

- LGBTQIA+

Gay, lesbian, and queer students are three times more likely to suffer from depression than peers

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People belonging to sexual and gender minorities were more likely to report suffering from depression than their peers, according to a new US study.



The research was based on data from the Healthy Minds Study, a large annual survey looking at mental health among US university students, with responses from more than 480,000 students aged 18 to 35 between 2007 and 2022. LGBTQIA+ students make up roughly one-fifth of the student population but represent nearly half of those experiencing depression, according to the findings published in *The Journal of American College Health*. This group includes individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual (LGBTQIA+), non-binary, or gender non-conforming.

“This study highlights the critical need for targeted interventions to support the mental health and well-being of young adults during their studies, particularly those who identify as LGBTQIA+,” Dr David Pagliaccio, associate professor at the New York State Psychiatric Institute, said in a statement.

“As LGBTQIA+ self-identification rates continue to rise, addressing these disparities becomes increasingly urgent for creating inclusive and supportive academic environments,” he added. “Students tend to show continued mental health struggles longitudinally over time,” the study found with on average more than one student out of ten reporting major depression symptoms. The rate increased over time.

With 27 per cent of them reporting depression compared to 8.5 per cent of cisgender, heterosexual students, LGBTQIA+ students were three times more likely to suffer from depression.

‘Trend seen globally everywhere’

“LGBTI mental health inequalities start as young as age 10,” Rú Avila Rodriguez, deputy executive director and policy & research manager at IGLYO, The International LGBTQI Youth & Student Organisation, told Euronews Health in an email. “This is a trend seen globally everywhere that such research is undertaken,” they added, when asked if a similar trend was being observed in Europe.

A theory that could explain the discrepancy is the minority stress theory which suggests that “the increased prevalence of mental health issues experienced by LGBTI people is due to the increased level of social stress, including stigma, discrimination, unsupportive environments (family, schools, health systems...), prejudice, and victimisation,” Rodriguez said. According to the new US study, experiences of discrimination and lack of belonging were “major drivers” of mental health disparities.

An IGLYO survey of LGBTQI young people aged between 14 and 30 in Europe found that school environments had a negative impact on more than half of respondents’ mental health.

“As LGBTQI students continue to see increased levels of depression, it is essential that these strategies recognise this, prioritise these communities; and build in strategies to support LGBTQI youth specifically,” Rodriguez added.