

Suicide, Help-Seeking and LGBT Youth: A Mixed Methods Study

Authors : Elizabeth McDermott, Elizabeth Hughes, Victoria Rawlings

Abstract : Globally, suicide is the second leading cause of death among 15-29 year-olds. Young people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) have elevated rates of suicide and self-harm. Despite the increased risk, there is a paucity of research on LGBT help-seeking and suicidality. This is the first national study to investigate LGBT youth help-seeking for suicidal feelings and self-harm. We report on a UK sequential exploratory mixed method study that employed face-to-face and online methods in two stages. Stage one involved 29 online (n=15) and face-to-face (n=14) semi-structured interviews with LGBT youth aged under 25 years old. Stage two utilized an online LGBT youth questionnaire employing a community-based sampling strategy (n=789). We found across the sample that LGBT youth who self-harmed or felt suicidal were reluctant to seek help. Results indicated that participants were normalizing their emotional distress and only asked for help when they reached crisis point and were no longer coping. Those who self-harmed ($p<0.001$, OR=2.82), had attempted or planned suicide ($p<0.05$, OR=1.48), or had experience of abuse related to their sexuality or gender ($p<0.01$, OR=1.80), were most likely to seek help. There were a number of interconnecting reasons that contributed to participants' problems accessing help. The most prominent of these were: negotiating norms in relation to sexuality, gender, mental health and age; being unable to talk about emotions, and coping and self-reliance. It is crucial that policies and practices that aim to prevent LGBT youth suicide recognize that norms and normalizing processes connected to sexual orientation and gender identity are additional difficulties that LGBT youth have accessing mental health support.

Keywords : help-seeking, LGBT, suicide, youth

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