

**LIFE IN
SCOTLAND
FOR LGBT
YOUNG
PEOPLE**
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**HEALTH
REPORT**





SUMMARY

In 2012, LGBT Youth Scotland undertook a **survey on Life in Scotland for LGBT Young People**, aged 13-25. The survey findings relating to education have already been published¹. This report presents the results relating to health and will be followed by further issue-specific reports on safety and on community and identity.

The health-related questions in the survey explored LGBT young people's experiences of accessing health services, with a particular focus on mental and sexual health, feeling supported and coming out to doctors.

THE FACTS

- 56.5% of LGBT young people said they felt safe and supported by the NHS in terms of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity, however this was much lower for LGBT young women (43.1%) and transgender young people (48.1%).
- 34.9% of LGB respondents and 66.7% of transgender young people were out to their doctor.
- 56% of all LGBT young people said they felt comfortable talking about sexual health issues with their doctor. This was even lower for transgender respondents (48%) and lesbian and gay women (43.2%).
- 40.1% of LGBT young people considered themselves to have mental health issues, compared with the overall Scottish figure of 1 in 4. Transgender respondents were the most likely to consider themselves to have mental health issues (66.7%), followed by bisexual women and lesbian and gay women.
- Positively, 9 in 10 young people said they knew where to get information and help with sexual health, and 3 in 4 said they knew where to get information and help with mental health or with stress-related issues.

LGBT young people identified specific problems in terms of the health services they accessed: health professionals assuming they were straight, not catering to their needs, and not understanding the specific issues affecting them.

INTRODUCTION

LGBT Youth Scotland is the largest youth and community-based organisation for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in Scotland. Originally set up in 1989 in Edinburgh as a local service to respond to the needs of LGBT young people affected by homophobia and homophobic bullying in Scottish schools, LGBT Youth Scotland became a national organisation in 2003 and continues to support LGBT young people affected by homophobia, biphobia and transphobia.



The charity's mission is: to empower lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender young people and the wider LGBT community so that they are embraced as full members of the Scottish family at home, school and in every community.

Since 2006, LGBT Youth Scotland has conducted research into LGBT young people's experiences in Scotland, covering a range of topics, from education to safety. This latest **survey of 2012** aimed to gain an accurate picture of **Life in Scotland for LGBT Young People**, aged 13-25. This report focuses on **health** and follows a report on **education**² released in late 2012. Further issue-specific reports will be published on **safety** and on **community and identity**.



“ I feel supported by my GP because they have never let me down... I have had some bad experiences with other medical staff mostly when I get asked inappropriate questions that aren't relevant to my treatment: when getting my stitches removed after chest surgery, a nurse asked me about my bits. She wasn't meaning it out of badness, she just didn't know better.

“ I've never felt any discrimination. My doctor has never seen it as an issue and pointed me to an LGBT sexual health clinic, in case there was anything I wasn't comfortable discussing with him.

- Less than half (48.1%) of transgender young people felt safe and supported by the NHS in terms of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.
- Transgender respondents were more often out, but also more likely to say that they wouldn't feel comfortable coming out, than LGB respondents.
- Less than half (48%) of transgender respondents felt comfortable speaking with doctors about sexual health and a third (33.3%) did not.

The difference in the results between young LGBT men and women may be due to a growing emphasis on sexual health for gay men. Whilst this is a positive development, specific groups need more resources dedicated to understanding and addressing their needs (i.e. LGB young women, bisexual young people and transgender young people).

GEOGRAPHY

The location of young people also had an impact on their likelihood to feel safe and supported.

- LGBT young people in urban areas were the most likely to feel safe and supported by the NHS in terms of sexual orientation or gender identity (**61.7%**).
- This dropped to **55.9%** of those living in suburban areas and to **43.8%** of those in rural areas.
- In addition, **67.7%** of young people from urban areas said that their local area was a good place for LGBT young people to live compared to **49.5%** of those from suburban areas and just **27.1%** of those from rural areas³.

These discrepancies may be due to several factors: the wider availability of appropriate resources such as LGBT specific clinics in urban areas; the difficulty at times to attend services anonymously in rural communities; LGBT young people's desire to attend specialist services or migration towards cities based on the perception that there is greater understanding of LGBT issues in such areas.

“ I feel supported thanks to services like Breathing Space, clinics dedicated to LGBT young people, walk-in services, websites, call centres... I have always been treated well and speak highly of this country's health services.

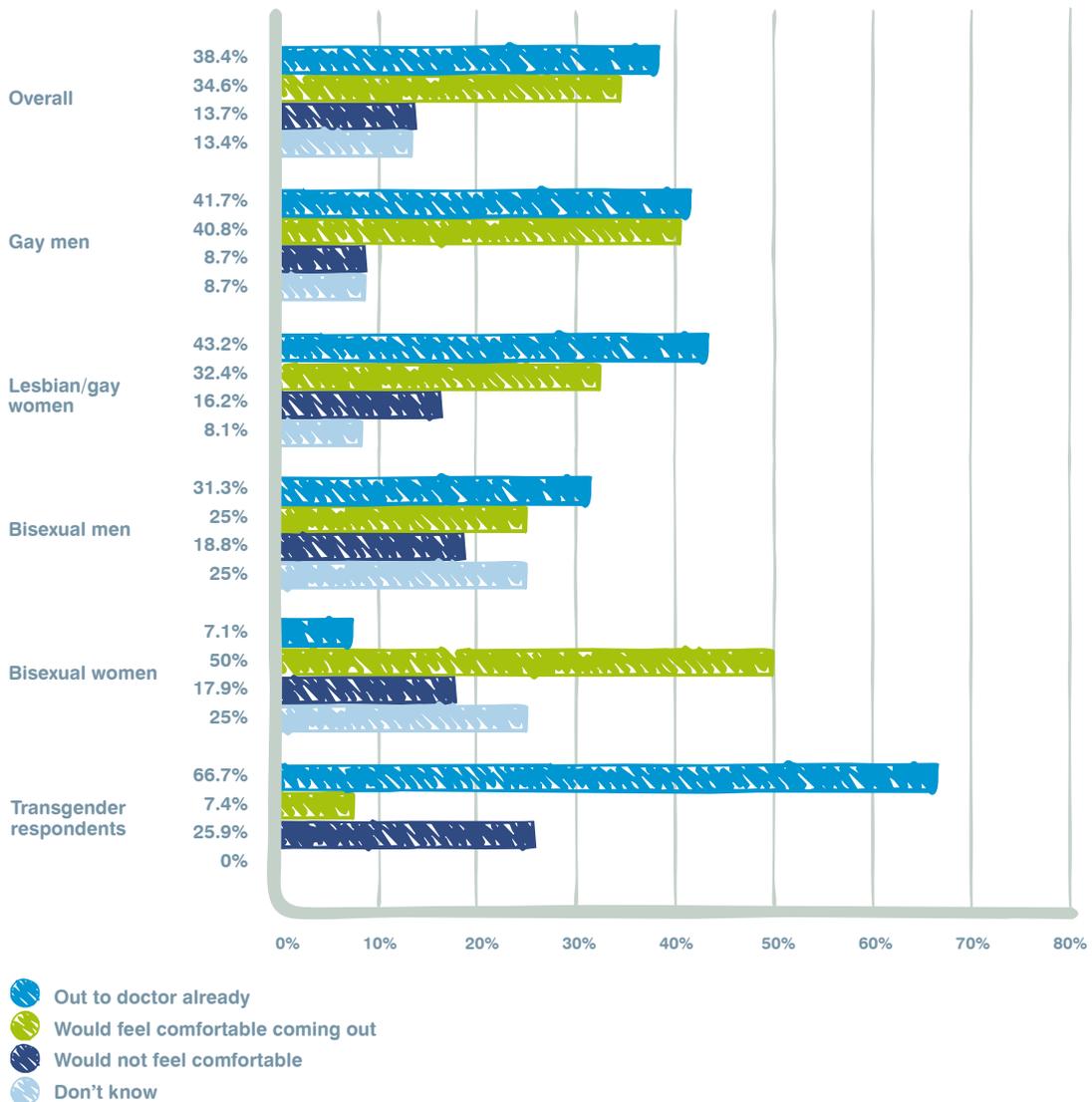
3/ See our upcoming report on *Life in Scotland for LGBT Young People: Community and Identity* for more details.

COMING OUT TO DOCTORS

Discrimination, the fear of experiencing discrimination, hiding one's sexual orientation or gender identity and the societal pressure to conform to gender expectations can all have a very negative impact on an individual's health, such as raised levels of anxiety and social isolation. This is why it is important for young people to feel that they can turn to their doctors for support and information on issues such as sexual and mental health.

“ I have had suicidal thoughts since the age of 8, fuelled by confusion of gender and not fitting into social norms. I am a closeted lesbian and often feel depressed and nervous.

“Would you feel comfortable coming out to your doctor?”



SEXUAL HEALTH

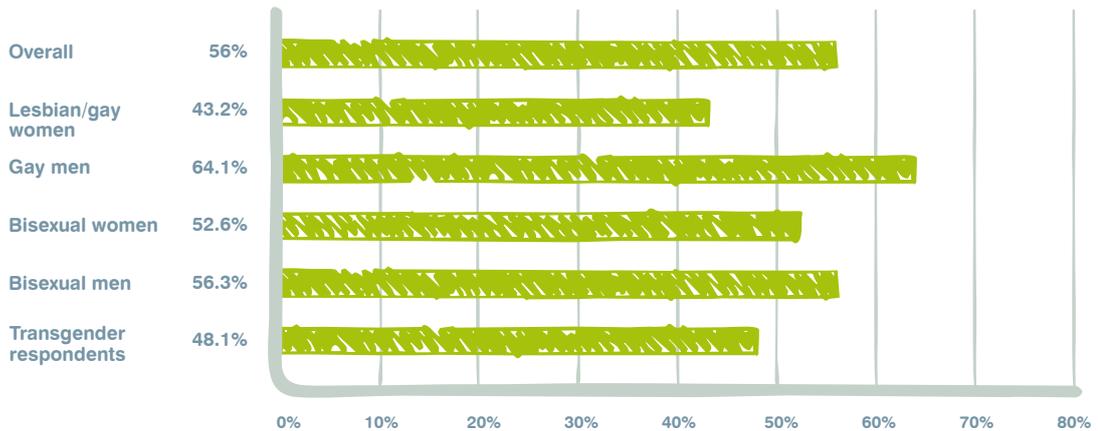
“ I went in to ask about a medical complaint. As soon as I mentioned I was gay the doctor went on about condoms and AIDS. I was shocked! The doctor did not even treat my medical problem during the consultation.

Research into sexual health has shown that men who have sex with men are the group most at risk of acquiring HIV in the UK⁵, resulting in a major focus on prevention initiatives targeting this group. Although this focus is often justified, other research has suggested that lesbian, gay and bisexual women often do not get the right or accurate information about safe sex practices⁶.

The Life in Scotland survey included questions on comfort when speaking about sexual health with doctors.

BEING COMFORTABLE WITH DOCTORS

Proportion of respondents who said they felt comfortable speaking about sexual health issues with their doctor.



5/ HIV: The Facts – www.nhs.uk/livewell/stis/pages/hiv.aspx. For more information on young gay and bisexual men's experiences of HIV health provision, see Rowlinson, Sarah and Sheila Wilson (2002) *Provision of HIV Prevention to Young Gay and Bisexual Men*. LGBT Youth Scotland and NHS Lothian.
 6/ See Hunt, Ruth and Julie Fish 2008 *Prescription for Change: Lesbian and Bisexual Women's Health Check 2008*. Stonewall.

Overall, **2 in 5 (40.1%)** respondents considered themselves to have mental health problems, with considerable variations between groups under the LGBT umbrella:

- Transgender respondents were most likely to consider themselves to have mental health problems (**66.7%**)⁹.
- **63%** of bisexual women considered themselves to have mental health problems, compared to **20%** of bisexual men.
- Gay and lesbian women were more likely to consider themselves to have mental health problems than gay men (**43.8%** and **27.2% respectively**).

“ I have lived through serious bouts of depression including self-harm and being suicidal and can be a bit overly-cautious. Given how some people have treated me in the past, and the lack of support for trans people, I don't think it's surprising.

These concerning results indicate that the majority of LGB young women and transgender young people do not feel safe and supported by the NHS. More needs to be done to support lesbian, gay and bisexual young women and transgender young people in relation to their mental health.

As was the case for sexual health, geography also influenced responses to questions on mental health. Young people who lived in suburban areas were the most likely to consider themselves to have mental health problems (**46.7%**), followed by young people who lived in rural areas (**43.8%**). Those in urban areas (**33.9%**) were least likely to consider themselves to have mental health problems.

These findings align with other themes in the survey and suggest that this reflects the scarcity of specialist services outside of urban areas.

IMPACT OF BULLYING

While the percentage of LGBT young people identifying mental health problems is high, the number increases when focusing specifically on the young people who had experienced bullying in education. The *Life in Scotland for LGBT Young People: Education Report* showed that almost 70% of LGB young people and 77% of transgender respondents had experienced bullying in school and that bullying incidents were also common in colleges and universities.

“ I suffered from depression as a teenager which led to anorexia. I was told by my doctor that the homophobic bullying may have triggered this.

APPENDIX 1: METHODOLOGY

The survey questionnaire was developed to include both closed and open-ended questions to provide qualitative data alongside the statistical data.

The survey was administered online through e-mail and social networking sites. This enabled the survey to be circulated to a wide range of organisations and groups, including LGBT and youth specific organisations, local council youth services across the country, schools, and the student unions and LGBT societies of colleges and universities. This distribution pattern may account for the fact that a significant proportion of respondents had university level qualifications.

Social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook were also used to share the link to the survey more widely to LGBT-friendly venues, MSPs and local councillors who were in turn encouraged to spread the information widely within their own networks.

The online format had several benefits:

- It ensured a wide distribution across Scotland.
- It effectively removed potential geographical constraints for participants.
- It was an effective means of collating responses from young people not already in contact with the organisation.
- All responses were anonymous.
- It targeted young people through online forums that they use to socialise and seek information (mainly Twitter and Facebook).

Each question in the survey was optional. A total of 273 complete responses were received, complemented by a further 77 partial returns.



