



KEY FINDINGS



The LGBTIreland Report: national study of the mental health and wellbeing of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people in Ireland



The LGBTIreland Report

The LGBTIreland Report details the findings of a national study of the mental health and wellbeing of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people in Ireland, with a special emphasis on young people.

This 'Key Findings' outlines some of the major findings of *The LGBTIreland Report*, which had two separate components.

Module 1 of the study was conducted to gain a better understanding of the lives of LGBTI people in the Republic of Ireland and the factors that may impede or facilitate their mental health and wellbeing. It comprised an online survey which gathered data from 2,264 LGBTI people (38.6% gay male, 26.5% lesbian/gay female, 14.4% bisexual, 12.3% transgender, 2% intersex and other identity 6.3%). Module 2 assessed public attitudes towards LGBT people to gain a better understanding of how the social environment can shape the lives and wellbeing of LGBTI people in Ireland. It comprised a survey administered via telephone to a nationally representative sample of 1,008 people in Ireland aged from 18 to 65 with quotas set on age, gender, class and region.

Due to the extraordinary response rate received from the LGBTI population, this study is considered to be the largest study of LGBTI people in Ireland to date, the largest study of transgender people, and the first study with a sample of intersex people. This report summarises the main findings of the study with particular reference to the 1,064 LGBTI people aged between 14 and 25. There were 416 aged between 14 and 18 and 648 aged between 19 and 25. The report also emphasises the variety of lived experiences found within the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex population in Ireland.



In the last two decades, Ireland has slowly but steadily made significant advancement in the civil and legal rights of its LGBTI citizens. As a direct consequence of these developments, Ireland has evolved from a society noted for being LGBTI oppressive to being considered internationally as a forerunner in progress on equal civil rights of LGBTI people. It is heartening to see in the findings of this study that the majority of participants aged 26 and over were doing well and reported good self-esteem, happiness and life satisfaction as well as being very comfortable with their LGBTI identity. However, the study found that a very significant number of those aged under 25 did not experience the same levels of positive mental health and wellness.

Compared to the *My World National Youth Mental Health Study*¹, LGBTI young people in this study had:

- 2 times the level of self-harm
- 3 times the level of attempted suicide
- 4 times the level of severe/extremely severe stress, anxiety and depression

The LGBTIreland study was commissioned by GLEN (Gay and Lesbian Equality Network) and BeLonG To Youth Services, funded by the HSE's National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP), and conducted by a research team led by Prof. Agnes Higgins from the School of Nursing & Midwifery, Trinity College Dublin. The report was launched by former President of Ireland Dr. Mary McAleese in March 2016.

The full report of the study is available at www.glen.ie and www.belongto.org and all data should be referenced to:

Higgins, A; Doyle, L; Downes, C; Murphy, R; Sharek, D; DeVries, J; Begley, T; McCann, E; Sheerin, F and Smyth, S (2016). *The LGBTIreland report: national study of the mental health and wellbeing of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people in Ireland*. Dublin: GLEN and BeLonG To.

¹ Dooley B and Fitzgerald A (2012) *My world survey: national study of youth mental health in Ireland*. Dublin: UCD and Headstrong



Coming Out Experiences

This study shows that LGBTI people are becoming aware of their LGBTI identity and coming out at a younger age in comparison to previous generations. The time gap between a person knowing and telling another individual about one's LGBTI identity is also decreasing.

- **12 years:** most common age people discovered their LGBTI identity
- **16 years:** most common age people told the very first person they are LGBTI
- **1 in 4:** people who had come out had not told their mother or father they are LGBTI
- The gap between knowing and telling decreased with age: 36-45 year olds = 9 year gap, 26-35 year olds = 6 year gap, 19-25 year olds = 4 year gap and 14-18 year olds = 1- 2 year gap. While the gap is lowest for LGBTI teens, 1-2 years is a significant length of time for teens to be concealing their LGBTI identity and is occurring at a critical time of physical, emotional, social and vocational development
- 3% had not come out to anybody and these were more likely to be younger people, and bisexual and intersex people.

What helped people to come out: Knowing that they would be supported and accepted by family, friends and others; greater visibility of LGBTI people; and more accepting attitudes helped most people to come out.

"My mother was always extremely supportive of equality before I came out and so I knew she would be fine with it and she also had talked my father into seeing it as ok as well." (Gay male, 15)

Main reason why people said they had not come out: Fear of rejection and discrimination was one of the main reasons why people who had not come out continued to conceal their LGBTI identity. People particularly feared rejection by family and friends especially when they were aware of existing negative attitudes within their family or among friends. The assumption of heterosexuality by family, friends and society also acted as a barrier to coming out.

"My family wouldn't accept me...I have been in conversations when they often slag people off for being LGBT." (Female questioning/not sure, 17)

Unfortunately, there are still misunderstandings about LGBTI people's sexual orientation and gender identity among a significant minority of the general public in Ireland:

- **1 in 3** of the general public did not believe that a young person can know they are LGBTI at the age of 12, yet the most common age LGBTI people know is 12 years of age
- **1 in 4** believed that being LGBT is a choice with the same number believing that learning about LGBT issues in school might make a young person think they are LGBT or would make them experiment
- **1 in 5** believed that being LGBT is something that you can be convinced to become
- **1 in 5** believed that bisexual people are just confused about their sexual orientation
- Encouragingly **4 out of 5** of the general public said that LGBT issues should be addressed within schools and that teachers should give positive messages about LGBT identities within schools.

"I would lose friends. I know that many of them are homophobic and I see no real benefit to coming out at this age. Just causes hassle...I wouldn't be able to handle the slagging at this age." (Gay male, 16)

Mental Health

Stress, Anxiety and Depression were measured using the DASS Scale²

- **Stress:** 35% of LGBTI people's scores indicated stress levels within the mild/moderate (20%) or severe/extremely severe (15%) range
- **Anxiety:** 42% of LGBTI people's scores indicated levels of anxiety within the mild/moderate (19%) or severe/extremely severe (23%) range
- **Depression:** 47% of LGBTI people's scores indicated levels of depression within the mild/moderate (27%) or severe/extremely severe (20%) range
- Levels of severe/extremely severe stress, anxiety and depression were **4 times higher** among 14-18 year old LGBTI teens in comparison to a similar age group (12-19 year) in the *My World* national youth mental health study¹
- Intersex people had the highest scores for depression, anxiety and stress followed by transgender and bisexual people.

² Lovibond, S. H., & Lovibond, P. F. (1995). Manual for the Depression, Anxiety, Stress Scales (2nd ed.). Sydney, Australia: Psychology Foundation.



"I was ashamed and angry, because other people and the media use horrid words and people in the school always use "fag" as an insult on one another and it made me feel all wrong." (Bisexual transgender, 16)

Self-harm: 34% LGBTI people had self-harmed with almost half of these doing so in the past year. 60% said their self-harm was related to their LGBTI identity. 41% told nobody about their self-harm. The most common forms of self-harm were self-cutting, overdose and self-battery. Younger LGBTI people were most likely to self-harm:

- **56% of 14-18 year olds** had self-harmed with 77% doing so in the past year
- **43% of 19-25 year olds** had self-harmed with almost half doing so in the past year
- **Self-harm was 2 times higher** among 19-25 year old LGBTI people in comparison to a similar age group (17-25) in the *My World¹* national youth mental health study
- Bisexual and transgender people were more likely to have self-harmed than intersex, lesbian/gay females and gay males.

"I was having nervous thoughts about whether I was going to come out to my parents or not. And the thought of it got too much and I decided to cut myself to get some sort of release from those thoughts. I still haven't come out to them." (Gay male, 20)

Suicidal thoughts: 60% of LGBTI people had seriously thought of ending their own life with almost half of these considering it in the past year. 60% said their suicidal thoughts were related to their LGBTI identity. 40% told nobody about their suicidal thinking. Younger LGBTI people were more likely to consider ending their lives by suicide:

- **70% of 14-18 year olds** had seriously thought of ending their own life (70% in the past year)
- **62% of 19-25 year olds** had seriously thought of ending their own life (50% in the past year)
- Intersex, transgender and bisexual people were more likely to consider ending their own life than lesbian/gay females and gay males.

Attempted suicide: 21% of LGBTI people had attempted suicide with one quarter of these doing so in the past year. Two thirds said their suicide attempt was related to their LGBTI identity. One third told nobody about their suicide attempt. Younger LGBTI people were more likely to have attempted suicide:

- **1 in 3 14-18 year olds** had attempted suicide with 50% doing so in the past year
- **1 in 5 19-25 year olds** had attempted suicide with 25% doing so in the past year
- **Attempted suicide was 3 times higher** among 19-25 year old LGBTI people in comparison to a similar age group (17-25) in the *My World*² national youth mental health study
- Transgender and intersex people were more likely to attempt suicide than lesbian, gay and bisexual people.

Substance misuse: While 86% of LGBTI people reported drinking alcohol, 44% had scores indicating some level of alcohol problems or dependence. 10% had high/very high levels of problem drinking. Gay males and those aged 19-35 had the highest level of problem drinking. 56% of LGBTI people had taken drugs recreationally. The most common drugs taken were hashish/marijuana/cannabis, codeine-based drugs and ecstasy/E/yokes. Those aged 19-45 were more likely to have taken recreational drugs. Recreational drug use was 2 times higher among LGBTI people compared to the general population.³

“I’m proud of the journey I’ve made personally in going from hating myself for my sexuality to accepting and approving of myself. If I wasn’t LGBTQI I don’t know if I would have learnt such self-acceptance.” (Intersex, gay)

School Experiences

Whilst there have been some improvements in LGBTI students’ school experiences since the *Supporting LGBT Lives* study in 2009⁴, the *LGBTIreland* study found that going to school continues to be a very difficult experience for many young LGBTI people.

Those currently in school or who had been in school in the previous 5 years rated how LGBTI-friendly their school was, with most giving a rating of 5 out of 10. This compares to college/ university and workplace ratings of 10 out of 10 for LGBTI-friendliness (10 = completely LGBTI-friendly). This discrepancy is most likely accounted for by the findings on LGBTI students’ negative experiences in Irish schools:

- **Only 20%** of LGBTI students felt they belonged completely in their school
- **Only 44%** of LGBTI students said they received positive affirmation of their identity

³ National Advisory Committee on Drugs. (2011). Annual Report. Dublin: National Advisory Committee on Drugs. Retrieved from: http://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/18963/1/nacd_annualreport2011.pdf

⁴ Mayock, P., Bryan, A., Carr, N., & Kitching, K. (2009). *Supporting LGBT Lives: The Mental Health and Well-being of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People in Ireland*. Dublin: GLEN



- **67%** witnessed bullying of other LGBTI students in their school
- **50%** of LGBTI students personally experienced anti-LGBTI bullying
- **1 in 4** missed or skipped school to avoid negative treatment due to being LGBTI
- **1 in 4** considered leaving school early and approximately 1 in 20 quit school

The 14-18 year olds were less likely to have witnessed anti-LGBTI bullying in school in comparison to those aged 19-35. Whilst this reflects some positive change in LGBTI students' experiences in schools, of concern is the finding that experiencing anti-LGBTI bullying in school is directly related to poorer mental health outcomes and higher levels of reported self-harm and suicidal behaviour:

- Students who experienced anti-LGBTI bullying in school had higher levels of depression, anxiety, stress and alcohol use
- Students who experienced anti-LGBTI bullying in school were more likely to self-harm, to seriously consider ending their life and to attempt suicide.

"Have the teachers and other disciplinarians of the school actually take homophobic and transphobic [bullying] seriously and to have repercussions for the bullies - rather than tell the victims to 'toughen up' or 'ignore them'." (Bisexual female, 22)

Day-to-Day Victimization & Harassment of LGBTI People

This study shows that LGBTI people continue to experience victimisation and harassment in their day-to-day lives and that there has not been a significant reduction in these experiences since the *Supporting LGBT Lives* study in 2009.⁴

- **75%** have been verbally abused due to being LGBTI (30% of these in the past year)
- **1 in 3** have been threatened with physical violence due to being LGBTI
- **1 in 3** have had someone threaten to 'out' them against their will
- **1 in 5** have had hurtful things written about their LGBTI identity on social media
- **1 in 5** have been punched, hit or physically attacked in public due to being LGBTI
- **1 in 6** LGBTI people have experienced sexual violence
- Younger LGBTI people were more likely to have been threatened with being outed and more likely to say they felt unsafe or very unsafe going to or leaving an LGBTI venue.

While a significant number of LGBTI people experienced some form of victimisation in public because of their LGBTI identity, there were different levels of harassment and violence experienced by LGBTI people. The findings showed that gay men, transgender people and intersex people experienced the highest levels of harassment and violence in public:

- **1 in 3** gay men have been punched, hit or physically attacked in public
- **1 in 4** transgender and intersex people have been punched, hit or physically attacked in public
- **1 in 3** transgender and intersex people have had hurtful things written about them on social media
- **1 in 4** intersex people and **1 in 5** transgender people have experienced sexual violence.

"Always watching your back is not good!" (Lesbian/gay female, 25)

Given these high incidences of LGBTI harassment and violence it is not surprising that:

- **Only 1 in 3** LGBTI people felt safe showing affection to, or holding hands with a partner in public
- **50%** felt unsafe or very unsafe showing affection or holding hands in public
- **15%** said they would never do either

Related to LGBTI people's fears around public displays of affection, it is interesting that while 17% of the general public in Ireland reported being uncomfortable seeing a heterosexual couple kissing:

- 30% were uncomfortable seeing a female couple kissing
- 40% were uncomfortable seeing a male couple kissing

The findings also show that transgender people face additional challenges in their day-to-day lives:

- **Approximately 60%** have had someone use the wrong pronoun to refer to their gender (40% in past year)
- **Only 40%** felt safe expressing their gender identity in public with **1 in 10** saying they would never do it



Accessing Mental Health Services

People were asked what barriers to accessing mental health services they had encountered. The non LGBTI-specific barriers included:

- **Cost:** private psychological/counselling services were too expensive
- **Stigma:** fear of being labelled mentally ill
- **Medication:** fear of only being given medication

The LGBTI-specific barriers to accessing mental health services included:

- **Lack of understanding:** mental health practitioners were not sufficiently aware and understanding of LGBTI identities and the appropriate language and terminology to use
- **Fear of misunderstanding:** The person's LGBTI identity would be seen as the problem

"Lack of awareness of specific LGBTI issues, especially for bisexual and trans people...I don't think there's any awareness of specific problems for bisexual people. There doesn't seem to [be a] welcoming of groups or targeted services." (Bisexual male, 27)

Related to these barriers was the finding that a significant number of LGBTI people who had self-harmed or attempted suicide had not sought any form of help:

- **40%** of those who self-harmed did not seek any help
- **30%** of those who attempted suicide did not seek any help

Recommendations

Based on the findings of modules one and two of this study, the following strategies are recommended to address the issues of concern identified in the report and to achieve further progress for LGBTI people in Ireland:

- Reduce mental health risks and build resilience among LGBTI people
- Support the LGBTI community to flourish
- Protect and support LGBTI children and young people in schools
- Increase public understanding and change attitudes and behaviour
- Recognise the diverse needs within the LGBTI community

- Build the knowledge and skills of professionals and service providers
- Conduct further research and assess progress

“This scholarly report is as essential and revealing as it is horrifying. The ongoing damage is undeniable. That it involves so many young people is tragic. That it is solvable is the good news.

In May 2015 the Irish people convincingly showed their commitment to levelling the playing field for our LGBTI citizens. I know when they read this report they will be heart sore and determined that their homes, streets and schools will not be party to continuing the embedded culture which supports this level of misery. They will want to see a very different story when this research is repeated in a few years time...

We have the chance to make this country the best in the world for LGBTI citizens. It will not happen by chance but by change. We committed to that change last May and now we have to follow through, drilling down through the centuries of sediment, to the heart's core, releasing the goodness, decency and egalitarian sensibility that Ireland is capable of. The children who are in cots and buggies today, who will discover their sexual identity in twelve or so years time have the right, to grow into mentally healthy and well-adjusted teenagers. What we do now can help ensure that no bully and no homophobic, biphobic or transphobic culture will too easily deprive them of that right”.

Dr Mary McAleese, speaking at the launch of the *LGBTIreland Report*, March 2016

This study highlights the areas where further progress is needed in order to protect the mental health and wellbeing of LGBTI people and to enable LGBTI people to live full and equal lives. Continuing to improve the visibility of LGBTI people and their relationships and families in Irish society is a key part of this. Challenging remaining negative attitudes to LGBTI people and correcting misunderstanding of LGBTI identities are also important. All sections of Irish society have a role to play including Government, State agencies, health and social services, schools, LGBTI organisations, local communities, families, individual citizens and LGBTI people themselves.

The full list of recommendations is available in the *LGBTIreland Report* which is available on the GLEN website

www.glen.ie

and the BeLonG To website

www.belongto.org



GLEN

GLEN is a national policy and strategy focused NGO which aims to deliver ambitious and positive change for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in Ireland, ensuring full equality, inclusion and protection from all forms of discrimination and harm. We have a range of work programmes including mental health, education, workplace, sexual health, families and older people.

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Supporting Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual &
Trans Young People in Ireland



BeLong To

BeLong To is the national youth service for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender young people aged between 14 and 23. BeLong To's vision is for an Ireland where Lesbian Gay bisexual and transgender (LGBT) young people are empowered to embrace their development and growth confidently and to participate as agents of positive social change.

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Transgender
Equality
Network
Ireland

TENI

Transgender Equality Network Ireland is a non-profit organisation supporting the trans community in Ireland. TENI seeks to improve the situation and advance the rights and equality of trans people and their families. Our Vision is an Ireland where trans people are understood, accepted and respected, and can participate fully in all aspects of Irish society.

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For information on LGBTI services visit www.lgbt.ie

For LGBT support call **1890 929 539**