Garafalo et al. (1999) found that LGB high school students and students unsure of their sexual orientation were 3.4 times more likely to have attempted suicide in the last year than their straight peers. Eisenberg and Resnick (2006) found LGB high school students were more than twice as likely as their straight peers to have attempted suicide.
- Safren and Heimberg (1999) found that among youth who had attempted suicide, almost twice as many LGB youth as their straight peers said that they had really hoped to die.
- Little research has been done about transgender individuals, but in one study of adults and young adults 30.1 percent of transgender individuals surveyed reported having ever attempted suicide (Kenagy, 2005). For US adults overall, 4.6 percent of adults and young adults report having ever attempted (Kessler et al., 1999).
- Numerous studies confirm that LGB youth have higher rates of suicidal ideation than their straight peers; for example, the Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey found that youth who self-identified as GLB or reported any same-sex sexual contact were more than three times more likely to report having seriously considered suicide in the last year (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2006).
- Because no reliable data exists, we do not know whether LGBT youth die by suicide more frequently than their straight peers. Sexual orientation and gender identity data are not included on death certificates so aggregated national death data do not include this information. In addition, many LGBT youth do not disclose this information to family members and friends; as a result, sexual orientation and gender identity often do not show up in psychological autopsy interviews.

Risk and Protective Factors Among LGBT Youth

While LGBT youth think about and attempt suicide more often than their straight counterparts, most LGBT youth do not attempt suicide. LGBT youth have many of the same risk factors as straight youth, but many LGBT have more or more severe risk factors. It is important to note that being LGBT is not a risk factor in and of itself; however, the minority stressors that LGBT individuals encounter — such as discrimination and harassment — are directly associated with suicidal behavior as well as indirectly with risk factors for suicide.

- The strongest risk factor for suicide death is previous attempts, and LGB youth attempt more frequently than non-LGB youth (see above).

- Most people who die by suicide have mental illness and/or a substance use disorder. Fergusson et al. (1999) found that LGB youth showed higher rates of major depression, anxiety disorder, conduct disorder, and co-occurring psychiatric disorders than their straight peers.
- D’Augelli (2002) found high rates of victimization among LGB youth from community settings: more than three quarters reported verbal abuse and about one in seven reported physical attacks, and victimized youth reported more mental health problems.
- Ryan et al. (2009) found that family acceptance was important for LGB youth, in fact LGB youth who experienced severe family rejection were more than 8 times more likely to report having attempted suicide compared with peers from families with little or no rejection.
- Eisenberg and Resnick (2004) found that family connectedness, caring adults, and school safety serve as protective factors from suicide for LGB individuals.

Implications for Suicide Prevention

- Because much of the risk for suicidal behavior among LGBT youth stems from the social and cultural environment, a cultural competence approach is recommended by many. Youth workers who understand and help address the stressors that the LGBT youth minority face can be most effective. See <http://www.hrc.org/issues/cultural-competence.htm>
- SPRC recommends that youth-serving agencies
 - implement in-service staff training about the issues faced by LGBT youth, particularly the higher rate of suicidal behavior, victimization, and family rejection and recognition and response to warning signs for suicide;
 - establish policies and protocols for appropriate response to suicide attempts, self-injury, and suicides; and
 - institute non-discrimination policies that extend equal rights to all sexual orientations and gender identities (SPRC, 2008).

Important Resources for Suicide Prevention

American Association of Suicidology Warning Signs of Suicide

<http://www.suicidology.org/web/guest/stats-and-tools/warning-signs>

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is a free, 24-hour hotline available to anyone in suicidal crisis or distress. Call 1-800-273-TALK (8255). Learn more at

<http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>

American Association of Suicidology Risk Factors for Suicide and Fact Sheets

<http://www.suicidology.org/web/guest/stats-and-tools/fact-sheets>

American Association of Suicidology is the oldest national organization devoted to understanding and preventing suicide. The Association leads advances in suicide prevention science and programs through research, education, training, development of standards, dissemination of accurate information, and survivor support services. Our members include researchers, prevention practitioners, and survivors all over the world. Learn more at www.suicidology.org