

# Health and Safety of LGBT Youth

## IN SONOMA COUNTY

The California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) has collected health information from middle and high school students for over 20 years. The survey questions cover a wide range of health-related topics, including physical activity, nutrition, drug use, bullying, mental health, and protective factors at school. Beginning with the 2013 administration of the survey, students were asked to self-identify as heterosexual, gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Students were also asked to self-identify as male, female, or transgender. These two questions allow for the comparison of health-related behaviors and experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth (LGBT) with those students who do not identify as LGBT.

Chapman University in conjunction with the ACLU of Southern California has analyzed the data from the 2015 administration of the CHKS to better understand the health-related status of LGBT youth in Sonoma County.

### How Many LGBT Youth?

In 2013, 5.0% of California middle and high school students identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, with 95% of students identifying as heterosexual. In Sonoma County, the number of students identifying as LGB was 6.9% in 2015. Based on enrollment for schools in Sonoma County for the 2014/2015 school year this percentage translates to approximately 2,230 students identifying as LGB in this age group.

Also in 2013, the percentage of middle and high school students identifying as transgender was 0.8% in California. In Sonoma County, the number of students identifying as transgender was 1.2% in 2015. Based on enrollment for schools in Sonoma County for the 2014/2015 school year this percentage translates to approximately 388 students identifying as transgender in this age group. The following are some of the highlights from the Sonoma County CHKS 2015 administration.

### Attendance

LGB Youth were more than 3 times more likely (4.5%) than their non-LGB peers (1.4%) to miss school in the previous 30 days because they did not feel safe at school. Transgender youth were also 3 times more likely (6.8%) to miss school than non-transgender students for the same reason (2.1%).

### Safety

Transgender youth were 4 times more likely than their non-transgender peers to report not feeling safe at school (20.4% versus 5.7%). For LGB youth, 11.3% admitted to not feeling safe at school compared with 5.4% for their non-LGB peers. Transgender youth (29.3%) were twice as likely to report being afraid of being beaten up than their non-transgender peers (12.7%). The same is true for LGB youth (23.6% versus 12.2%).

*Sonoma County Middle School and  
High School Youth*  
*2,230 LGB    388 Transgender*

### Bullying

Transgender youth were more likely (34.7%) to report having been pushed, shoved, slapped, hit, kicked by someone 1 or more times on a school campus than their non-transgender peers (20.3%). LGB youth were also more likely to report the same (28.8% versus 19.9%).

LGB youth were more likely to report having sexual jokes, comments, or gestures directed at them at school (54.0% versus 28.2%). Transgender youth reported similar experiences with 51.6% reporting being the target of sexual jokes, comments, or gestures at school versus 29.5% for non-transgender students.

Almost half (43.1%) of self-identified LGB youth report being bullied because they were lesbian, gay, bisexual or someone thought they were. Fewer non-LGB youth (5.3%) report being bullied because someone thought they were lesbian, gay or bisexual. Among transgender youth, 40.4% were bullied for the same reason versus 7.3% among non-transgender youth.

### Alcohol and Drug Use

Looking at lifetime use of alcohol and other drugs across grades 7 through 12, there were noticeable differences. Lifetime use measures the number of youth who have ever used a particular drug. Lifetime use of alcohol was higher for LGB youth (52.5%) than for their non-LGB peers (30.8%). Transgender youth also showed a higher rate

(48.1%) than non-transgender youth (32.1%).

Lifetime use of marijuana was 43.1% for LGB youth and 22.6% for youth identifying as non-LGB. A similar disparity was evident for transgender youth (31.9% versus 23.9%).

LGB youth reported a higher use of methamphetamine and cocaine during their lifetime than their non-LGB peers (6.6% versus 3.8%) with transgender youth reporting a similar disparity (7.8% versus 4.0%).

### Mental Health

The 2015 data revealed indicators of mental health challenges for LGBT youth. When asked *Did you miss school because you felt very sad, hopeless, anxious, stressed, or angry during the past thirty days?* 28.4% of LGB responded in the affirmative, compared with 7.9% of their non-LGB peers. Transgender youth reported similar experiences with 27.1% having missed school because they felt very sad, hopeless, anxious, stressed, or angry versus 9.0% of non-transgender youth.

When asked *Did you seriously consider attempting suicide during the past 12 months?* 46.3% of LGB youth reported that they had seriously considered attempting suicide versus 13.4% of their non-LGB peers. Similar results were found for transgender youth, with 45.3% admitting to having seriously considered suicide versus 15.5% of non-transgender youth. When translated into real numbers, this indicates that in one year in Sonoma County approximately 1,208 middle school and high school LGBT youth seriously considered attempting suicide.

### Protective Factors

Protective factors are the conditions and structures at a school that help to shield students from potential harmful outcomes. These are the human relationships and programs at a school site that “protect” against the risk factors already mentioned here.

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### Youth Engagement and Connection to School

LGB youth were more likely to say that they *did not feel close to people at this school* than did their non-LGB peers (21.1% versus 12.4%). Transgender-identified students were even less likely to report feeling close to people at school (24.6%) in comparison to non-transgender students (12.8%).

When presented with the statement *I feel like I am a part of this school*, LGB youth were less likely to agree with the statement (26.0%) when compared with non-LGB peers (14.1%). Transgender youth were more than twice as likely to say that they did not feel like they were a part of their school (31.5%) as compared to non-transgender students (14.7%).

*In an average class of 30 students in Sonoma County, 2 of those students will identify as LGBT*

Responding to the statement *Teachers at my school treat students fairly*, 20.0% of LGB identified students were more likely to disagree with the statement compared to 15.0% of their non-LGB peers. Transgender students were even more likely to disagree with the statement than non-transgender students (26.7% versus 15.1%).

### Moving Forward

The results of the CHKS survey responses highlight the importance of increasing positive connections and protective factors as a way to create safe and inclusive environments for our lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth. These protective factors should:

- Guarantee that all youth—and especially LGBT identified youth—have caring and supportive adults to speak with and to mentor them.
- Create school environments that are safe, supportive, and inclusive of all.
- Implement policies, programs, and resources that promote health equity among LGBT youth.
- Create opportunities for LGBT youth to engage in meaningful participation in schools and communities.



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