

A Youth19 Brief: Same- and multiple-sex attracted students

In this Youth19 brief we present key findings for same- and multiple-sex attracted secondary school students. Further, in-depth reports and articles in this area are planned.

What is Youth19?

Youth19 is the latest in the Aotearoa New Zealand Youth2000 series of health and wellbeing surveys. These large scale, high quality surveys began in 2001, and involve a total of over 36,000 students. Youth19 is led by Dr Terryann Clark (University of Auckland) and Dr Terry Fleming (Victoria University of Wellington), with collaborators from around New Zealand and beyond.¹



Same- and multiple-sex attracted students

In this brief, we focus on young people who said that they are attracted to people of “the same sex (e.g. I am a male attracted to males or I am a female attracted to females)”, or to “males and females”.

This same- or multiple-sex attracted group is compared to exclusively different-sex attracted students, who said they were attracted to the “opposite or a different sex (e.g. I am a male attracted to females or I am a female attracted to males)”. In Youth19, 99.5% of different-sex attracted students were cisgender (i.e. not transgender). Students who said “I’m not sure” or “neither” about their attractions, were categorised as not sure/neither sex-attracted. Those who said they “don’t understand this question” were removed from these analyses.

Same- or multiple-sex attracted students are likely to have a range of identities and experiences, including identifying as Takatāpui.* Some Takatāpui may identify as being part of a rainbow** community; lesbian, gay or bisexual; heterosexual; transgender or gender diverse; not using labels; or using other labels.

7,721 adolescents from 49 Auckland, Northland and Waikato schools and kura kaupapa Māori took part in Youth19. They completed the anonymous survey in English or te reo Māori on internet tablets with optional voice over.

Summary

Sixteen out of every 100 Youth19 participants (16%) reported they were same- or multiple-sex attracted, not sure, or not attracted to any sex.

Most of these students reported positive home and family environments. However, a greater proportion of same- or multiple-sex attracted students reported social and school isolation and unsafe environments than their exclusively different-sex attracted peers.

There are important actions that families, schools, communities and government can take to support the health and wellbeing of same- and multiple-sex attracted students .

* Takatāpui is a Māori concept that has been reclaimed to embrace all Māori with diverse sex characteristics, genders and sexualities.² ** Rainbow is an umbrella term that refers to the sex, gender and sexuality identities of people who may identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, or additional diverse identities (LGBTQI+).

Key findings – home, school and community

In total, 16% of students – four out of every 25 students – reported they were same- or multiple-sex attracted, not sure of their attractions, or not attracted to any sex.

Nearly one in ten (9%) said they were same- or multiple-sex attracted, and 7% said they were not sure of their attractions or not attracted to any sex.

Over two thirds (71%) of same- or multiple-sex attracted students had disclosed this to someone close to them.



Home

- Nearly nine out of ten (87%) same- or multiple-sex attracted students said that at least one of their parents cared about them “a lot”.



School

- Eight out of ten (82%) same- or multiple-sex attracted students said they felt part of their school.
- Nearly one out of fifteen (7%) same- or multiple-sex attracted students said that they had been bullied at school weekly or more often in the past year.



Neighbourhood & community

- Five out of ten (48%) same- or multiple-sex attracted students said they always felt safe in their neighbourhoods.
- Just under six out of ten (58%) same- or multiple-sex attracted students said they had taken part in activities to help others at school or the community in the past year.



Key findings – healthcare and mental health

Healthcare access

Nearly one in three (31%) same- or multiple-sex attracted students reported that they were unable to access healthcare when they needed it in the past year.



Mental health

Just over half (53%) of same- or multiple-sex attracted students reported significant depressive symptoms and half (50%) of this group reported that they had self harmed in the past year.



Just over one in ten (13%) same- or multiple-sex attracted students reported they had attempted suicide in the past year.



For info on how these mental health indicators were measured, see our *Hauora Hinengaro / Emotional and Mental Health* report.³

Comparison to exclusively different-sex attracted students

Same- and multiple-sex attracted students face some minor disparities and some major challenges. On all measures (apart from volunteering and bullying) a higher proportion of same- and multiple-sex attracted students reported challenges than their exclusively different-sex attracted peers. The differences were largest in mental health and wellbeing, as shown here:

Measure	Same- and multiple-sex attracted students % (95% CI)	Different-sex attracted students % (95% CI)
A parent cares a lot	87.4 (84.5 – 90.3)	94.3 (93.6 – 95.0)
Part of school	82.2 (79.2 – 85.2)	87.1 (86.2 – 88.0)
Weekly (or more) bullying*	7.3 (5.3 – 9.3)	4.9 (4.3 – 5.6)
Volunteering*	58.1 (53.7 – 62.5)	54.7 (53.2 – 56.1)
Safe in neighbourhood	48.2 (43.8 – 52.6)	58.9 (57.5 – 60.3)
Forgone healthcare	30.9 (26.9 – 35.0)	19.6 (18.4 – 20.7)
Depressive symptoms	53.1 (48.8 – 57.5)	21.4 (20.2 – 22.6)
Self harm	50.1 (45.8 – 54.5)	21.5 (20.4 – 22.7)
Suicide attempt	13.0 (10.1 – 15.8)	5.7 (5.1 – 6.4)

*Note: Analysis shows that the 95% confidence intervals (i.e., that there is a 95% chance that the true estimate of this score is within this range) overlap for these measures. Such differences are within the margin of error and may not be statistically significant and should not be considered definitive.

Implications

What do these findings mean?

Youth19 results highlight that same- and multiple-sex attracted high school students experience higher levels of social and school isolation and unsafe environments than their exclusively different-sex attracted peers. Earlier research on minority stress confirms that the increased stress and mistreatment rainbow young people experience are the drivers underpinning their increased rates of depression, self-harm, and suicide attempts. These findings also indicate that social and school environments need to change to address the active exclusion and mistreatment of young people who are same- and multiple-sex attracted.

We know that caring and loving family relationships are central to young people's wellbeing. It is very concerning that lower proportions of same- and multiple-sex attracted youth report that their families care about them a lot. This may be related to families not understanding or accepting their young person's sexual attractions. This perceived lack of care, combined with a lack of belonging at school for some of these students, means that they may be particularly vulnerable to harm.

Access to healthcare, pastoral care support and peer support are important for same- and multiple-sex attracted youth, yet they report that accessing healthcare is a significant barrier. Given the high rates of depressive symptoms and suicide attempts reported by this group, access to quality healthcare is critical.

Despite the high levels of challenge reported by these students, their generosity to give back to others and support their communities slightly exceeds that of exclusively different-sex attracted students. The willingness of these young people to support others is an important strength to celebrate, cultivate and nurture. It is important to ensure that same- and multiple-sex attracted young people are themselves supported to take on these volunteering roles safely, given that they are likely to be facing a range of additional stressors.

Strengths and limitations

All questions in the Youth19 survey are self-reported. This means that young people answer the questions themselves, almost always by selecting a particular response option on the tablet screen. A key strength of Youth19 is the large, representative sample, which gives us an overview of a broad range of important areas for diverse groups of young people. The downside is that the survey only included students who were at the invited schools or kura kaupapa Māori on the day of the survey, and that the responses are not in-depth. For each question there are limitations and things it would be good to know more about. Other kinds of research can help to enrich our understandings alongside this big picture overview.

Youth19 is supplemented by school staff surveys and builds on previous Youth2000 surveys in 2001, 2007 and 2012, as well as supplementary surveys between these waves. For more about the survey, see www.youth19.ac.nz.

Recommendations

Given the significant challenges facing same- and multiple-sex attracted young people at home and in their neighbourhoods, schools, and health care settings, urgent steps are required to mitigate these inequalities. We all share the responsibility to create safe and nurturing environments so that same- and multiple-sex attracted young people can flourish. Ideas for families and whānau are provided on the next page.

Schools and healthcare settings have statutory and ethical obligations to provide safe and welcoming environments for transgender and non-binary youth. Helpful actions include:

For schools

Review and apply the guidelines and recommendations in the following publications (links overleaf):

- *Making Schools Safer for Trans and Gender Diverse Youth*: A practical resource for schools and whānau on supporting trans, gender diverse, and intersex students – InsideOUT with the Ministry of Education.
- *Inclusive Education Guide on Supporting LGBTIQ+ Students in secondary schools* – Te Kete Ipurangi.
- *Relationships and Sexuality Education* – A guide for teachers, leaders and boards of trustees (including at least 12–15 hours of quality inclusive relationships and sexuality education per year as recommended by the Education Review Office).

These documents emphasise that same- and multiple-sex attracted young people should see themselves affirmed:

- Across the curriculum, and at all levels
- By other students and teachers
- In school policy (including uniforms, student records, bathrooms, anti-bullying and sports)
- In the support groups offered (e.g., gender and sexuality associations, diversity groups).

For healthcare settings

Some same- and multiple-sex attracted young people are also transgender. As such, it is important to review and apply the *Guidelines for Gender Affirming Healthcare for Gender Diverse and Transgender Children, Young People and Adults in Aotearoa, New Zealand* (link overleaf), particularly the need to:

- Partner with rainbow communities, particularly transgender people, and young persons to develop and shape responsive and accessible health services
- Realise Treaty of Waitangi responsibilities to ensure that health care services are “available, accessible, acceptable and of quality to Māori” rainbow and Takatāpui young people
- Engage in professional learning and development, including encouraging individual health care professionals to join the Professional Association for Transgender Health Aotearoa (PATHA).

Develop cultural competence to work with same- and multiple-sex attracted and transgender young people, including recognising that:

- Some students will have had negative experiences with discrimination and may be wary of disclosing important aspects of their identity to practitioners
- Same- and multiple-sex attracted students who are required to educate practitioners about relevant aspects of their identities and experiences may feel invisible and less confident in the care that is provided.

Support and resources

For young people

A range of supports are available online and nationally for same- and multiple-sex attracted young people, including free support from Outline, Rainbow YOUTH, InsideOUT, and Gender Minorities Aotearoa (see below).



For families and whānau

Your support and love is really important. Even if there are, or have been, challenges, maintaining or re-establishing relationships is one of the most important things for your young person's wellbeing, now and in the future. Resources and support groups for whānau of same- and multiple-sex attracted young people are hosted at RainbowYOUTH (<https://ry.org.nz/whanau-support>) – more links below.

Organisations and Resources:

- InsideOUT: information, resources, training and support to schools, workplaces, government agencies, organisations, community groups, whānau and individuals: <http://insideout.org.nz/>
- RainbowYOUTH: Supporting rainbow young people and their whānau: <https://ry.org.nz/>
- OUTLineNZ 0800 OUTLINE (6885463): Free phone counselling and support for LGBTIQ+ people <http://www.outline.org.nz>
- Gender Minorities Aotearoa: Information, advocacy, and wrap around support for transgender people of all ages, ethnicities, and backgrounds: <https://genderminorities.com/>
- Professional Association for Transgender Health Aotearoa (PATHA): <https://patha.nz/>
- Te Ngākau Kahukura: Professional development for working with young rainbow people: <https://www.tengakaukahukura.nz/>
- *Takatāpui: Part of the Whānau*. Kerekere E. Auckland: Tiwhanawhana Trust and Mental Health Foundation, 2015: <https://takatapui.nz/takatapui-part-of-the-whanau#part-of-the-whanau>
- *Guidelines for Gender Affirming Healthcare for Gender Diverse and Transgender Children, Young People and Adults in Aotearoa, New Zealand*: Oliphant J, Veale J, et al. Transgender Health Research Lab, University of Waikato, 2018: <https://researchcommons.waikato.ac.nz/handle/10289/12160>
- *Creating Rainbow-Inclusive School Policies and Processes: A resource for school boards, leaders, teachers, guidance counsellors, and school communities*. InsideOUT, endorsed by the Ministry of Education, 2021: <http://insideout.org.nz/resources/>
- Supporting LGBTIQ+ Students: Te Kete Ipurangi, Ministry of Education. <https://www.inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/supporting-lgbtiqa-students/>
- *Relationships and Sexuality Education – A guide for teachers, leaders and boards of trustees*: Ministry of Education, 2020: <https://health.tki.org.nz/Teaching-in-HPE/Policy-Guidelines/Relationships-and-Sexuality-Education>

References

1. Fleming, T., Peiris-John, R., Crengle, S., Archer, D., Sutcliffe, K., Lewycka, S., & Clark, T. (2020). *Youth19 Rangatahi Smart Survey, Initial Findings: Introduction and Methods*. The Youth19 Research Group, The University of Auckland and Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. <https://www.youth19.ac.nz/publications>
2. Kerekere, E. (2015). *Takatāpui: Part of the Whānau*. Auckland: Tiwhanawhana Trust and Mental Health Foundation. (see link above)
3. Fleming, T., Tiatia-Seath, J., Peiris-John, R., Sutcliffe, K., Archer, D., Bavin, L., Crengle, S., & Clark, T. (2020). *Youth19 Rangatahi Smart Survey, Initial Findings: Hauora Hinengaro / Emotional and Mental Health*. The Youth19 Research Group, The University of Auckland and Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. <https://www.youth19.ac.nz/publications>

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Find out more at www.youth19.ac.nz Contact us: youth19@auckland.ac.nz