

December 2021 Youth Services Survey

Youth Supplemental Questions

Experiences of LGBTQ Youth

County of San Diego Children, Youth and Families Behavioral Health Services

BACKGROUND

In December 2021, clients ages 13 and older and caregivers of all child and youth clients receiving outpatient mental health services from the County of San Diego Children, Youth & Families Behavioral Health Services (CYFBHS) system were asked to complete the Youth Services Survey (YSS). A supplementary survey was added to the YSS to gather information about youth who identify as LGBTQ. Specifically, the supplemental section contained questions on bullying and discrimination, affirming spaces, experiences in mental health treatment, and desire for additional services. This information will help CYFBHS identify the needs of LGBTQ youth. It will also help inform the 2022-2024 CYF Performance Improvement Project (PIP) which is designed to improve care for these youth.

SAMPLE AND METHODS

In December 2021, the YSS survey was administered online. 523 youth surveys were returned with a response to at least one supplemental question and 477 surveys had usable data. Of these 477 surveys, 13 were duplicates (the same client reporting on two different providers) which were only retained for the analyses of provider behavior. Findings from the youth responses to the supplemental questions only are highlighted in this report. Not every youth responded to every question.

I. SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Table 1: Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity	December 2021 (N=464)	
	n	%
Heterosexual/Cisgender	243	52%
Sexual Minority/Cisgender	137	30%
Transgender	75	16%
Unknown (I don't know what this question is asking/skipped)	9	2%

Slightly more than half of the respondents (52%) identified as heterosexual and cisgender, (30%) identified as a sexual minority and cisgender, and 16% identified as transgender. These prevalence rates are much higher than those identified in the CYFBHS Special Populations Report FY 2020-21,

in which 11% of CYF clients ages 13 and older identified as LGBTQ. While the Special Populations Report included data from all 12,132 clients served by CYFBHS in FY 2020-21, this YSS supplemental survey had only 464 unique respondents. These prevalence rates are also much higher than those identified in the California Healthy Kids Survey 2017-2019 (14% sexual minority, 3% transgender), or the national Youth Risk Behavior Survey 2019 (11% sexual minority).

Table 2: Orientation by Gender Identity	Heterosexual		Not Heterosexual		Unknown	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Female (N=250)	123	49%	120	48%	7	3%
Male (N=137)	119	87%	16	12%	2	1%
Transgender (N=75)	6	8%	69	92%	0	0%
Unknown (N=2)	1	50%	1	50%	0	0%

Female clients were more likely than male clients to identify as sexual minorities (48% vs. 12%). Ninety-two percent of clients who identified as transgender also identified as sexual minorities.

Table 3: Orientation among Sexual/Gender Minorities	December 2021 (N=212)	
	n	%
Heterosexual	6	3%
Gay or Lesbian	33	16%
Bisexual	86	41%
Other	50	24%
Questioning	37	17%

Among youth who identified as sexual/gender minorities, only 16% identified as “Gay” or “Lesbian.” “Bisexual” (41%), “Other” (24%), and “Questioning” (17%), were more common orientations.

GENDER IDENTITY AND PRONOUNS

The majority of the youth who identified as transgender (85%) had their sex assigned as “female” on their birth certificates. When asked which pronouns they use, 33% of the transgender youth endorsed more than one pronoun option.

	She/Her		He/Him		They/Them		Something else		Decline to Answer	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Male assigned at birth (N=9)	4	44%	8	89%	5	56%	0	0%	0	0%
Female assigned at birth (N=64)	18	28%	22	34%	35	55%	15	23%	2	3%
Unknown (N=2)	0	0%	0	0%	1	50%	0	0%	1	50%

While the majority of youth who were assigned “male” on their birth certificates used he/him pronouns (89%), only 28% of the youth who were assigned “female” at birth used she/her pronouns.

	Male Assigned at Birth		Female Assigned at Birth		Unknown	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
All of them (N=75)	2	22%	9	14%	0	0%
Most of them (N=75)	3	33%	6	9%	0	0%
Some of them (N=75)	0	0%	15	23%	2	2%
A few of them (N=75)	2	22%	17	27%	0	0%
None of them (N=75)	2	22%	17	27%	0	0%

When asked if their family and friends use their preferred pronouns, only 15% of transgender youth responded, “all of them.” In contrast, 25% responded “none of them.” Thus, 75% of youth who identified as transgender have some family members or friends who use their preferred pronouns, but most of these youth also have some family members or friends who do not use the pronouns they identify with.

II. BULLYING, DISCRIMINATION, AND AFFIRMING SPACES

BULLYING

Table 6: Have you been bullied in the past 12 months?	Heterosexual / Cisgender (N=243)		Sexual Minority / Cisgender (N=137)		Transgender (N=75)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Bullied in person	46	19%	34	25%	20	27%
Bullied electronically	47	19%	26	19%	16	21%

The supplemental survey included questions about both in-person bullying and cyberbullying. Overall, 22% of respondents reported that they had been bullied in person in the past 12 months, but the percentage was larger for youth who identified as transgender (27%), or sexual minority/cisgender (25%), compared to heterosexual/cisgender (19%). While 20% reported they had been bullied electronically in the past year, the percentage did not vary as much by orientation and gender identity.

DISCRIMINATION
















Table 7: Have you felt discriminated against in the past 12 months?	Sexual Minority / Cisgender (N=137)		Transgender (N=75)	
	n	%	n	%
Discriminated due to sexual orientation	22	16%	22	29%
Discriminated due to gender identity	13	9%	24	32%

Almost one-third (32%) of transgender youth reported that they had felt discriminated against in the past year due to their gender identity, and 16% of sexual minority/cisgender youth had felt discriminated against due to their sexual orientation.

Table 8: Experiences of Discrimination	Sexual Minority / Cisgender (N=137)		Transgender (N=75)	
	n	%	n	%
I was verbally harassed because people thought I was lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ).	15	11%	21	28%
I was physically attacked because people thought I was LGBTQ.	3	2%	7	9%
I experienced unwanted sexual contact because people thought I was LGBTQ.	5	4%	13	17%
I wasn't allowed to dress in the way that fit my gender identity or expression.	11	8%	16	21%
I was disciplined for fighting back against bullies.	17	12%	14	19%
I believe I was disciplined more harshly because teachers/staff thought I was LGBTQ.	1	1%	8	11%
I left a school because the mistreatment was so bad.	14	10%	12	16%
I stopped receiving mental health treatment because a provider made me feel uncomfortable about my LGBTQ identity.	4	3%	1	1%

Verbal harassment was the most frequent type of discrimination reported by transgender youth (28%), while “being disciplined for fighting back against bullies” was the most common type reported by sexual minority/cisgender youth (12%).

AFFIRMING SPACES

Table 9: Affirming Spaces	Sexual Minority / Cisgender (N=137)		Transgender (N=75)	
	n	%	n	%
School*	78 [†]	 59%	46 [‡]	 64%
Work	14	 10%	6	 8%
Home	70	 51%	35	 47%
Online communities	46	 34%	47	 63%
A place of worship	12	 9%	2	 3%
Community events	32	 23%	16	 21%
Somewhere else	87	 64%	50	 67%
Nowhere	8	 6%	0	0%

*School was only displayed to youth who reported being enrolled in school.
[†]n=132
[‡]n=72

The Supplemental Survey asked LGBTQ youth to endorse affirming spaces, “Where, if anywhere, are you able to be in spaces that affirm your LGBTQ identity (let you be you)?” Youth were asked to check all that apply. The most common answer was “somewhere else” (sexual minority/cisgender youth, 64%; transgender youth, 67%) and some youth who chose this option listed friends’ houses as affirming spaces. Among transgender youth the next most popular option was “school” (64%). Forty-nine percent of sexual minority/cisgender youth and 53% of transgender youth did not mark “home” as an affirming space.

III. EXPERIENCES IN MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT

Table 10: Current Mental Health Treatment	Sexual Minority / Cisgender (N=144)		Transgender (N=76)	
	n	%	n	%
Has your current mental health provider ever asked you about your sexual orientation: No	70	49%	31	41%
Has your current mental health provider ever asked you about your gender identity: No	65	45%	18	24%
Do you feel your current mental health provider is LGBTQ friendly: No	9	6%	4	5%
Has your current mental health provider talked to you about challenges you may have faced because of your LGBTQ identity: No	105	73%	37	49%
Has your current mental health provider ever shared information about resources or supports that are available for youth that identify as LGBTQ: No	93	65%	39	51%

Almost all of the youth who identified as LGBTQ (95%) felt that their current mental health provider was “LGBTQ friendly.” However, many youth reported that their provider had not asked them about their sexual orientation (sexual minority/cisgender youth 49%, transgender youth 41%) or gender identity (sexual minority/cisgender youth 45%, transgender youth 24%). Additionally, the majority of sexual minority/cisgender youth and nearly half the transgender youth reported that their provider had not talked to them about challenges they might face because of their LGBTQ identity (73% and 49% respectively), or shared information about resources available for youth who identify as LGBTQ (65% and 51% respectively).

IV. CURRENT MENTAL HEALTH AND DESIRE FOR ADDITIONAL SERVICES

Table 11: Current Mental Health	Heterosexual / Cisgender (N=243)		Sexual Minority / Cisgender (N=137)		Transgender (N=75)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Very good	29	12%	7	5%	3	4%
Good	69	28%	36	26%	7	9%
Fair	100	41%	56	41%	38	51%
Poor	39	16%	28	20%	19	25%
Very Poor	6	3%	10	7%	8	11%

Both sexual minority/cisgender youth (27%) and transgender youth (36%) were more likely than heterosexual/cisgender youth (19%) to rate their current mental health as “poor” or “very poor”.

Table 12: Interest in Additional LGBTQ Services	LGBTQ (N=120)	
	n	%
Peer Support - In Person	56	47%
Peer Support - Virtual	36	30%
Group Therapy - In Person	34	28%
Group Therapy - Virtual	31	26%
Family Therapy - In Person	59	49%
Family Therapy - Virtual	44	37%

More than half (120 of 212, 57%) of LGBTQ youth reported an interest in additional services. Among these youth, the most popular additional service options were in-person family therapy (49%), in-person peer support (47%) and virtual family therapy (37%).

V. KEY FINDINGS

LGBTQ IDENTITY

- The percentage of youth ages 13 and older who identified as sexual minorities (30%) and transgender (16%) on the supplemental survey, was much higher than the percentage identified in the CYFBHS Special Populations Report FY 2020-21 (11%), the California Healthy Kids Survey 2017-2019 (14% sexual minority, 3% transgender), or the national Youth Risk Behavior Survey 2019 (11% sexual minority). The YSS supplemental survey had a much smaller sample than the CYFBHS Special Populations Report or the other community surveys. As the reasons for this discrepancy are unclear, and the YSS is completed by a fraction of CYF clients, additional research should be done to determine the true prevalence of LGBTQ youth in the CYF system.
- The percentage of girls who identified as sexual minorities (48%) was much higher than the percentage of boys (12%). Additionally, the majority of transgender youth were assigned female at birth (85%). Nationwide, there has been a greater increase in LGBTQ identification among girls than among boys. However, the percentage of girls identifying as LGBTQ on the supplemental survey is much higher than national estimates.
- The majority of youth who identified as sexual minorities did not identify as “gay” or “lesbian” (16%). “Bisexual” (41%), “other” (24%), and “questioning” (17%) were more common orientations. The number of questioning youth suggests that some clients may still be exploring their sexual identity.

DISCRIMINATION AND AFFIRMING SPACES

- Most transgender youth had some family or friends who do not use their preferred pronouns (75%).
- Almost one-third (32%) of transgender youth reported that they had felt discriminated against in the past year due to their gender identity. LGBTQ youth were more likely to experience in-person bullying (transgender youth 27%, sexual minority/cisgender 25%) than heterosexual/cisgender youth (19%), but the prevalence of cyberbullying was similar across groups (19%-21%).
- Nearly half of sexual minority/cisgender youth and transgender youth did not feel that their home was an “affirming space.”

MENTAL HEALTH CARE

- Many providers did not ask sexual minority/cisgender youth about their sexual orientation (49%), talk to them about challenges they may face because of their LGBTQ identity (73%), or provide them with resources for LGBTQ youth (65%). Transgender youth reported similar issues.
- More than half of LGBTQ youth reported interest in additional services. The most popular additional service option was in-person family therapy (49%).

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Additional research should be conducted to examine the prevalence of LGBTQ youth in the CYF outpatient mental health system.
- All service providers should receive training on the experiences of LGBTQ youth and how to identify and support this population.
- Service providers already working with LGBTQ youth should take steps to address family conflict and offer additional family therapy.
- Providers working in schools should coordinate with the school system to help address bullying and discrimination against LGBTQ youth.