



AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF SUICIDOLOGY

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered Resource Sheet

Facts about Suicide

- Currently there are slightly more than 36,000 suicides annually
- Suicide is the tenth leading cause of death
- Males complete suicide at a rate four times that of females. However, females attempt suicide three times more often than males.
- Groups at particular risk include people with depression, schizophrenia, drug and/or chemical dependency, and panic disorders.
- Feelings of hopelessness (e.g., there is no solution to my problem) are found to be more predictive of suicide risk than a diagnosis of depression per se.
- Socially isolated individuals are generally found to be at a higher risk for suicide.
- The vast majority of individuals who are suicidal often display clues and warning signs.

Statistics involving Suicide rates in the LGBT community

There are a few key points that must be highlighted when looking into suicide in the LGBT community when wondering if the group is at risk. These are:

- A study found that when comparing heterosexual males and females with their gay and lesbian counterparts, they found that the gay men were 6 times more likely than the heterosexual males to attempt suicide and the lesbians were 2 times more likely than heterosexual females to attempt.
- In the 1990's, gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth make up 20-40% of homeless youth in urban areas. These youth were 3.5 times more likely than heterosexual youth to attempt

suicide according to information provided by the Youth Suicide Prevention Education Program Website.

There are numerous risk factors that contribute to suicide in the LGBT community. These include:

- Psychiatric disorders, primarily depression and anxiety, substance abuse, discrimination and homophobia, violence, and gender nonconformity.
- Self-identification at a young age and interpersonal conflict in regards to sexual identity, and hidden sexual identity may affect those in the LGBT community.
- Coming out at an early age, self-esteem issues, societal attitudes, family, religion and school all are risk factors. If a teenager does not have support from his family, peers, and/or society he is at greater risk.
- Religion may also contribute to suicide among the LGBT community. Religions doctrine regarding homosexuality may cause parent's to condemn their child. These teenagers may be more vulnerable to suicide ideation.
- Schools also contribute to problems for those in the LGBT community. These include a fear of being physically and/or verbally abused. Many schools do not teach that homosexuality is a normal variation of sexual behavior. These adolescents feel powerless in changing the situation which increases suicide contemplation. A fact sheet compiled by GLSEN, Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network, shown on the Creating Safe Schools for Lesbian and Gay Student's website show that 45% of gay males and 20% of lesbians report having an experience with verbal and/or physical harassment due to their sexual orientation.
- Another problem in school situations is most counselors are not trained to know how to discuss homosexual issues.
- In a national study, 28% of gay and lesbian high school students dropped out of school because of harassment resulting from their sexual orientation.
- The use of drugs and alcohol may become a tool to help with depression and low self-esteem which may then increase the change of suicide thoughts. A GLSEN compiles fact sheet states that 68% of adolescent gay males and 83% of lesbians use alcohol, 44% of gay males and 56% of lesbians use other drugs. This is because homosexual teenagers, in general, are more likely to use drugs.
- Researchers have found that self-dislike and self-criticism are also predictors in suicide ideation. 80% of lesbian, gay and bisexual youth report isolation problems. These feelings may contribute to suicide ideation because the negative feelings may occur more frequently.
- To date, there is no empirical data regarding the number of completed suicides within the LGBT community.

Considerations for Future Projects

Considerations for researchers when starting a new project dealing with suicide in the LGBT community:

- Future population-based surveys need to routinely inquire about sexual orientation. Longitudinal studies need to be conducted in order to see how the risk of suicide evolves during the lifespan of a person in the LGBT community. This however, can be said about any segment of the population.
- “In order to develop more effective prevention and intervention strategies, future research needs to account for underlying psychosocial variables that may prove to be more salient.”

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Risk Factors

Factors that play a role in suicidality, regardless of age and sexual orientation (IS PATH WARM?):

| | |
|---|-----------------|
| I | Ideation |
| S | Substance Abuse |
| P | Purposelessness |
| A | Anxiety |
| T | Trapped |
| H | Hopelessness |
| W | Withdrawal |
| A | Anger |
| R | Recklessness |
| M | Mood Changes |

Other Resources

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Organizations

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

<http://www.afsp.org>

AFSP is dedicated to advancing our knowledge of suicide and our ability to prevent it. AFSP's activities include supporting research projects, providing information and education about suicide and depression, and supporting programs for suicide survivor treatment, research and education.

CenterLink: The Community of LGBT Centers

<http://www.lgbtcenters.org>

Exists to support the development of strong, sustainable LGBT community centers and to build a unified center movement.

The Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network

<http://www.glsen.org>

The Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network strives to assure that each member of every school community is valued and respected regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression.

The National Coalition for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Health

<http://www.lgbthealth.net>

The National Coalition for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Health is committed to improving the health and well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals and communities through public education, coalition building and advocacy that focus on research, policy, education and training.

Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians & Gays

<http://www.pflag.org>

Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians & Gays (PFLAG) is a national non-profit organization with over 200,000 members and supporters and over 500 affiliates in the United States. This vast grassroots network is cultivated, resourced and serviced by the PFLAG national office, located in Washington, DC, the national Board of Directors and 13 Regional Directors.

The Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States

<http://www.siecus.org>

SIECUS – the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States – was founded in 1964 to provide education and information about sexuality and sexual and reproductive health.

Soulforce

<http://www.soulforce.org>

“The purpose of Soulforce is freedom for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people from religious and political oppression through the practice of relentless nonviolent resistance.”

Suicide Prevention Resource Center

<http://www.sprc.org>

The Suicide Prevention Resource center provides prevention support, training, and resources to assist organizations and individuals to develop suicide prevention programs, interventions and policies, and to advance the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention. In particular, see

http://www.sprc.org/library/SPRC_LGBT_YOUTH.pdf.

The Trevor Project

<http://www.thetrevorproject.org>

The Trevor Project is the leading national organization providing crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning youth.

American Association of Suicidology

AAS is a membership organization for all those involved in suicide prevention and intervention, or touched by suicide. AAS is a leader in the advancement of scientific and programmatic efforts in suicide prevention through research, education and training, the development of standards and resources, and survivor support services. For membership information, please contact:

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If you or someone you know is suicidal, please contact a mental health professional or call 1-800-273-TALK (8255).