

One in three LGBTQ2S homeless youth have attempted suicide since pandemic onset

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More than one-third (36 percent) of Toronto-area LGBTQ2S youth experiencing homelessness have attempted suicide since the COVID-19 pandemic began and 82 percent have engaged in self-harm, according to a new CAMH-led study.

The [study](#), "Investigating the impacts of COVID-19 among LGBTQ2S

youth experiencing homelessness," published in the journal *PLOS ONE*, is believed to be the first in the world to look at how this already marginalized group has been impacted by the pandemic. Sixty-one [young people](#) aged 14 to 29, who self-identify as LGBTQ2S, at-risk of, or experiencing, homelessness in the GTA and surrounding areas took part in the survey which involved both qualitative and quantitative data collection.

"The impact the pandemic has had on these young people is really shocking," said lead author Dr. Alex Abramovich, Independent Scientist with the Institute for Mental Health Policy Research at CAMH. "Prior to COVID they already had much higher rates of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation compared to cisgender and heterosexual youth, due to stigma and discrimination. Their needs were not being met then and they certainly are not being met now. This study shows how urgently we need specialized, population-based LGBTQ2S mental health supports for this group of young people."

Previous studies have reported that as many as 40 percent of youth experiencing homelessness identify as LGBTQ2S. The survey found that since the pandemic began, the number of LGBTQ2S youth living in a [public space](#), vehicle or vacant building increased from 13 to 33 percent.

"I had a tough time finding places to go when the pandemic happened, a lot of opportunities and just resources shut down for me," said one participant.

"I heard from a friend, even in the graveyard, they're pitching tents in the graveyard and they're living there," said another. "It's really getting out of control."

The study found that prior to the pandemic, many LGBTQ2S youth were "couch-surfing" at their friends' homes, an option that was no longer

available due to public health measures. Others reported experiencing severe mental distress over having to live in isolation with unsupportive parents.

"I've had nervous breakdowns, I've had [panic attacks](#), I've had anxiety attacks, I've had very severe depressive episodes," one participant stated.

Lack of access to health care and social supports was also cited as another negative factor, with 74 percent of study participants reporting delayed or limited access to services, and 31 percent reporting being unable to access any kind of health care. Sixty-two percent said they were unable to access counselling or support groups.

Study participants also reported higher levels of substance, with 67 percent stating increased use of cannabis and 56 percent stating increased use of alcohol.

"It's been really hard in our community because we've lost some people you know who were sober for years and unfortunately it was just the pandemic that kind of hit them and they couldn't cope," said another survey respondent.

One limitation to the study according to the authors was due to the challenges involved in the recruitment of LGBTQ2S youth experiencing homelessness during a [pandemic](#), due to hidden homelessness. Only youth who were able to access technology were included in the study, which the authors say may have excluded some of the most marginalized LGBTQ2S [youth](#).

More information: "Investigating the impacts of COVID-19 among LGBTQ2S youth experiencing homelessness," *PLOS ONE* (2021). [journals.plos.org/plosone/arti ... journal.pone.0257693](https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0257693)

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