LGBTQ+
Students and Allies in Public Health

SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH
PREVENTION RESEARCH CENTER

COVID-19-RELATED STRESS AMONG LGBTQ+ UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: RESULTS OF A U.S. NATIONAL SURVEY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (N=565 LGBTQ Students)

Online survey results reveal that high proportions of LGBTQ+ students in the U.S. are facing basic needs, academic, and financial-related challenges during COVID-19. They are also facing high levels of substance use, psychological distress, and social isolation, and receiving little emotional support during COVID-19. As a result of COVID-19, high proportions are enduring LGBTQ+-related stressors, such as being rejected by family members for being LGBTQ+. LGBTQ+ students of color bear the added burden of racial oppression amid COVID-19. Urgently recommended actions for university administrators/leaders are found on page 2.

1. Pandemic-Related Stress: Academic, Financial, and Basic Needs

- **62% said their living arrangements changed as a result of COVID-19**; 82% of these moved back home with their parents after the COVID-19 outbreak
  - 88% of those displaced said their living arrangements have not gone back to normal.
- 43% lost their job; 26% had a job offer rescinded.
- 37% reported an increase in coursework; 25% said their grades suffered; 10% dropped a class.

"*After losing my job… it has been increasingly difficult to find another one… because of my gender identity and presentation…this has in turn put me under a lot of strain financially…*"

2. Psychological Distress, Social Isolation and Support, and Substance Use

- **65% met the clinical criteria for moderate or severe psychological distress.**
- 17% had issues accessing medical/mental health care; 18% had issues obtaining prescription meds.
- 40% often felt very isolated from others; 26% received no social/emotional support.
- 32% were drinking more alcohol since COVID-19; 22% reported more recreational cannabis use.

"*Cut off from all the queer support groups and friends that I had. I was very alone and had to basically go back to the closet when I went to my parents.*"

3. Sexual and Gender Minority-Related Stress

Compared to before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic…

- **30% heard their family make negative comments about LGBTQ+ people more often.**
- 36% were cautious about their actions around heterosexual/straight people more often.
- 44% hid their LGBTQ+ identity from other people more often.
- 32% of transgender/nonbinary students reported disrespect of their gender identities more often.

"*I don't have the same support system for that part of my life. I don't get to express myself that way. It's like before college when I just decided it was easier and safer to just "be straight".*"

4. Intersectional Racial Oppression Among LGBTQ+ Students of Color

Compared to before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic…

- **37% experienced an increase in white LGBTQ+ people saying things that were racist.**
- 38% reported an increase in mistrust of white LGBTQ+ people.
- 38% felt misunderstood by white LGBTQ+ people more often.
- 43% were spending more time educating white LGBTQ+ people about race.

"*The rise in xenophobia, white terrorism… policing… COVID panic, and… brutal and unrelenting oppression has absolutely affected my life and… loved ones. The constant threat of death is a suffocating shadow.*"

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATION AND LEADERSHIP

General

- Provide financial and institutional support to develop and implement affirming academic, financial, and social services for LGBTQ+ students (of color).
- Collect confidential and optional data on the sexual orientation and gender identity of students; this is paramount to (1) identifying and (2) addressing the unique needs of LGBTQ+ students (of color).
- Acknowledge the disparate impacts of COVID-19 among LGBTQ+ students (of color) and connect them to identity-relevant and affirming on and off-campus resources (e.g., LGBTQ+ student centers, offices of diversity and equity, counseling and health centers, community-based organizations).
- Adopt inclusive policies and practices that allow student records and technology to affirmatively, correctly, and accurately reflect pronouns, gender identity, and chosen name.

Academics, Finances, and Basic Needs

- Disseminate this report to educate instructors about the unique stressors faced by LGBTQ+ students (of color) in the context of the pandemic and online learning.
  - Encourage instructors to engage in LGBTQ+-affirming actions and practices.
- Educate instructors about LGBTQ+-affirming resources on and off-campus and strongly encourage the inclusion of these resources and referrals in their syllabi.
- Invest in initiatives that increase hiring of LGBTQ+ students (of color) in affirming campus jobs.
- Initiate or extend LGBTQ+-affirming programs that provide emergency basic needs support.

Mental Health Support

- Develop and increase capacity and reach of mental health and social support services for LGBTQ+ students (of color) who may face barriers to quality care (e.g. lack of access to technologies, socioeconomic resources, and racially and intersectionally-sensitive care).
- Develop and disseminate resources for parents and families to support their LGBTQ+ children.
- Develop and implement innovative approaches to support mental health services that protect the privacy and safety of LGBTQ+ students not out to their families (e.g., chat or text-based services).

"*I can't talk to my therapist…because my mom listens to our appointments. I feel like I'm stuck and I cannot be myself due to being ripped away from college just as things were getting brighter. I don't have a job now and things are getting really dicey with paying for my medication and new living arrangements.*"

SAMPLE & METHODS

A nonprobability online survey was implemented between May-August 2020 among full-time LGBTQ+ undergraduate (70%) and graduate (30%) students (M_{age}=22 years; N=565). *Race and ethnicity*: 75% white, 14% Asian, 11% Black or African American, 14% Hispanic or Latina/o/x. *Gender*: 54% cis-woman; 15% cis-man; 10% transgender; 12% nonbinary; 6% genderqueer. *Sexual orientation*: 32% bisexual; 14% gay; 18% lesbian; 16% queer; 7% asexual; 9% pansexual.
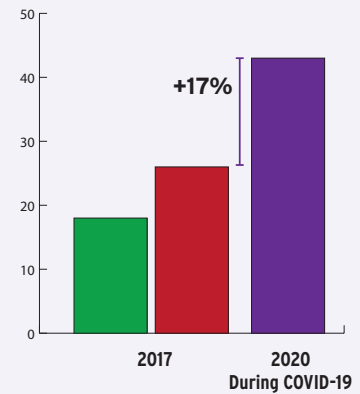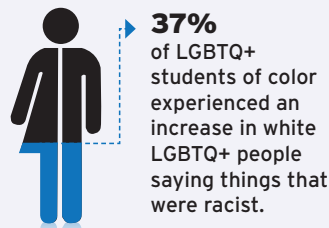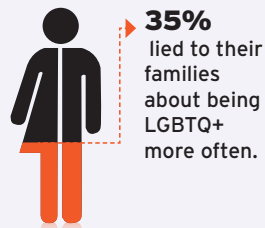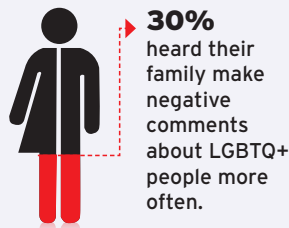
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SUGGESTED CITATION

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UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH
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KEY RESULTS FROM A NATIONAL SURVEY OF LGBTQ+ UNIVERSITY STUDENTS DURING COVID-19

Compared to before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic...

30% heard their family make negative comments about LGBTQ+ people more often.

35% lied to their families about being LGBTQ+ more often.

37% of LGBTQ+ students of color experienced an increase in white LGBTQ+ people saying things that were racist.

44% hid their LGBTQ+ identity from other people more often.

32% of transgender/nonbinary students reported disrespect of their gender identities more often.

+17%

2017	2020 During COVID-19

Severe psychological distress increased among LGBTQ+ students

- 18% of heterosexual students suffered from severe psychological distress (2017)
- 26% of LGBQ students suffered from severe psychological distress (2017)
- **43% of LGB(T)Q students surveyed in Summer 2020 suffered from severe psychological distress**

from a population-based study published in the Journal of Adolescent Health (Dunbar et al., 2017)

We recommend that universities

1. Provide financial and institutional support to develop and implement affirming academic, financial, and social services for LGBTQ+ students (of color).

2. Develop and extend capacity and reach of innovative, safe, and affirmative mental health and social support services for LGBTQ+ students (of color).

3. Connect LGBTQ+ students (of color) to identity-relevant and affirming mental health and social support resources on and off-campus.

4. Express solidarity with LGBTQ students (of color) through inclusive and affirmational practices.