

# LGBTQ youth have double the risk for suicidal thoughts, attempts

November 15 2022, by Cara Murez

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A new study that looks at suicide risk among U.S. teens who are lesbian,

gay and bisexual finds they have disproportionately high rates of suicidal thoughts, planning and attempts compared to their heterosexual peers.

"The major message of this paper is that among a group of survivors of these types of violence, those who identify as a [sexual minority](#) are more likely to develop [suicidal thoughts](#) and behaviors," said [Émilie Ellis](#), lead author of the study and a postdoctoral researcher in the College of Public Health at the University of Georgia.

"We know that LGBTQ+ people are much more likely to experience suicidal thoughts and behaviors, but they're also a lot more likely to have experienced trauma more frequently and to develop post-[traumatic stress](#) following those trauma exposures," Ellis said in a university news release.

Based on their answers to a questionnaire, LGBTQ [high school students](#) were more than twice as likely to attempt suicide, the researchers found, or to plan a [suicide attempt](#) and endure suicidal thoughts compared to their heterosexual classmates.

This group was also more likely to experience trauma, including sexual or dating violence, as well as discrimination at home due to their [sexual orientation](#). They were also more likely to experience bullying and victimization at school, according to the report.

The suicidality issue may be even bigger than realized because of underreporting and stigma around suicide, Ellis said.

"There could be consequences to admitting that you have suicidal ideation," Ellis explained. "We have to think about how many more kids are out there who didn't get this survey who have experienced trauma and suicidal ideation but answered no because they were worried someone was going to tell a parent."

For the study, the researchers analyzed 14,690 responses to the Youth Risk Behavior Survey from 2015 to 2019. The survey is conducted among public and private high school students by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The investigators found that one in five students reported seriously considering suicide in the last year. More than 7% of the students attempted to kill themselves. More than 10% experienced [sexual violence](#). About 7% of those who reported dating said they had at least one experience of sexual violence in their dating lives. More than 7% said they'd experienced [physical violence](#) at least once in a dating relationship.

Exposure to sexual and dating violence was associated with an increased likelihood of suicidal thoughts, planning for suicide and attempting suicide in all kids. However, exposure to violence was significantly more predictive of suicidal thoughts and behaviors for sexual minority youth, the investigators found.

Students who are sexual minorities are more likely to experience childhood sexual abuse and dating violence than their heterosexual peers. They more frequently suffer from traumatic stress after the violence, putting them at greater risk of suicide, the study authors said.

While [sexual abuse](#) had the strongest influence on suicidal thoughts and attempts among gay and lesbian youth, sexual dating violence had the biggest impact on bisexual teens, the survey found.

Approaches to dealing with suicide and violence in LGBTQ youth could be tailored to specific subsets of the group, according to the researchers.

School tactics could include gay-straight alliances, anti-homophobia policies and stronger staff-student relationships.

Interventions need to specifically address violence among sexual minorities, Ellis said.

The findings were published recently in the *Journal of Child and Adolescent Trauma*.

**More information:** The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on [suicide](#) plus info on the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.

Émilie M. Ellis et al, Is Trauma Exposure More Harmful for Sexual Minority Youth? Differences in Trauma-Suicide Associations in a Nationally Representative Sample of U.S. Youth and Implications for Suicide Prevention, *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma* (2022). [DOI: 10.1007/s40653-022-00475-0](#)

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Citation: LGBTQ youth have double the risk for suicidal thoughts, attempts (2022, November 15) retrieved 28 January 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-11-lgbtq-youth-suicidal-thoughts.html>

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