

BC Study Shows Gay Youth Face High Suicide Risk

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Burnaby, BC -- Gay youth in British Columbia face an alarmingly high risk of suicide, according to a new report on youth health released this week by The McCreary Centre Society.

Nearly half of the young people surveyed in a McCreary Centre Study said they have attempted suicide at least once, with their first suicide attempt at an average age of 13.

The study is the first health survey of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth ever undertaken in BC. It was conducted by The McCreary Centre Society -- a non-governmental, non-profit youth health research organization -- with the collaboration of several community agencies and youth groups. It was funded by Vancouver Foundation, Canada's largest community foundation, which makes about 600 grants annually to support charitable organizations throughout BC.

The report, titled "Being Out" is based on surveys of youth between the ages of 13 and 19 in the Greater Vancouver and Fraser Valley regions, Victoria, Nanaimo and Prince George. It shows that youth who "come out" during their adolescent years often experience rejection, isolation and self-doubt. This makes them more at risk than other youth of having problems related to drug and tobacco use, sexually transmitted diseases and a variety of other health concerns.

"Being Out" also shows that lesbian and gay youth do not see their schools as safe or supportive environments. Nearly 40% say they feel like outsiders in school, and over 80% said they heard homo-phobic remarks from other students at school. A sense of alienation has been cited as a factor in recent incidents of school violence.

Other key findings of the study include:

- A quarter of the youth surveyed had attempted suicide in the past year.
- Most non-heterosexual youth are reluctant to disclose their sexual orientation to teachers, doctors and social service providers.
- Lesbian and gay youth are more likely than heterosexual youth to engage in self-destructive behaviours such as substance abuse and risky sexual activities.
- Almost 50% of gay and lesbian youth have very low self-esteem.
- Over half have been physically and/or sexually abused.
- None of the youth in the survey group gave high ratings to the quality of their family relationships.

The report makes a number of suggestions for promoting the health of gay and lesbian youth, including action to discourage discrimination against homosexuality, support for

services to address the specific physical and emotional health needs of gay and lesbian youth, and training programs for professionals working with young people.

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