



Querying Canadian Higher Education

A Snapshot of LGBT+ Students' Experiences and Mental Health

Querying Canadian Higher Education is a collaboration between researchers at Wilfrid Laurier University and McGill University and the Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity. Our aim is to understand the experiences, wellbeing, and academic engagement of diverse LGBT+ university and college students in Canada, and to inform the development of evidence-based policies and services tailored to LGBT+ students' needs.

This factsheet is based on our analysis of the 2016 Canadian data from the National College Health Assessment (NCHA), a US-based survey that was administered in 2016 to 41 post-secondary schools in Canada. Our sample consists of over 39,000 students, including 15% who identify as LGBT+ and 2.5% who specifically identify as trans (i.e., trans men, trans women, nonbinary, two-spirit, genderqueer, gender fluid, and other diverse gender identities).

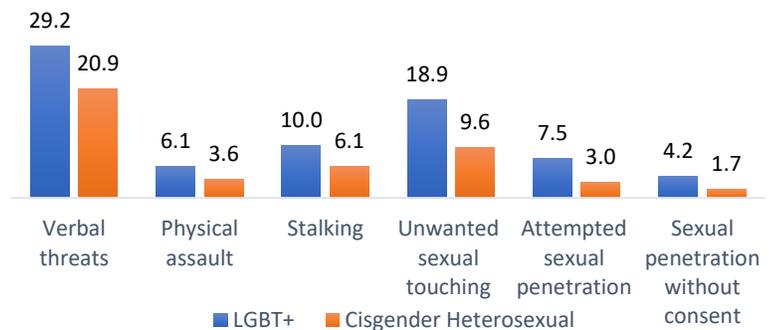
Experiences of Victimization

Across all forms of victimization, more LGBT+ students experienced victimization in the last 12 months than cisgender heterosexual students did.

Compared to rates among cisgender heterosexual students, particularly alarming is LGBT+ students' rates of:

- physical assault and unwanted sexual touching, which were nearly double
- attempted sexual assault and sexual assault, which were both approximately 2.5 times higher.

Percentage of Students Reporting Victimization (last 12 months)



Perceptions of Safety & Belonging on Campus

More LGBT+ students felt unsafe on and off campus, day and night, than their peers did. For example, at night, 20.1% of LGBT+ students indicated they felt "not safe at all" or "somewhat unsafe" on campus compared to 15.5% of their peers. Rates of feeling unsafe off campus at night were considerably higher for both groups; 40.2% for LGBT+ students, and 33.2% for cisgender heterosexual students.

More LGBT+ students lacked a feeling of belonging to a community at their school (33.9% LGBT+ students, 28.2% cisgender heterosexual students).

Mental Health

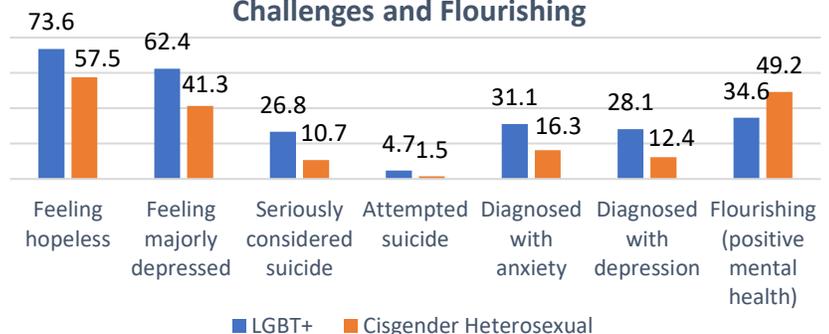
LGBT+ students experienced more mental health challenges of various kinds in the past 12 months than their peers. In both groups, large numbers of students experienced feelings of hopelessness and major depression, with higher rates among LGBT+ students.

Rates for seriously considering suicide were 2.5 times higher among LGBT+ students; rates for attempted suicide were over 3 times greater.

Rates for being diagnosed with depression were over 2 times higher, and rates for being diagnosed with anxiety were almost twice as high, among LGBT+ students.

In terms of positive mental health (e.g., emotional, psychological and social well-being), rates of flourishing were 0.7 times lower among LGBT+ students.

Percentage of Students Reporting Mental Health Challenges and Flourishing



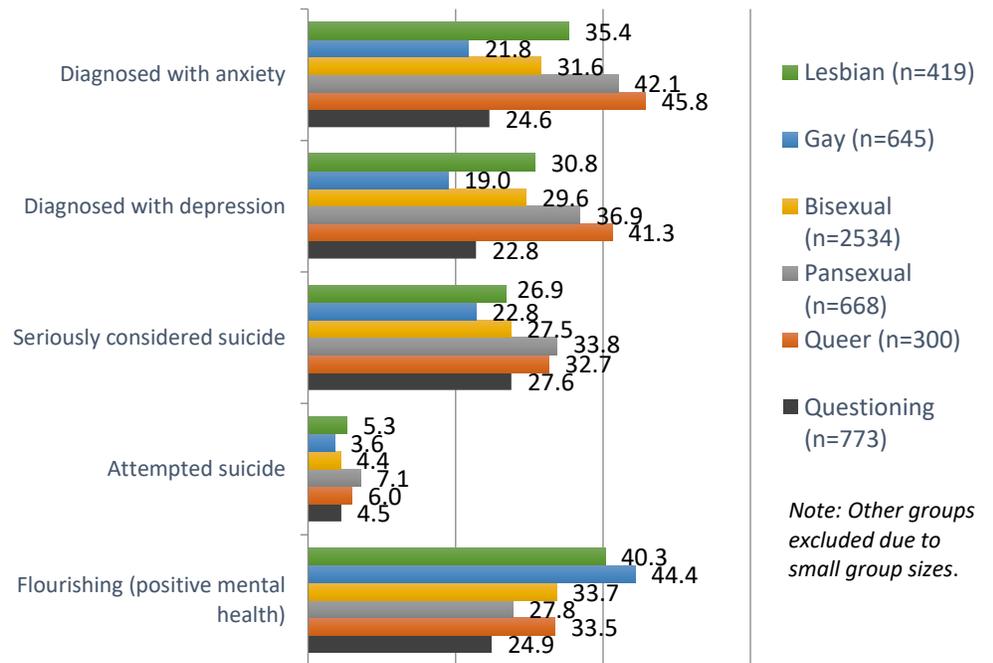
Note: Challenges in the last 12 months; flourishing in the past month.

Mental Health and Differences among LGBT+ Students

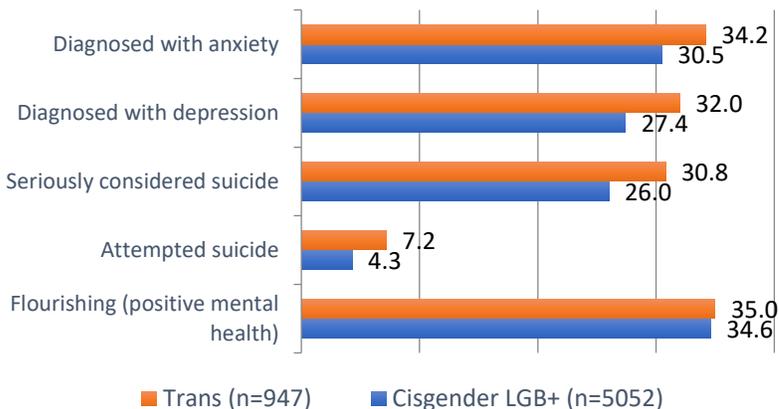
Differences exist among LGBT+ students in terms of diverse sexual identities. Across all mental health indicators, gay students were less likely to experience challenges, while pansexual and queer students were often among the most likely to experience challenges. Pansexual students and students identifying as questioning had the lowest rates of flourishing positive mental health, while lesbian and gay students had the highest rates.

We also observed differences between cisgender LGB+ students and transgender students; trans students were more likely than cisgender LGB+ students to experience mental health challenges. Notably, compared to cisgender LGB+ students, trans students' rates of attempted suicide were approximately 1.5 times higher.

Percentage of LGBT+ Students Reporting Mental Health Challenges and Flourishing within Sexual Identity Subgroups



Percentage of Trans Students and Cisgender LGB+ Students Reporting Mental Health Challenges and Flourishing



Implications

These statistics point to the need for increased attention to the mental health of postsecondary LGBT+ students in Canada. Policymakers, service providers, and advocates need to understand the experiences of LGBT+ students who experience victimization, exclusion, and mental health challenges, and to implement policies, practices, and services that will support campus environments in which LGBT+ students can flourish.

Recommended citation: Woodford, M. R., Coulombe, S., Marshall, Z., Schwabe, N., Krzesni, D. & the Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity (2019). *Querying Canadian Higher Education: A snapshot of LGBT+ students' experiences and mental health*.

For more information contact: Dr. Michael Woodford, Faculty of Social Work, Wilfrid Laurier University, mwoodford@wlu.ca



Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en
sciences humaines du Canada

