

SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Partners in Prevention (PIP) works with 21 college and university campuses in the state of Missouri to improve student health behaviors. PIP gathers data annually from the Missouri College Health Behavior Survey (MCHBS) to inform and improve campus programs. This brief will focus on students' sense of belonging and their likelihood of accessing resources both on and off campus, specifically for students who identified as LGBQQ* on the 2015 MCHBS. Students who identified as transgender are not included in this brief unless they also identified their sexual orientation as LGBQQ. As sexual orientation and gender are different constructs, the stressors and experiences of the transgender student population cannot be conflated with those of LGBQQ student population.

DISCUSSION

According to the 2015 MCHBS data, 8.3% of students identified as LGBQQ**. Of those students who identified as LGBQQ, 26% did not feel a sense of belonging on their campuses, compared to 22% of students who identified as heterosexual. Students who identified as LGBQQ were also less likely than their heterosexual peers to report feeling like a member of their campus community (49% compared to 56%).

Since students' attachment to campus may impact their perceived access to and utilization of resources, the relationship between a student's sexual orientation and the likelihood of going to specific resources, both on- and off-campus, was explored. While many resources showed no significant difference in likelihood of use, certain resources, such as faculty or professors, mental health professionals in the community, and chat rooms or online support groups, were more likely to be used by students who identified as LGBQQ than those who identified as heterosexual. Conversely, students who identified as LGBQQ reported a lower likelihood of utilizing other resources, such as religious or spiritual advisors, law enforcement, and family members, than their peers who identified as heterosexual.

*LGBQQ- Lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, or questioning

**8.3% of students who identified a sexual orientation selected an LGBQQ identity. This number does not include the 4.4% of students who chose "prefer not to respond", likely due to the sensitive nature of this question or the limited options.

Students Accessing On Campus Resources

| | LGBQQ Students | Heterosexual Students |
|---------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|
| Friends/peers | 79% | 81% |
| University Counseling Center | 49% | 47% |
| Religious or spiritual advisor | 7.5% | 21% |
| Residence life staff | 14% | 15% |
| University Health Center | 22% | 23% |
| Law enforcement/campus security | 23% | 28% |
| Academic advisor | 18% | 19% |
| Faculty/professor | 30% | 24% |
| University staff member | 15% | 13% |
| No One | 11% | 9.4% |

Students Accessing Off Campus Resources

| | LGBQQ Students | Heterosexual Students |
|--|----------------|-----------------------|
| Parents | 61% | 74% |
| Siblings/extended family | 47% | 60% |
| Friends/peers | 84% | 84% |
| Mental Health professional (counselor) | 33% | 23% |
| Religious or spiritual advisor | 11% | 26% |
| Chat rooms or online support groups | 17% | 4.7% |
| Dating partner/spouse | 41% | 45% |
| No One | 3.7% | 2.3% |

SUMMARY

Students who identified as LGBQQ are less likely than their heterosexual peers to report feeling as though they belong on their campuses or that they are active members of their campus communities. Having a dedicated space and staff for LGBQQ students, as well as having an ally group or providing access to online chat and help resources, are factors that could increase these students' sense of belonging and connection to campus. To date, few PIP campuses are able to provide these resources. Beginning in 2016, the MCHBS will

include asexual as a sexual orientation option in an attempt to decrease the high prefer not to respond rate for that question. In the future, campuses may want to consider allowing multiple responses for the sexual orientation question the MCHBS to empower students to select responses that more accurately reflect their identities.

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