



Homelessness and Housing Instability Among LGBTQ Youth

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Executive Summary

LGBTQ youth are overrepresented among young people experiencing homelessness and housing instability in the United States. This elevated risk of homelessness and housing instability has detrimental effects on LGBTQ youths' mental health. This report uses data from the [2021 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health](#) to examine the prevalence of homelessness and various manifestations of housing instability among LGBTQ youth and their mental health symptoms. It also examines rates of homelessness and housing instability among various subgroups within the LGBTQ community and the prevalence of experiences which are frequently connected to housing instability (e.g., food insecurity). Finally, it includes recommendations for preventing and combating LGBTQ youth homelessness.

Key Findings

Overall, 28% of LGBTQ youth reported experiencing homelessness or housing instability at some point in their lives.

- Nearly half (44%) of Native/Indigenous LGBTQ youth have experienced homelessness or housing instability at some point in their life, compared to 16% of Asian American/Pacific Islander youth, 27% of White LGBTQ youth, 27% of Latinx LGBTQ youth, 26% of Black LGBTQ youth, and 36% of multiracial LGBTQ youth.
- Homelessness and housing instability were reported at higher rates among transgender and nonbinary youth, including 38% of transgender girls/women, 39% of transgender boys/men, and 35% of nonbinary youth, compared to 23% of cisgender LGBTQ youth.
- 16% of LGBTQ youth reported that they had slept away from parents or caregivers because they ran away from home, with more than half (55%) reporting that they ran away from home because of mistreatment or fear of mistreatment due to their LGBTQ identity.
- 14% of LGBTQ youth reported that they had slept away from parents or caregivers because they were kicked out or abandoned, with 40% reporting that they were kicked out or abandoned due to their LGBTQ identity.

LGBTQ youth who experienced homelessness or housing instability reported higher rates of mental health challenges, compared to their stably housed LGBTQ peers.

- LGBTQ youth in our sample who reported housing instability or homelessness had nearly two to four times the odds of reporting depression (aOR = 2.07), anxiety (aOR = 1.96), self-harm (aOR = 2.30), considering suicide (aOR = 2.62), and attempting suicide (aOR = 3.70) compared to those who did not report any housing instability.
- 69% of youth who reported past housing instability and 68% of youth who were currently homeless reported that they had engaged in self-harm in the last year – compared to 49% of youth who had not experienced housing instability,
- 58% of youth who reported past housing instability and 62% of youth who were currently homeless reported having seriously considered suicide in the last year – compared to 35% of youth who had not experienced housing instability,
- 28% of youth who reported past housing instability and 35% of youth who were currently homeless reported a suicide attempt in the last year – compared to 10% of youth who had not experienced housing instability,

LGBTQ youth who reported experiencing homelessness or housing instability had higher rates of victimization, being in foster care, and food insecurity, compared to their stably housed LGBTQ peers

- LGBTQ youth who reported past housing instability or current homelessness had more than three times greater odds (aOR = 3.46) of ever being physically threatened or abused due to their sexual orientation or, among transgender and nonbinary identity, gender identity (aOR = 3.13).
- LGBTQ youth who reported past housing instability or current homelessness had nearly six times greater odds (aOR = 5.81) of reporting that they had been in foster care at any point in their life.
- LGBTQ youth who reported past housing instability or current homelessness had more than three times greater odds (aOR = 3.53) of reporting food insecurity in the last month.

Recommendation Summary

- **Preventing LGBTQ Youth Homelessness.** Strong anti-discrimination policies in the workplace and strong anti-bully and harassment policies in schools can be effective in helping LGBTQ youth stay connected to school and employment, increasing their skills and future earnings, and making it easier for them to maintain stable housing. Additionally, since family conflict around youths' LGBTQ identities is a driving factor in LGBTQ youth homelessness, developing family counseling or mediation programs may be effective at decreasing conflict and keeping LGBTQ youth in their homes and connected to their families. Special attention should also be paid to preventing housing instability among LGBTQ youth in foster care through case management and exit planning for youth exiting care.
- **Increased Funding for Low-Barrier Housing Programs.** More funding should be allocated for safe, low-barrier housing programs which can have an immediate positive impact on LGBTQ youth experiencing housing instability.
- **Reimagining Shelter Services.** One immediate action that housing providers can take to support LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness is to make sure that all shelter and housing facilities provide culturally competent services to LGBTQ youth.
- **Improved Data Collection on LGBTQ Youth Homelessness.** Better data is needed to understand the full scope and impact of LGBTQ youth homelessness in the United States. Questions about both LGBTQ identity and housing status should be added to population surveys of youth and young adults, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS).
- **Anti-Poverty Economic Policies.** LGBTQ youth are impacted by their families' and communities' economic stability. Policies that combat poverty at the societal level will have a positive impact on LGBTQ youths' access to safe and secure housing. Economic upheavals, such as what we are seeing with the COVID-19 pandemic, increase economic pressure on low-income households and make it even more urgent for legislators to tackle root causes of poverty in the United States to the benefit of LGBTQ youth, their families, and their communities.

Background

LGBTQ youth are overrepresented among young people experiencing homelessness (Choi, Wilson, Shelton, & Gates, 2015; Durso & Gates, 2012; Morton, et al., 2018; Baams et al., 2019). While the challenges of identifying and contacting youth experiencing homelessness make it difficult to establish the exact prevalence of LGBTQ youth homelessness, it is estimated that lesbian, gay, and bisexual¹ (LGB) youth make up 7-9% of the general population (Wilson, Cooper, Kastanis, & Nezhad, 2014) but 29% of youth experiencing homelessness (Choi et al., 2015). Studies show that nearly one in four (23%) of transgender young adults between the ages of 18 and 25 experience homelessness. Further, a study by the Williams Institute found that 23% of transgender young adults between the ages of 18 and 25 reported ever experiencing homelessness, compared to 12.5% of the overall population of 18-25 year-olds (O'Neill, Wilson, & Herman, 2020; Morton et al., 2018).

This report is intentionally using the phrase “homelessness and housing instability” to capture the wide variety of experiences that can negatively impact a young person’s housing stability. The state of not having a permanent home is a complicated and non-linear experience that can be difficult to capture and measure in survey research. Homelessness and housing instability include a variety of circumstances: living on the streets, staying in emergency shelters or transitional housing, living in one’s car, staying at a hotel due to lack of other housing options, sleeping in a public place or on public transportation, or temporarily moving in with friends and family. Over the course of days or weeks, a young person may sleep on the bus, move in with a friend, stay in an emergency shelter, and then move in with an extended family member. This frequently unplanned movement makes it difficult for researchers and practitioners to connect with youth experiencing homelessness or housing instability, whether to conduct research or offer services. Each of these housing circumstances also comes with unique risks. Couch-surfing with friends is generally considered to be safer than sleeping on the streets; however, youth staying with friends, extended family, and acquaintances are still vulnerable to theft, exploitation, and violence. The volatility of housing instability also makes it difficult for young people to stay connected to supportive institutions such as school, employment, or case management.

Risks Associated with LGBTQ Youth Homelessness

Experiencing homelessness or housing instability is associated with a number of safety risks for LGBTQ youth. For example, with the exception of marijuana use, LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness are more likely to report drug use compared to their straight, cisgender peers experiencing homelessness (Gattis, 2013; Kattari, Barman-Adhikari, DeChants, & Rice, 2017; Saewyc et al., 2017). This substance use increases LGBTQ youths’ risk of violence. For example, LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness report higher incidences of being injured or having sex when they did not want to because of substance use (Saewyc et al., 2017). LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness are more likely to report engaging in survival sex, defined as exchanging sex for money, a place to stay, or to fulfill

¹ It is important to note that due to a failure to collect nuanced sexual orientation and gender identity data in many large-scale surveys, much of the previous research on LGBTQ youth actually only covers those who are lesbian, gay, or bisexual. In this report, findings that only apply to lesbian, gay, or bisexual youth will be denoted with the acronym LGB and findings which apply to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning youth will be denoted with acronym LGBTQ.

other basic needs (Bauermeister, Eaton, Meanley, Pingel, & UHIP Partnership, 2017; Ecker, 2016; Gattis, 2013; Tyler, 2013). LGB youth experiencing homelessness are more likely to report a variety of risky sexual behaviors, including having unprotected anal sex and having sex with a sex worker, an intravenous drug user, or a person living with HIV (Ecker, 2016; Gattis, 2013; Rice et al., 2013). LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness are also more likely to have been either physically or sexually assaulted or abused (Gattis, 2013; Ecker, 2016; Saewyc et al., 2017).

Homelessness or housing instability can have strong negative impacts on LGBTQ youths' mental health, even when compared to their unhoused straight, cisgender peers or housed LGBTQ youth. LGB youth experiencing homelessness report higher rates of depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), self-harm, suicidal ideation, or suicide attempts than their straight, cisgender peers experiencing homelessness (Ecker, 2016; Gattis & Larson, 2017; Gattis, 2013; Moskowitz et al., 2012; Saewyc et al., 2017). LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness are also more likely to report high levels of stress compared to their straight, cisgender peers experiencing homelessness (Moskowitz et al., 2012). Previous research from The Trevor Project shows that LGBTQ youth who had experienced housing instability reported attempting suicide at more than three times the rate of their LGBTQ peers who had not experienced housing instability (The Trevor Project, 2019).

Complexities of Measuring Housing Status Among LGBTQ Youth

This complexity also extends to data about LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness. Few large data sets that include youth experiences of homelessness exist due to the difficulty of finding and recruiting youth experiencing homelessness into study participation. The CDC's Youth Risk and Behavior Survey (YRBS) measures health behaviors and outcomes among youth in middle and high school across the United States (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). Since 2015, a question on sexual orientation was added to the standard YRBS questionnaire for high school students, and states and local jurisdictions had the discretion to add questions about homelessness as well as transgender identity. However, only 27 states ask questions about housing and sexual orientation and very few ask about gender identity in ways that include transgender students. This creates a lack of data about the combined experiences of homelessness and LGBTQ identity. The California Healthy Kids Survey is one iteration of the YRBS which includes questions about both housing status and LGBTQ identity. While this data is important, it only examines LGBTQ identity as an aggregate group, and there is no option to examine for within-group differences among the many identities which make up the LGBTQ community.

Advocates in the LGBTQ community have worked for decades to address this overrepresentation and to increase LGBTQ youths' access to safe and secure housing. In particular, [True Colors United](#) has done powerful and impactful work to raise awareness, advocate for policy change, and elevate the voices of LGBTQ young people experiencing homelessness. This report seeks to build upon this important work by sharing insights on LGBTQ youth who have experienced homelessness or housing instability based on data from The Trevor Project's [2021 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health](#). Additionally, most studies specifically on LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness recruit small samples of participants from housing services and therefore do not include housed LGBTQ youth for

comparison. The data in this report are unique in that they include both housed and unhoused LGBTQ youth for comparison. Furthermore, the sample size also includes youths' specific LGBTQ identities and therefore allows us to look at differences among subgroups (e.g. bisexual youth, transgender youth).

Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic and Housing

It is important to note that the data in this report were collected between October and December 2020 and were therefore influenced by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and associated economic upheavals. Data from our [2021 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health](#) show that more than 80% of LGBTQ youth reported that COVID-19 had made their living situation more stressful, indicating that the pandemic has had an impact on LGBTQ youths' access to safe and secure housing.

The economic disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic has threatened the housing stability of thousands of Americans. A recent report from the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau found that over 2 million homeowners and 8 million renters were behind on their mortgage or rent payments (Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, 2021). They further report that Black and Hispanic households were more than twice as likely to report being behind on housing payments, highlighting the disproportionate risk faced by households of color (Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, 2021). While the long-term economic impacts of the pandemic cannot yet be observed, a study on the mental health impacts of the Great Recession found that housing instability accounted for a significant amount of the accelerated suicide deaths in the US during that time (Fowler et al., 2015).

Economic stress impacts LGBTQ youth homelessness in two central ways. Firstly, LGBTQ youth are at risk of homelessness if their families lose their housing. History of family homelessness increases young people's individual risk of homelessness or housing instability (Samuels et al., 2019). LGBTQ youth of color are at particular risk of family homelessness due to the COVID-19 pandemic, given that Black and Hispanic households are more likely to be behind on housing payments due to pandemic-related economic disruptions (Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, 2021). Secondly, LGBTQ youth already living away from their families are also vulnerable to the economic upheaval of the pandemic. Job losses due to the pandemic were concentrated among low-paid industries, eliminating many of the entry-level jobs that young adults rely on to start their careers and maintain stable housing (Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, 2021). Decreased access to jobs that pay a living wage may place LGBTQ youth at increased risk of homelessness.

As the nation's largest provider of crisis services for LGBTQ youth, the Trevor Project is dedicated to understanding how homelessness and housing instability impact the well-being and safety of LGBTQ young people. This report examines experiences of homelessness and housing instability among respondents to our [2021 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health](#) and their impact on LGBTQ youths' mental health. Notably, our large and diverse sample allows us to explore experiences across age, sexual orientation, gender identity, and race/ethnicity.

Methods

Sample and Procedures

Data were collected from an online survey platform between October and December 2020. LGBTQ youth between the ages of 13 and 24 were recruited via targeted ads on social media. The final analytical sample included 34,759 LGBTQ youth from across the United States. The overall survey included a maximum of 142 questions. Chi-square and logistic regression analyses were used to examine differences in groups and to determine the adjusted odds of mental health indicators. Adjusted odds ratios predicting mental health indicators controlled for sex assigned at birth, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, and Census Region.

Measures of Housing Instability

Survey respondents were asked a number of questions about their current and previous housing. The question about current housing asked, “What best describes where you currently live?” and provided twelve response options including, “a shelter, car, campground, or other transitional or temporary housing.” Respondents were also asked, “Are you currently or have you ever been homeless (even if only for a short period of time)?” with response options including: 1) No, 2) Yes, I have been in the past but am currently not, or 3) Yes, I am currently homeless. To assess housing instability due to running away or being abandoned, respondents were asked, “Have you ever had to sleep away from your parent(s) or caregiver(s) because you were kicked out or were abandoned?” and “Have you ever slept away from your parent(s) or caregiver(s) because you ran away?”, both with response options of 1) No and 2) Yes.

From four questions, three groups were created to examine housing instability and homelessness among LGBTQ youth. Respondents who reported that they were currently homeless or currently living in a shelter, car, campground, or other transitional or temporary housing were grouped together as Currently Homeless (n = 219). Respondents who reported that they had either been homeless in the past, had run away, or had been kicked out or been abandoned at any point were grouped together as Past Housing Instability (n = 9,666). And finally, respondents who reported none of these experiences were grouped together as Neither Past Nor Current Housing Instability (n = 24,874).

Measures of Mental Health and Suicide Risk

Other outcomes related to homelessness and housing instability were measured using a variety of survey items. Current symptoms of generalized anxiety disorder were measured using the GAD-2 (Plummer et al., 2016). Currently, major depressive disorder symptoms were measured using the PHQ-2 (Richardson et al., 2010). Questions on self-harm, considering suicide, and attempting suicide in the past 12 months were taken from the CDC’s YRBS (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021).

Measures of Factors Associated with Homelessness and Housing Instability

Barriers to mental health care were measured by asking, “In the past 12 months, have you wanted psychological or emotional counseling from a mental health professional?” Response options included 1) No, 2) Yes, but I didn’t get it, 3) Yes, and I got it. Experiences of victimization due to youths’ LGBTQ identity were measured by asking, “Have you ever felt physically threatened or been physically abused because of your sexual orientation?”, “In the past 12 months, have you felt physically threatened or been physically abused because of your sexual orientation?”, “Have you ever felt physically threatened or been physically abused because of your gender identity?”, and “In the past 12 months, have you felt physically threatened or been physically abused because of your gender identity?” Response options included 1) No, and 2) Yes. To ensure accuracy, questions about victimization due to gender identity were only examined among respondents who identified as transgender, nonbinary, or questioning their gender identity. Youth’s experiences with the foster care system were measured by asking, “Have you ever been in foster care (even if only for a short period of time)?” Response options included: 1) No, and 2) Yes. Experiences of food insecurity were measured by asking, “During the last month, did you worry that food at home would run out before you or your family got money to buy more?” and “During the last month, were you hungry but didn’t eat because you or your family didn’t have enough food?” Response options included: 1) Never, 2) Sometimes, and 3) A lot. A new dichotomous variable was created, grouping respondents who answered Sometimes or A lot to either question, compared to respondents who answered Never for both questions.

Findings

Homelessness and Housing Instability Among LGBTQ Youth

Youth respondents reported a wide variety of scenarios that could contribute to homelessness and housing instability. Over a quarter of respondents (28%) reported that they were currently homeless or had experienced homelessness or housing instability in the past. Two hundred and nineteen respondents (0.6%) reported that they were currently homeless. Of those who were currently homeless, 89 (41%) reported that they were living in a shelter, car, campground, or other transitional or temporary housing at the time of the survey. Twenty-eight percent of respondents reported having experienced housing instability in the past. Among those who had experienced housing instability, 5,259 (54%) reported that they had been homeless in the past, 4,573 (47%) reported that they had been kicked out, and 5,388 (56%) reported that they had run away or been abandoned. This indicates overlap among these three experiences, with a number of youth experiencing two or three of the circumstances (e.g., both kicked out and run away). Family conflict about youths’ LGBTQ identities was a factor in this housing instability, with 40% of youth who said they had been kicked out and 55% of youth who said they had run away or been abandoned reporting that it had been due to mistreatment or fear of mistreatment related to their LGBTQ identity.

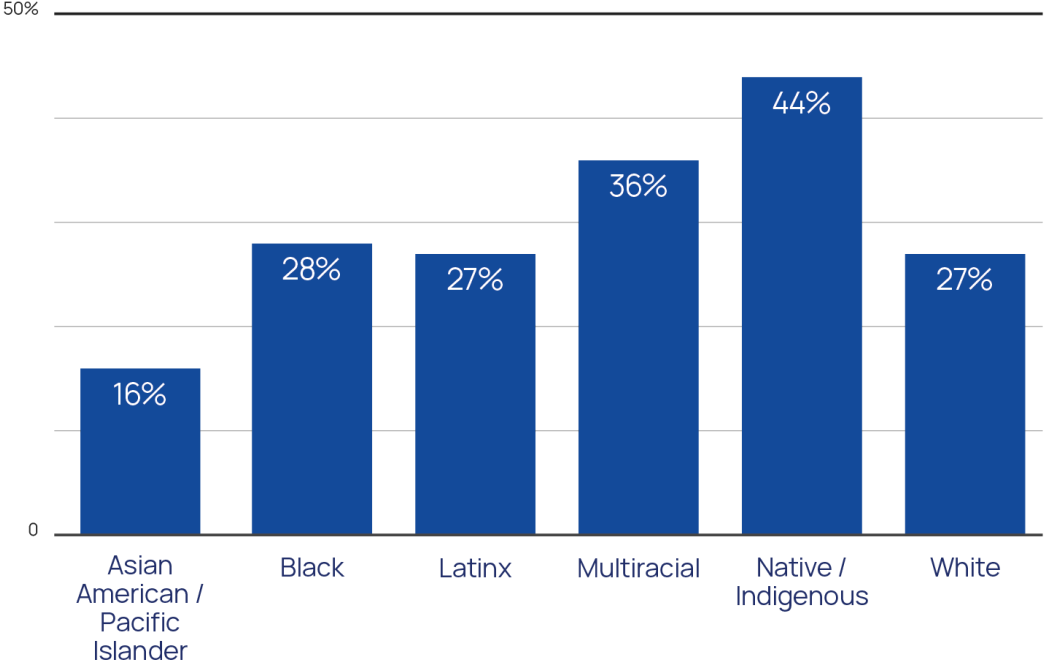
Demographics of LGBTQ Youth Experiencing Homelessness and Housing Instability

The demographic information for respondents in each of the groups is included in Table 1. These data show that while experiences of homelessness and housing instability impact LGBTQ young people from a variety of backgrounds and identities, LGBTQ youth of color, pansexual youth, and transgender and nonbinary youth, in particular, are placed at especially elevated risk of homelessness and housing instability.

Race

LGBTQ youth of color are overrepresented among LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness and housing instability. Compared to White LGBTQ youth, those who were Native/Indigenous had more than double the odds (aOR = 2.20) of experiencing housing instability or homelessness, with Black (aOR = 1.13), Latinx (aOR = 1.24) and multiracial LGBTQ (aOR = 1.58) youth also having significantly greater odds. Specifically, Native/Indigenous youth represented 1% of youth who had not experienced housing instability, but represented 3% of youth who reported past housing instability and 7% of youth who were currently homeless. Multiracial youth are similarly overrepresented, as they represented 16% of youth who had not experienced housing instability, 22% of youth who reported past housing instability, and 24% of youth who reported being currently homeless.

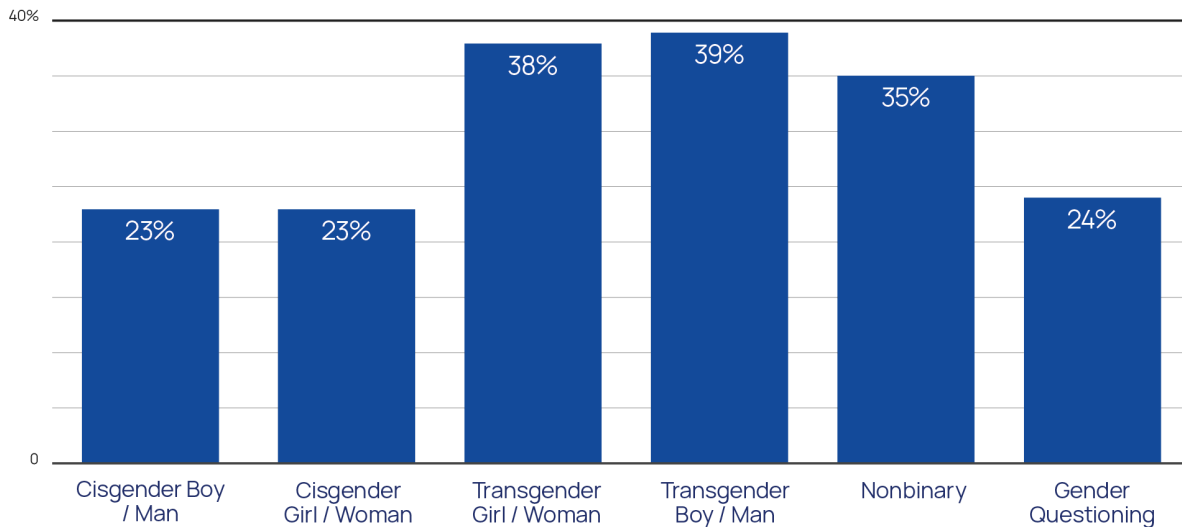
Rates of Past or Current Housing Instability by Racial / Ethnic Identity



Gender Identity

Homelessness and housing instability were reported at higher rates among transgender and nonbinary youth. There were no significant differences in the odds of experiencing homelessness or housing instability between cisgender LGBTQ boys/men and cisgender LGBTQ girls/women. However, transgender girls/women (aOR = 1.93), transgender boys/men (aOR = 2.18), and nonbinary youth (aOR = 1.68) all had significantly greater odds of experiencing homelessness or housing instability compared to cisgender LGBTQ boys/men. Transgender women and girls represent 2% of youth who had not experienced housing instability but 4% of youth who reported past housing instability and 6% of youth who reported being currently homeless. Transgender boys and men comprise 9% of youth who had not experienced housing instability but 14% of youth who reported past housing instability, and 17% of youth who reported being currently homeless. Nonbinary youth were also overrepresented among youth who reported past housing instability or current homelessness. Nonbinary youth represented 23% of youth who had not experienced housing instability but 32% of youth who reported past housing instability and 31% of youth who reported being currently homeless.

Rates of Past or Current Housing Instability by Gender Identity



Sexual Identity

Fewer disparities were observed in the data about sexual identity, but pansexual youth were overrepresented in each group. Pansexual youth had nearly 50% greater odds (aOR = 1.46) compared to gay/lesbian youth. Pansexual youth made up 16% of youth who had not experienced housing instability but 24% of youth who reported past housing instability, 22% of youth who reported being currently homeless.

Census Region

Data about the census region where youth were located showed one significant disparity in the group of youth who reported being currently homeless. Compared to LGBTQ youth who lived in the Northeast region of the U.S., those who lived in the South (aOR = 1.21), Midwest (aOR = 1.18), and West (aOR = 1.22) all had significantly greater odds of experiencing homelessness or housing instability. Youth in the West made up 26% of youth who had not experienced housing instability but 36% of youth who reported being currently homeless.

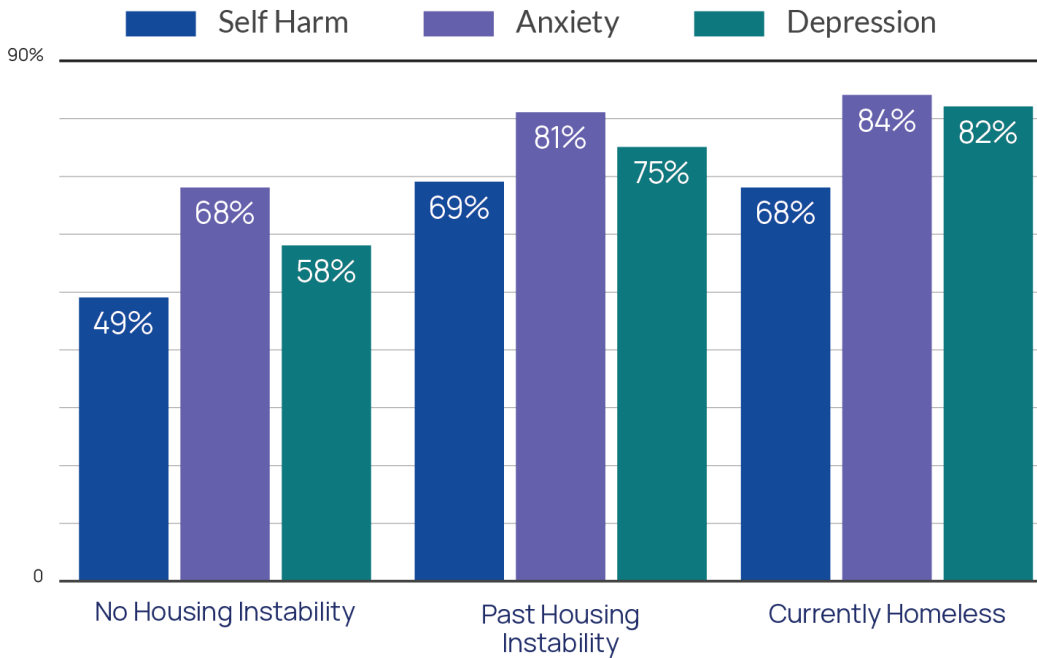
Mental Health and Suicide Risk among LGBTQ Youth Experiencing Homelessness and Housing Instability

Data about mental health and suicide risk among LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness or housing instability can be found in Table 2. LGBTQ youth who reported past housing instability or current homelessness had greater odds of reporting anxiety, depression, self-harm, considering suicide, and attempting suicide.

Anxiety, Depression, and Self-Harm

LGBTQ youth who reported experiences of homelessness and housing instability reported high rates of anxiety, depression, and self-harm. In adjusted logistic regression models, LGBTQ youth who reported housing instability or homelessness had nearly two times the odds of reporting depression (aOR = 2.07), anxiety (aOR = 1.96), and self-harm (aOR = 2.30). Compared to 68% of youth who had not experienced housing instability, 81% of youth who reported past housing instability and 84% of youth who reported being currently homeless reported symptoms of generalized anxiety disorder. LGBTQ youth who reported housing instability also reported higher rates of depression. Fifty-eight percent of youth who had not experienced housing instability reported symptoms of depression, compared to 75% of youth who reported past housing instability and 82% of youth who reported being currently homeless. Rates of self-harm in the last year were very high among youth who reported past housing instability or current homelessness. Compared to 49% of youth who had not experienced housing instability, 69% of youth who reported past housing instability and 68% of youth who were currently homeless reported that they had engaged in self-harm in the last year.

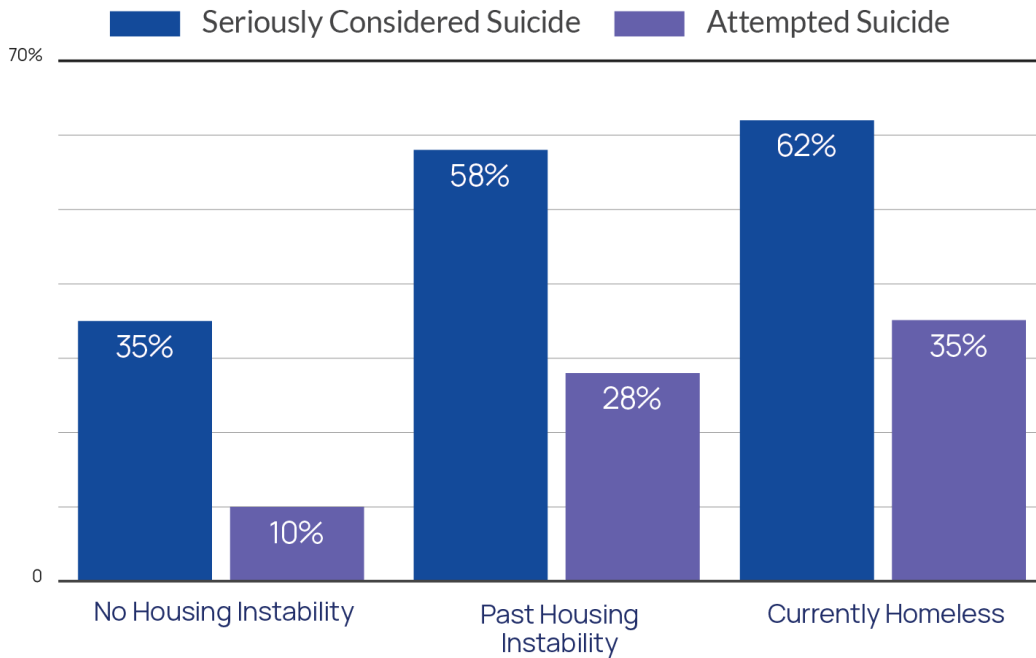
Mental Health Symptoms Among LGBTQ Youth by Housing Status



Seriously Considered or Attempted Suicide

LGBTQ youth who reported experiences of homelessness and housing instability were also more likely to report seriously considering or attempting suicide in the past year. In adjusted logistic regression models, LGBTQ youth in our sample who reported housing instability or homelessness had two to three times the odds of considering suicide (aOR = 2.62, or attempting suicide (aOR = 3.70) compared to those who did not report any housing instability. Compared to 35% of youth who had not experienced housing instability, 58% of youth who reported past housing instability and 62% of youth who were currently homeless reported having seriously considered suicide in the last year. Among LGBTQ youth who reported housing instability, rates of attempting suicide in the past year were more than twice that of their peers who had not experienced housing instability. Ten percent of youth who had not experienced housing instability reported an attempt in the last year, compared to 28% of youth who reported past housing instability and 35% of youth who reported being currently homeless.

Suicidal Thoughts and Attempts Among LGBTQ Youth by Housing Status



Barriers to Mental Health Care

Homelessness and housing instability can make it very difficult to access consistent, quality mental health care. Compared to 47% of youth who had not experienced housing instability, 51% of youth who reported past housing instability and 53% of youth who were currently homeless reported that they wanted mental health care but were unable to access it. Youth who reported past housing instability or current homelessness were more likely to report a number of structural barriers (cost, lack of transportation, lack of parental permission) and uncertainties about accessing mental health care (fears that a provider would only focus on their LGBTQ identity, previous negative experiences with mental health professionals, and fears that mental health treatment wouldn't work) than their peers who had not reported housing instability.

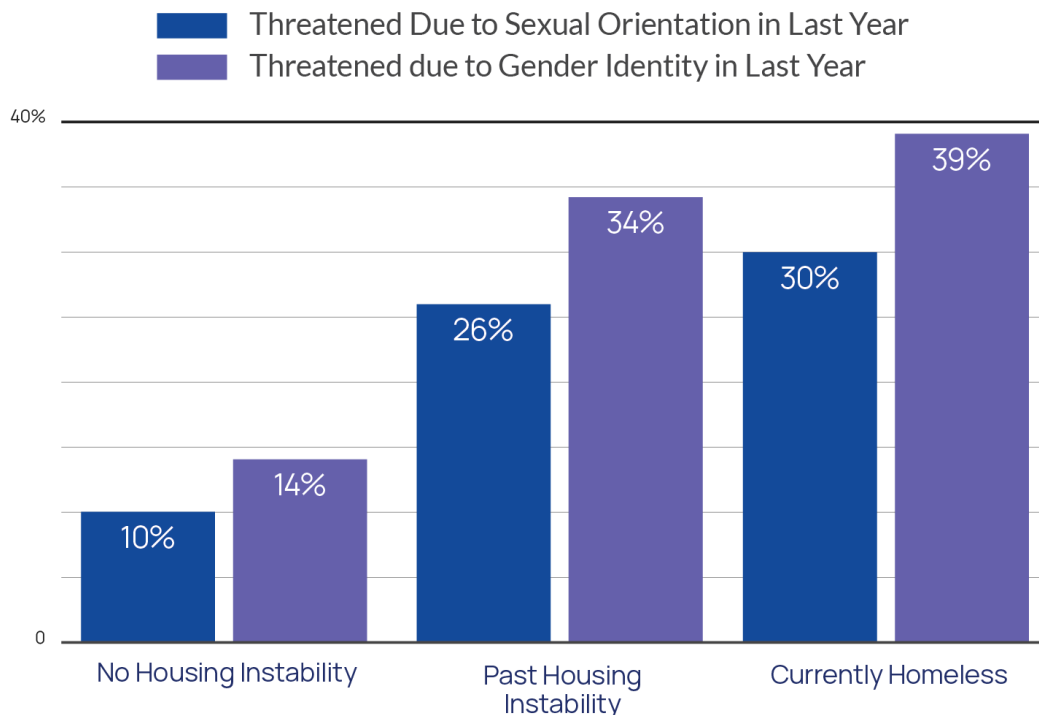
The majority (61%) of LGBTQ youth who reported housing instability or homelessness reported that they had not accessed mental health care because they could not afford it, compared to 39% of youth who had not experienced housing instability. One in three (33%) LGBTQ youth who reported housing instability or homelessness reported that they had not accessed mental health care because they could not get to the location, compared to one in five (20%) youth who had not experienced housing instability. One in four (25%) LGBTQ youth who reported housing instability or homelessness reported that they had not accessed mental health care because their parent/caregiver did not allow them to, compared to one in six (16%) LGBTQ youth who had not experienced housing instability.

Fears about the process of accessing mental health care were also more prevalent among youth who reported housing instability or homelessness. More than one in five (22%) LGBTQ youth who reported housing instability or homelessness reported that they had not accessed mental health care because they thought the provider would only focus on their LGBTQ identity, compared to less than one in six (14%) LGBTQ youth who had not experienced housing instability. More than a quarter (27%) of LGBTQ youth who reported housing instability or homelessness reported that they had not accessed mental health care because they had a negative experience with a previous mental health professional and did not want to have another one, compared to 15% of youth who had not experienced housing instability. Finally, 42% of youth who reported housing instability or homelessness reported that they had not received mental health care because they were worried it wouldn't work, compared to 37% of youth who had not experienced housing instability.

Experiences Associated with Homelessness and Housing Instability

Living on the streets or bouncing from shelter to couch-surfing can leave LGBTQ youth vulnerable to various forms of violence and victimization. Data about experiences frequently associated with homelessness or housing instability (victimization, history of foster care, and food insecurity) can be found in Table 3. Youth who reported past housing instability or current homelessness had greater odds of being threatened or abused due to their sexual orientation or gender identity, having a history of foster care, and having experienced food insecurity in the last month.

Rates of Victimization Among LGBTQ Youth by Housing Status



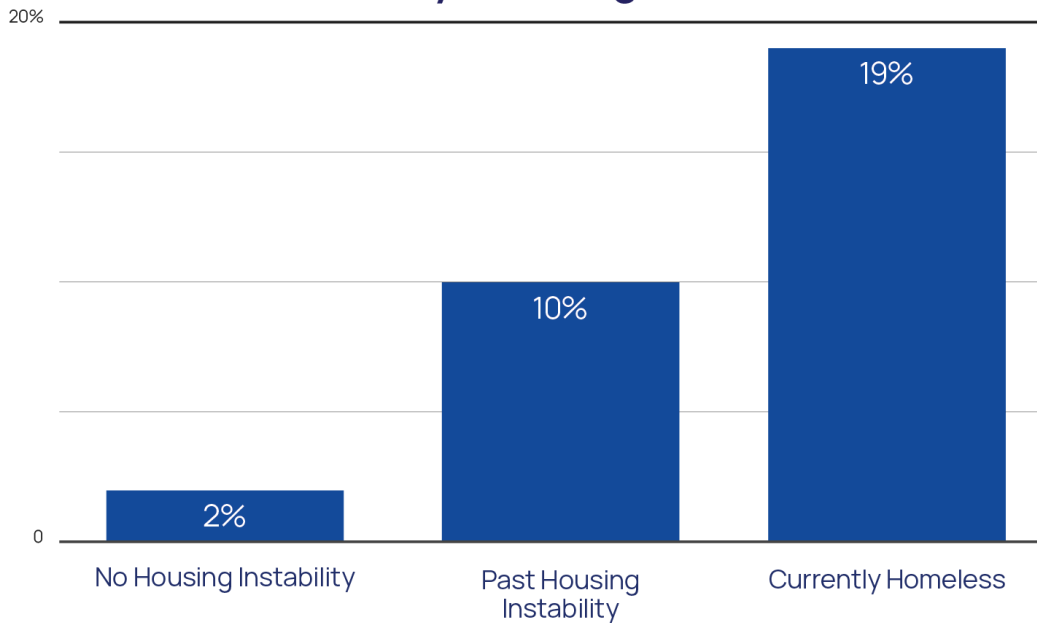
Victimization

Youth who reported experiencing homelessness or housing instability reported high rates of being threatened or abused due to their LGBTQ identity. LGBTQ youth who reported past housing instability or current homelessness had more than three times greater odds (aOR = 3.16) of being physically threatened or abused due to their sexual orientation in the last year compared to LGBTQ youth with no reported housing instability. Compared to 10% of youth who had not experienced housing instability, 26% of youth who reported past housing instability and 30% of youth who were currently homeless reported being threatened or abused due to their sexual identity in the last year. Transgender, nonbinary, or gender-questioning respondents also reported high rates of being threatened or abused due to their gender identity. Transgender and nonbinary youth who reported past housing instability or current homelessness had more than three times greater odds (aOR = 3.07) of being physically threatened or abused due to their gender identity in the last year compared to youth with no reported housing instability. Fourteen percent of transgender and nonbinary respondents who had never experienced housing instability reported being threatened or abused due to their gender identity in the last year, compared to 34% of transgender and nonbinary youth who reported past housing instability and 39% of transgender and nonbinary youth who were currently homeless.

Foster Care

Rates of a history of foster care were very high among LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness, especially among youth who reported current homelessness. LGBTQ youth who reported past housing instability or current homelessness had nearly six times greater odds (aOR = 5.81) of reporting that they had been in foster care at any point in their life, compared to LGBTQ youth who did not report any housing instability. While only 2% of youth who had not experienced housing instability reported having been in foster care, 10% of youth who reported past housing instability and 19% of youth who were currently homeless reported that they had been in foster care.

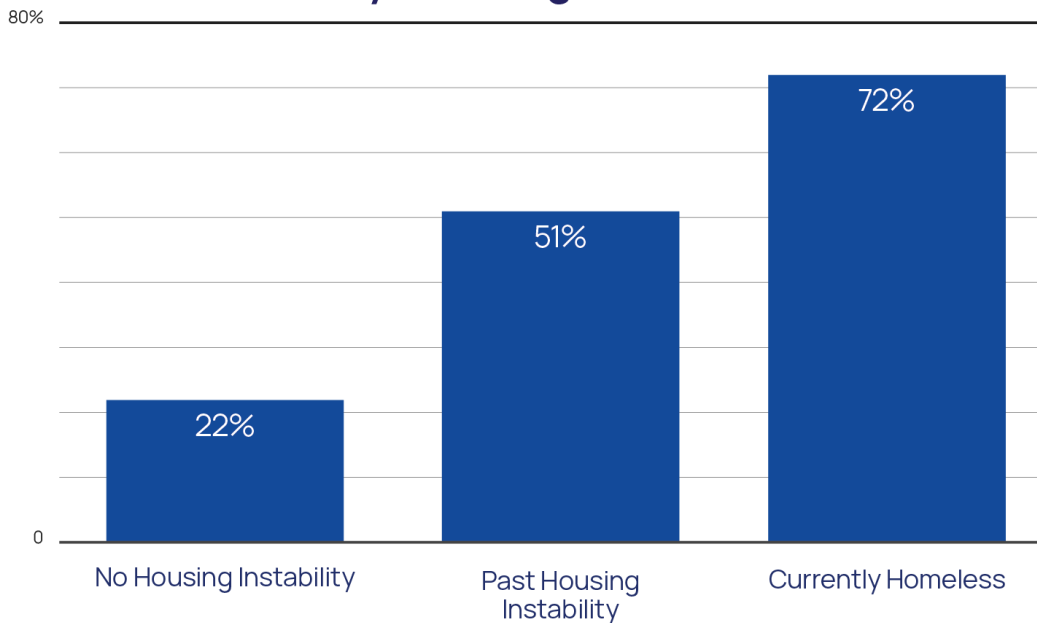
Rates of History of Foster Care among LGBTQ Youth by Housing Status



Food Insecurity

Experiences of food insecurity were high among LGBTQ youth who reported housing instability or homelessness. LGBTQ youth who reported past housing instability or current homelessness also had more than three times greater odds (aOR = 3.53) of reporting food insecurity in the last month, compared to their peers who did not report any housing instability. Compared to 22% of youth who had not experienced housing instability, 51% of youth who reported past housing instability and 72% of youth who were currently homeless reported that they had experienced food insecurity (worrying about food running out or not having enough to eat) in the last month.

Rates of Food Insecurity among LGBTQ Youth by Housing Status



Recommendations

Based on the data shared in this report and the perspectives of those in the field of housing advocacy, we offer the following recommendations for preventing and addressing LGBTQ youth homelessness.

Preventing LGBTQ Youth Homelessness

It is important to consider ways that LGBTQ youth homelessness can be prevented. Strong anti-discrimination policies in the workplace and strong anti-bullying and harassment policies in schools can be effective in helping LGBTQ youth stay connected to school and employment, increasing their skills and future earnings, and making it easier for them to maintain stable housing. Additionally, since family conflict around youths' LGBTQ identities is a driving factor in LGBTQ youth homelessness, developing family counseling or mediation programs may be effective at decreasing conflict and keeping LGBTQ youth in their homes and connected to their families. Such programs should be mindful of youths' safety as some families are not open to changing their ideas about LGBTQ people and are not safe to engage in counseling or mediation. However, research from the Family Acceptance Project shows that many parents reject their child's LGBTQ identity because they fear the homophobia and transphobia their child may experience in society (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014). Reaching out to these families to educate them about LGBTQ identities and the safe, fulfilling lives that their children can lead as openly LGBTQ people may help them become more understanding and accepting. Preserving connections with family networks can help LGBTQ youth maintain stable housing, as they can have more adults to rely on for emotional, logistical, and economic support.

Specific attention should be paid to preventing housing instability among LGBTQ youth in foster care. Previous scholarship has established that youth exiting the foster care system are at elevated risk of homelessness (Dworsky et al., 2013), in part due to lack of a social and economic support network after they leave the child welfare system. LGBTQ youth are disproportionately more likely to be in foster care (Wilson et al., 2014) and therefore at greater risk of experiencing housing instability after exiting care. The findings in this report align with existing literature and show that LGBTQ youth who have been in foster care are indeed at elevated risk of homelessness and housing instability. This highlights the need for child welfare agencies to provide more structured housing support for young adults exiting care. Examples of such support include amending policies to allow youth to stay in care and receive services up to the age of 21 – which several states currently allow – and expanding programs like the Chaffee Grants, which offer economic assistance to youth exiting foster care. There is also a need for establishing LGBTQ-affirming foster homes within the child welfare system. Providing homes where LGBTQ youth feel affirmed and supported can help LGBTQ youth stay connected to the system longer (e.g., not run away from placements and experience housing instability) and build their social network of support as they transition out of foster care. Further, this speaks to the need for anti-discrimination protections for prospective LGBTQ parents, who may be more equipped to understand and care for the unique needs of LGBTQ youth.

Increasing Funding for Low-Barrier Housing Programs

Unlike other deeply entrenched social problems such as racism, homophobia, biphobia, or transphobia, homelessness has a concrete, evidence-based solution: housing. More funding should be allocated for safe, low-barrier housing programs which can have an immediate positive impact on LGBTQ youth experiencing housing instability. “Low barrier” refers to decreasing or eliminating the bureaucratic challenges that a young person must go through to access services. For example, removing age requirements that arbitrarily force young adults out of youth-focused services at age 21 would allow young people to stay in programs designed for their needs for longer, building relationships and stability with peers and staff. Another barrier is the requirement that housing clients must be sober to stay in a shelter or move into a transitional housing apartment. While substance use services should be available to all clients accessing housing services, it is unrealistic to expect youth to achieve and maintain sobriety before having access to safe and secure housing. A harm-reduction approach to substance use should be implemented in housing services to ensure client safety and support youth in reducing unhealthy substance use. Funding should also be increased for programs such as Section 8, which provides vouchers that can be used to subsidize clients’ rent. Section 8 vouchers are in high demand with long waitlists in many American metropolitan areas. Increasing the funding and availability of this program, as well as limiting bureaucratic barriers to accessing these vouchers and incentivizing landlords to accept them, would increase the effectiveness of this popular housing service.

Reimagining Shelter Services

One immediate action that housing providers can take to support LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness is to make sure that all shelter and housing facilities provide culturally

competent services to LGBTQ youth. The high rates of victimization among youth who have experienced housing instability highlight LGBTQ youths' vulnerability to violence and harassment when living on the streets, staying with friends or acquaintances, or even staying in a shelter. The Equal Access Rule is a regulation mandated by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) which prohibits discrimination against LGBTQ people in HUD-funded shelter services and specifically requires that transgender individuals be allowed to use the dorm and bathroom facilities that align with their gender identity. While this rule provides strong regulatory protection, HUD is not well-equipped to enforce this rule at the many shelters and housing facilities that accept their funding each year, leaving transgender adults and youth experiencing homelessness vulnerable to discrimination and harassment. Stricter enforcement mechanisms would provide more robust protection for LGBTQ youth and, specifically, transgender youth who may be at highest risk when accessing shelter services.

Additionally, shelter and housing facilities should provide LGBTQ cultural competency training to all staff to ensure that LGBTQ clients are treated with dignity and respect. Several advocates and organizations have argued that in order for LGBTQ people to truly be safe, the entire concept of congregate care settings (e.g., dorms that house multiple clients, usually divided by gender) needs to be reimagined or eliminated. Advocates argue that even the most culturally competent shelter does not provide adequate privacy, safety, and dignity to transgender and nonbinary residents. In fact, even at shelters where transgender residents are allowed to select the dorm they would like to stay in, there are few gender-neutral or third-gender dorms or bathrooms available for nonbinary residents. LGBTQ shelter residents are also vulnerable to discrimination and harassment from other shelter residents and it is nearly impossible for shelter staff to supervise and protect LGBTQ residents at all times. These concerns raise important questions about the safety and dignity of all residents (regardless of sexual or gender identity) in large congregate care settings. More research is needed to determine appropriate alternatives, such as individual rooms, or dorms organized by social connections rather than gender.

The high rates of self-harm, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts among youth who are currently homeless and living in a shelter highlight the need for more robust connections between housing services and mental health care providers. Providing in-house mental health services at emergency shelters, offering transportation vouchers to young people to get to mental health appointments, and providing low-cost or free mental health care would decrease these barriers and allow more LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness to benefit from the mental health care that they want. Providers should also ensure that all mental health services that they offer or refer youth to are LGBTQ culturally competent to ensure that youth will feel comfortable using the services.

Improving Data Collection on LGBTQ Youth Homelessness

Better data is needed to understand the full scope and impact of LGBTQ youth homelessness in the United States. Questions about both LGBTQ identity and housing status should be added to population surveys of youth and young adults, such as the YRBS. Fortunately, starting in 2021, the CDC will add a question about homelessness to its standard YRBS questionnaire, improving nationwide data about homelessness and housing instability

among students (School House Connection, 2020). However, questions about gender identity that can accurately capture transgender students and their experiences are still lacking in most YRBS jurisdictions. Because homelessness and housing instability create risky environments for young people, any survey seeking to measure the risks that youth encounter in adolescence and young adulthood should ask about respondents' access to safe and secure housing. Similarly, LGBTQ identity should be measured with nuance so that homelessness and housing instability trends within the LGBTQ community can be observed and measured over time. For more information about measuring LGBTQ among youth in survey data, please refer to The Trevor Project's previous report, "[Measuring Youth Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity.](#)"

Additionally, current techniques used to identify and count individuals experiencing homelessness, such as the Point In Time Count (PITC) sponsored by the HUD each year, should be reassessed. Existing PITC protocols call for counting individuals in emergency shelters and street canvassing to count individuals living outdoors or in public spaces. These protocols, however, are likely to miss young people experiencing homelessness who are couch surfing or staying in informal, non-permanent housing arrangements. Adding questions about LGBTQ identity to PITC protocols would also allow for more accurate measuring of housing instability among LGBTQ youth and adults, although any questions about LGBTQ identity should be optional to protect participants' privacy and safety. Collecting more accurate data about LGBTQ youth homelessness and housing instability will allow researchers, policymakers, and housing service providers to make more informed decisions about how to prevent and confront LGBTQ youth homelessness.

Enacting Anti-Poverty Economic Policies

LGBTQ youth homelessness does not exist in a vacuum. LGBTQ youth are impacted by their families' and communities' economic stability and policies that combat poverty at the societal level will have a positive impact on LGBTQ youths' access to safe and secure housing. In the area of employment law, beneficial policies can include: requiring employers to pay a living wage, provide health insurance, and offer paid sick leave. Quality jobs with adequate pay and benefits allow people to maintain stable housing and promote better physical and mental health. Entry-level jobs that pay a living wage are particularly important for LGBTQ youth who are more likely to begin their careers without the support of their families. Local, state, and national authorities should also institute policies to increase the stock of affordable housing in their communities and subsidize the construction of new housing or renovation of existing housing properties. The economic upheaval of the COVID-19 pandemic has increased economic pressure on low-income households and made it even more urgent for legislators to tackle the root causes of poverty in the United States for the benefit of LGBTQ youth, their families, and their communities.

Conclusion

LGBTQ young people do not deserve to struggle with housing as they transition from children to young adults. These data indicate that Native/Indigenous, Multiracial, and Black youth are disproportionately at risk of homelessness and housing instability, likely due to the combined impacts of racism and LGBTQ stigma in housing, school, and the workplace. Solutions to

housing instability, therefore, must account for intersectional barriers that LGBTQ youth encounter. The high rates of food insecurity among LGBTQ youth experiencing housing instability highlight the role of economic instability in homelessness and the importance of making sure that LGBTQ youth have access to nutrition programs such as free and reduced lunch at school. It is imperative that researchers and policymakers continue to examine this ongoing issue and implement strategies to get LGBTQ youth into safe and secure housing. Access to housing is a human right, and The Trevor Project will continue to support LGBTQ youth in crisis through our high-quality crisis services, our research on LGBTQ youth mental health, and our training for organizations and housing providers who want to support and affirm LGBTQ youth.

About The Trevor Project

The Trevor Project is the world's largest suicide prevention and crisis intervention organization for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, & questioning (LGBTQ) young people. The Trevor Project offers a suite of 24/7 crisis intervention and suicide prevention programs, including TrevorLifeline, TrevorText, and TrevorChat as well as the world's largest safe space social networking site for LGBTQ youth, TrevorSpace. Trevor also operates an education program with resources for youth-serving adults and organizations, an advocacy department fighting for pro-LGBTQ legislation and against anti-LGBTQ policies, and a research team to examine the most effective means to help young LGBTQ people in crisis and end suicide. If you or someone you know is feeling hopeless or suicidal, our trained crisis counselors are available 24/7 at 1-866-488-7386, via chat www.TheTrevorProject.org/Get-Help, or by texting 678-678.

This report is a collaborative effort from the following individuals at The Trevor Project:

Jonah DeChants, PhD

Research Scientist

Myeshia N. Price, PhD

Senior Research Scientist

Amy E. Green, PhD

Vice President of Research

Carrie Davis, MSW

Chief Community Officer

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Media inquiries:

Press@TheTrevorProject.org

Research-related inquiries:

Research@TheTrevorProject.org

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Table 1: Demographic Characteristics by Subgroup

	No Past nor Current Housing Instability n = 24,874 (%)	Past Housing Instability n = 9,666 (%)	Currently Homeless n = 219 (%)
Race / Ethnicity			
AI/AN	328 (1)	244 (3)	14 (7)
AAPI	1,605 (7)	297 (3)	3 (1)
Black	1,235 (5)	469 (5)	18 (8)
Latinx	3,550 (15)	1,304 (14)	23 (11)
Multiracial	3,855 (16)	2,078 (22)	49 (24)
White	13,430 (56)	4,850 (52)	99 (48)
Sexual Identity			
Straight / Heterosexual	273 (1)	92 (1)	4 (2)
Gay or Lesbian	7,172 (29)	2,517 (26)	42 (19)
Bisexual	9,402 (38)	3,123 (32)	77(36)
Queer	2,966 (12)	1,237 (13)	25 (12)
Pansexual	4,000 (16)	2,335 (24)	62 (29)
Questioning	886 (4)	303(3)	6 (3)
Gender Identity			
Cisgender boy	3,500 (14)	1,025 (11)	21 (10)
Cisgender girl	10,161 (41)	2,973 (31)	63 (30)
Transgender girl	571 (2)	339(4)	13 (6)
Transgender boy	2,112 (9)	1,331 (14)	36 (17)
Nonbinary	5,737 (23)	3,028 (32)	65 (31)
Gender Questioning	2,429 (10)	769(8)	14 (7)
Census Region			
Northeast	4,073 (16)	1,312 (14)	27 (12)
South	8,732 (35)	3,517 (36)	72 (33)

Midwest	5,709 (23)	2,258 (23)	40 (18)
West	6,360 (26)	2,579 (27)	80 (36)
Age			
13 - 18	14,716 (59)	4,882 (50)	73 (33)
18 - 24	10,158 (41)	4,784 (49)	146 (67)

Table 2: Mental Health and Suicide Risk among LGBTQ Youth Experiencing Homelessness and Housing Instability

	No Past nor Current Housing Instability n = 24,874 (%)	Past Housing Instability n = 9,666 (%)	Currently Homeless n = 219 (%)
Self harm	11,868 (49)	6,414 (69)	146 (68)
Seriously considered suicide in past year	8,088 (35)	5,321 (58)	128 (62)
Suicide attempt	2,266 (10)	2,491 (28)	70 (35)
Anxiety	16,732 (68)	7,793 (81)	183 (84)
Depression	14,236 (58)	7,159 (75)	179 (82)
Wanted MH care but didn't get it	11,471 (47)	4,843 (51)	114 (53)

Table 3: Experiences Associated with Homelessness and Housing Instability

	No Past nor Current Housing Instability n = 24,874 (%)	Past Housing Instability n = 9,666 (%)	Currently Homeless n = 219 (%)
Victimization			
Threatened or abused last 12 months due to SO	2,227 (10)	2,154 (26)	56 (30)
Threatened or abused last 12 months due to GI ²	1,465 (14)	1,725 (34)	50 (39)
History of Foster Care	459 (2)	919 (10)	42 (19)
Food Insecurity	5,336 (22)	4,795 (51)	152 (72)

² Only among transgender, nonbinary, and gender-questioning respondents.