

A Youth19 Brief: Transgender and diverse gender students

In this Youth19 brief we present key findings for transgender and diverse gender 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 Associate Professor Terryann Clark (University of Auckland) and Associate Professor Terry Fleming (Victoria University of Wellington), with collaborators from around New Zealand and beyond.¹

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.



Transgender and diverse gender students

For this brief, transgender and diverse gender identity was primarily determined by responses to the question: "Which of the following best describes you? (You may choose as many as you need)", with answer options: Trans boy or man, Trans girl or woman, Non-binary, Genderqueer, Genderfluid, Agender, Takatāpui, Whakawahine, Tangata ira tane, Fa'afafine, Fa'atatama, Akava'ine, "I'm not yet sure of my gender", "Something else, please state" (open text), and "I don't understand this question". Participants who selected one of the transgender or gender expansive categories listed above were coded as transgender, participants who selected they were "not yet sure" were coded as unsure, and those who said they "did not understand the question" were coded as cisgender. This question was only asked of participants who said, in response to previous questions, that they identified their gender in "another way" (i.e. not boy/man or girl/woman) and/or that they thought they were or might be "transgender or gender-diverse. By this, we mean that your current gender is different from your gender at birth (e.g. trans, non-binary, Queen, fa'afafine, whakawahine, tangata ira tane, genderfluid or genderqueer)".

Summary

One out of every 100 Youth19 participants identified as transgender or non-binary (1.0%). A further 0.6% reported that they were not sure of their gender.

Three quarters (73%) of transgender and diverse gender participants said they had started to identify as transgender or gender-diverse before the age of 14.

Transgender students face high challenges in home, school, community and health care settings. Despite this, many are doing well, and transgender young people contribute widely in communities. We all share the responsibility to create environments in which transgender young people can flourish. There are important actions that families, schools, communities and government can take to support the health and wellbeing of transgender young people – more inside.

Key findings – home, school and community

One out of every 100 Youth19 participants identified as transgender or non-binary (1.0%). A further 0.6% reported that they were not sure of their gender.

Three quarters (73%) of transgender participants said they had started "to identify as transgender or gender-diverse (even if you did not know the word for it)" before the age of 14.

Two thirds (66%) of the participants who answered a question about whether they had "come out" or told someone about "being transgender or gender diverse" said that they had told at least one person. Around half of these students (52%) had told "close friends" and a third (31%) had told "parents or caregivers".

Home

Just over six out of ten (64%) transgender students said that at least one of their parents cared about them "a lot".



School

Seven out of ten (70%) transgender students said that they felt part of their school.

Over one in five transgender students (23%) said that they had been bullied at school weekly or more often in the past year.



Neighbourhood & community

More than six out of ten (62%) transgender students had taken part in activities to help others in their schools and communities in the past year.

Three out of ten (32%) transgender students said they always felt safe in their neighbourhoods.



Key findings – healthcare and mental health

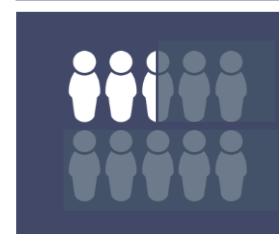
Healthcare access

Over half (55%) of transgender and diverse gender students reported they had been unable to access healthcare when they needed it in the past year.



Mental health

More than half (57%) of transgender and diverse gender students reported significant depressive symptoms and an equal proportion (57%) reported they had self harmed in the past year. One in five (26%) transgender and diverse gender 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 cisgender students

Transgender students face major challenges and disparities. On all measures (apart from volunteering) a greater proportion of transgender and diverse gender students reported challenges than their cisgender peers, including at home; in school, community and healthcare settings; and in their own mental health and wellbeing, as shown here:

Measure	Transgender and diverse gender students % (95% CI)	Cisgender students % (95% CI)
A parents cares a lot	64.3 (51.6 – 77.0)	93.9 (93.2 – 94.5)
Part of school	70.0 (58.6 – 81.3)	87.1 (86.2 – 88.0)
Weekly (or more) bullying	23.2 (12.4 – 34.1)	5.0 (4.4 – 5.6)
Volunteering*	61.7 (48.3 – 75.0)	54.2 (52.8 – 55.6)
Safe in neighbourhood	31.7 (19.2 – 44.2)	58.3 (57.0 – 59.7)
Forgone healthcare	54.7 (41.6 – 67.8)	19.9 (18.8 – 21.0)
Depressive symptoms	56.6 (43.4 – 69.8)	22.6 (21.4 – 23.8)
Self harm	56.9 (44.1 – 69.7)	22.1 (21.0 – 23.3)
Suicide attempt	26.4 (13.2 – 39.5)	5.9 (5.3 – 6.5)

*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 this measure. 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 findings show that transgender and diverse gender high school students experience very concerning levels of social and school isolation and unsafe environments, especially when compared with cisgender students. Research on minority stress has confirmed that the increased amounts of stress and mistreatment experienced by transgender and diverse gender young people are the drivers that underpin increased rates of depression, self-harm and suicide attempts. The findings also indicate that social and school environments need to change, to address the active exclusion and mistreatment of these young people.

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

Access to healthcare, pastoral care support and peer support are important for transgender and diverse gender 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 transgender and diverse gender students, their generosity to give back to others and support their communities exceeds that of cisgender students. Such willingness to support others is an important strength to celebrate, cultivate and nurture. It is important to ensure that transgender and diverse gender 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 transgender and diverse gender 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 transgender and diverse gender 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 transgender 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

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 people 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).

Recognise that some transgender students may also identify with other rainbow communities, so it is important to develop cultural competence to work with young people with a range of sex, sexuality and gender identities, 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
- Transgender and diverse gender 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 transgender and diverse gender 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 transgender and diverse gender young people are hosted at RainbowYOUTH (<https://ry.org.nz/whanau-support>) – more below.

Useful links

- 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>
- *Making Schools Safer for Trans, Gender Diverse and Intersex Youth: A practical resource for schools and whānau on supporting trans, gender diverse, and intersex students*. 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-lgbtqa-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>

This factsheet was compiled by Fenaughty, J., Sutcliffe, K., Fleming, T., Ker, A., Lucassen, M., Greaves, L., and Clark, T. (2021). Illustrations by Yasmine El Orfi. **Funding and acknowledgements:** The Youth19 project is an output of two Health Research Council of New Zealand Projects.¹ Thank you to our funders, the young people who took part in Youth19, and their families and schools.

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