



LGBTQ+ Youth Health Equity Data Brief

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Background

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) youth experience increased risks for adverse health and psychosocial outcomes compared to their heterosexual and cisgender* peers, including depression and anxiety, bullying, substance use and abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, suicide, and homelessness. These disparities are largely due to the structural stigma and discrimination these youth face.¹ LGBTQ+ individuals have also historically faced structural discrimination and violence in health care settings, such as forced institutionalization, medical castrations, lobotomies, and “conversion” therapy, which may lead to distrust and fear of health care institutions.² Due to this history and the structural discrimination LGBTQ+ individuals often face when seeking services, learning to provide inclusive, nonjudgmental care for LGBTQ+ individuals is essential to help treat and prevent adverse health outcomes.

Methods

Healthy Youth Survey (HYS) data were used for this brief. The HYS is a collaborative effort of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Department of Health, the Health Care Authority - Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery, and the Liquor and Cannabis Board. Surveys are conducted every other year with Washington State 6th, 8th, 10th, and 12th grade students.

For this report, data were reviewed from the 2018 survey of 10th grade students. Data were reviewed at a statewide level and at the Northwest Educational Service District 189 (ESD 189) level, which includes all five North Sound counties (Island, San Juan, Skagit, Snohomish, and Whatcom), when available. Approximately 69.2% of the high schools in the North Sound region were included in the 2018 survey with the 10th grade students. An additional 20.0% participated but were not included as there were fewer than 15 valid surveys. Data were stratified by reported sexual orientation and gender identity. Sexual orientation categories include: straight, gay or lesbian, bisexual, questioning or not sure, and something else fits better. Gender identity categories include: male, female, transgender, questioning or not sure, and something else fits better. Due to small numbers of respondents, data were suppressed at the ESD 189 level for some questions and some questions did not provide any data stratified by gender identity. Questions related to mental health, substance use, abuse, and harassment and bullying were reviewed.

Mental Health

While LGBTQ+ youth typically are mentally healthy and well adjusted, research has shown that LGBTQ+ youth may experience increased mental health concerns when compared to their straight, cisgender peers.¹ This includes increase rates of suicidal ideation and depression among lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) youth when compared to their straight peers.³ Studies also report that transgender youth experience increased suicidality and depression.⁴ These increased rates of mental health

¹ * Cisgender refers to someone who exclusively identifies as their sex assigned at birth.

concerns among LGBTQ+ youth may be due to increased experiences of risk factors, such as homophobic and transphobic victimization and family rejection, compared to their peers.⁵

Anxiety

In the North Sound region, 91.4% of bisexual youth and 77.4% of gay and lesbian youth reported feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge during the past two weeks compared to 64.0% of straight students. Transgender students and female student reported anxiety at similar percentages statewide, 81.0% and 77.8% respectively, but were much higher than male students at 53.3%. (Figure 1 and Figure 2)

Figure 1. Anxiety among 10th Graders by Sexual Orientation, 2018 Healthy Youth Survey, Washington State and North Sound (ESD 189).

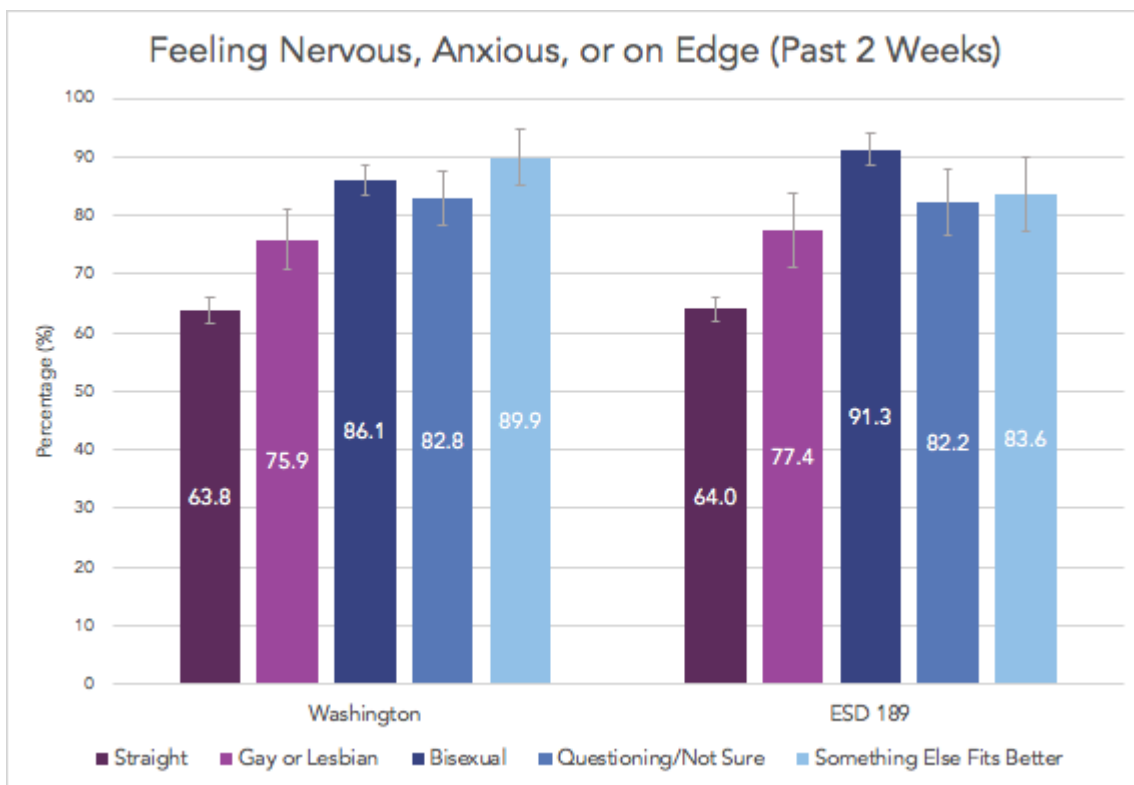
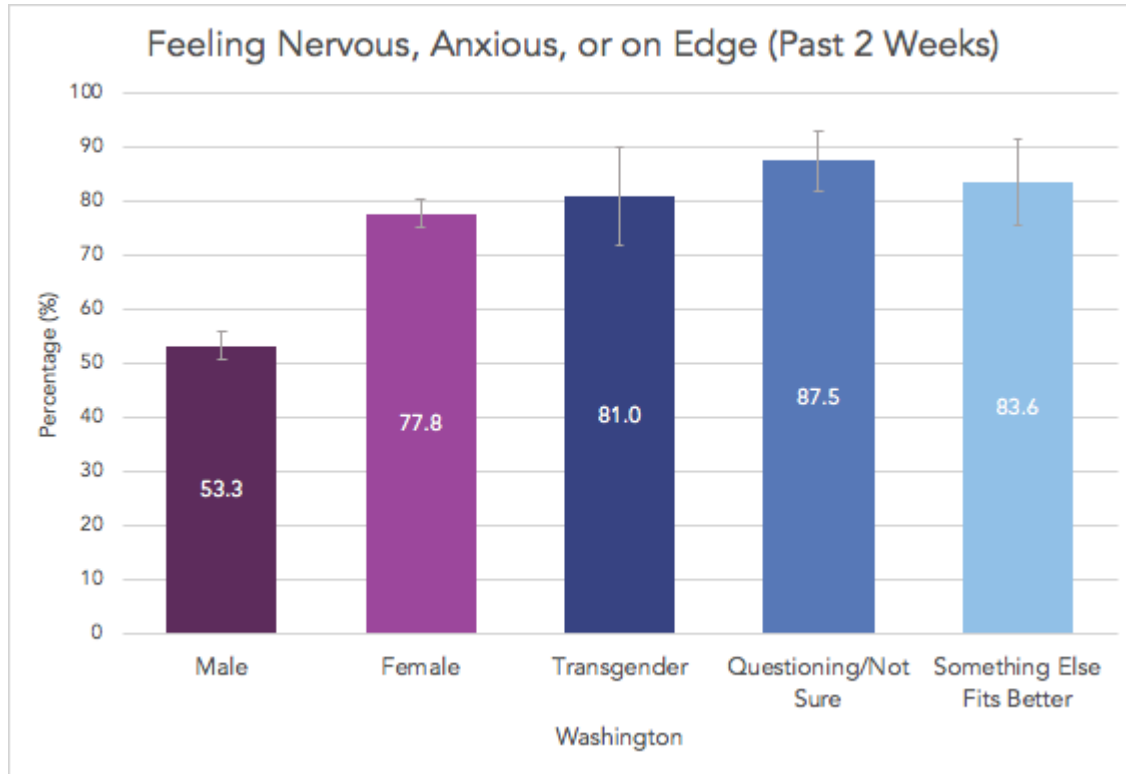


Figure 2. Anxiety among 10th Graders by Gender Identity, 2018 Healthy Youth Survey, Washington State.



Depression

In the North Sound region, 66.3% of bisexual youth and 58.1% of gay and lesbian youth reported feeling "so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row [during the past 12 months] that [they] stopped doing some usual activities" compared to 33.1% of straight students. 63.3% of transgender students in the North Sound region reported experiencing depression in the past year, over double the percentage for male students at 27.5% and higher than female students at 44.4%. (Figure 3 and Figure 4)

Figure 3. Depression among 10th Graders by Sexual Orientation, 2018 Healthy Youth Survey, Washington State and North Sound (ESD 189).

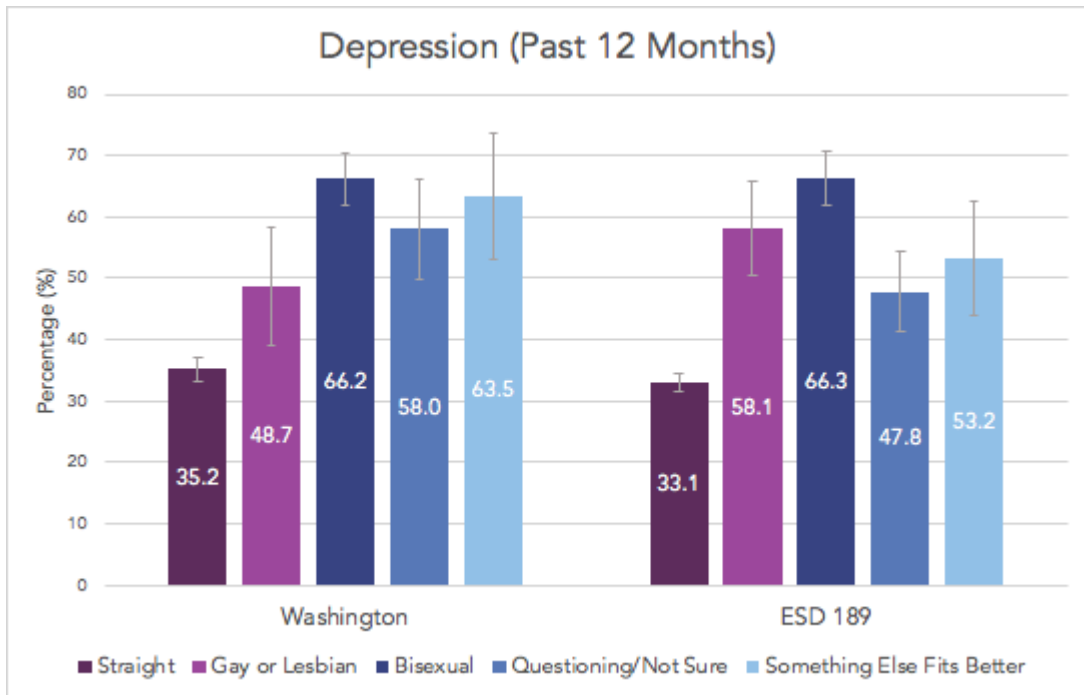
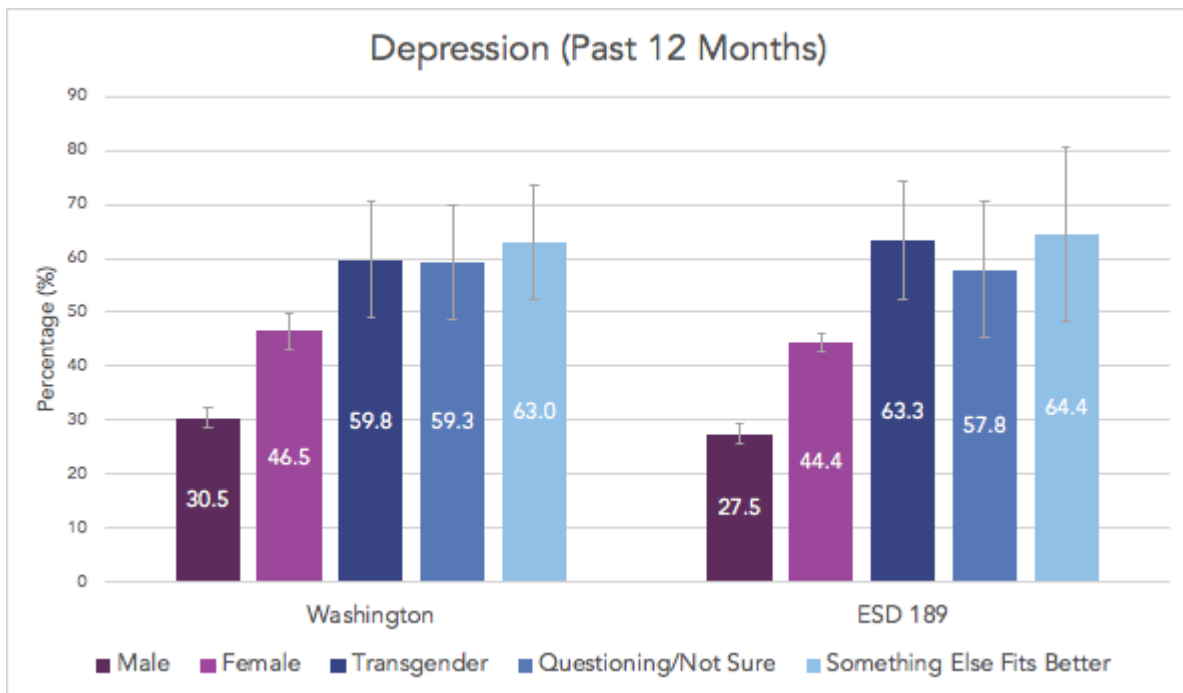


Figure 4. Depression among 10th Graders by Gender Identity, 2018 Healthy Youth Survey, Washington State and North Sound (ESD 189).



Suicidality

In the North Sound region, 52.5% of bisexual youth and 41.9% of gay and lesbian youth reported seriously contemplating suicide in the past year, compared to 18.1% of straight students. Nearly half of transgender students in the North Sound region (48.3%) reported suicidality in the past year, significantly higher than male students (16.2%) and female students (26.5%). (Figure 5 and Figure 6)

Figure 5. Suicidality among 10th Graders by Sexual Orientation, 2018 Healthy Youth Survey, Washington State and North Sound (ESD 189).

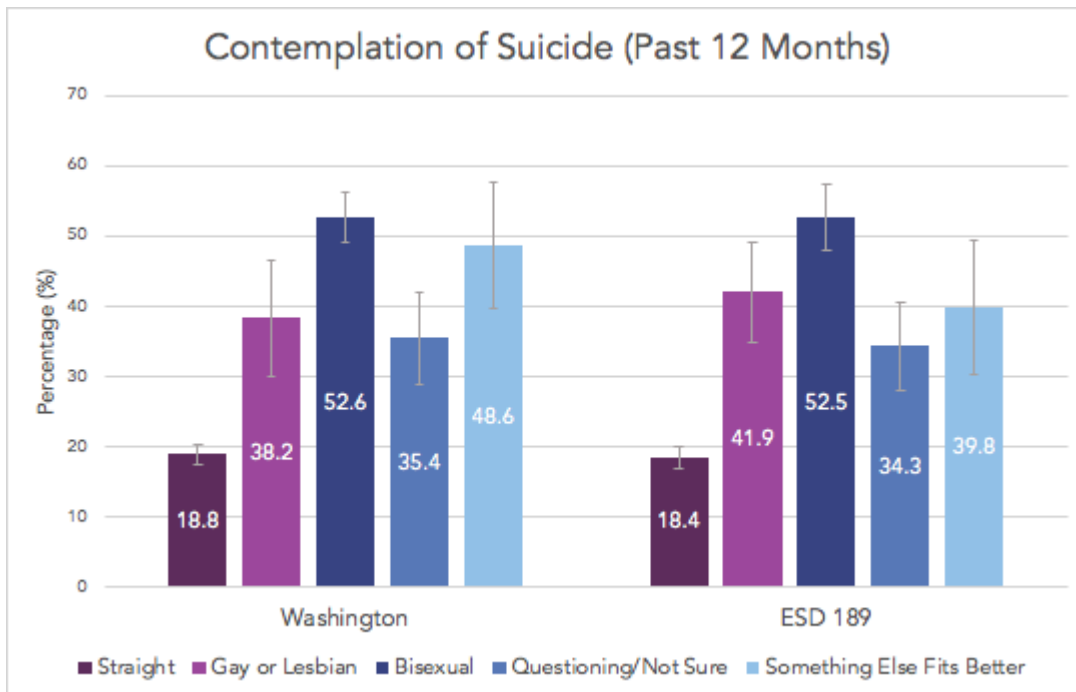
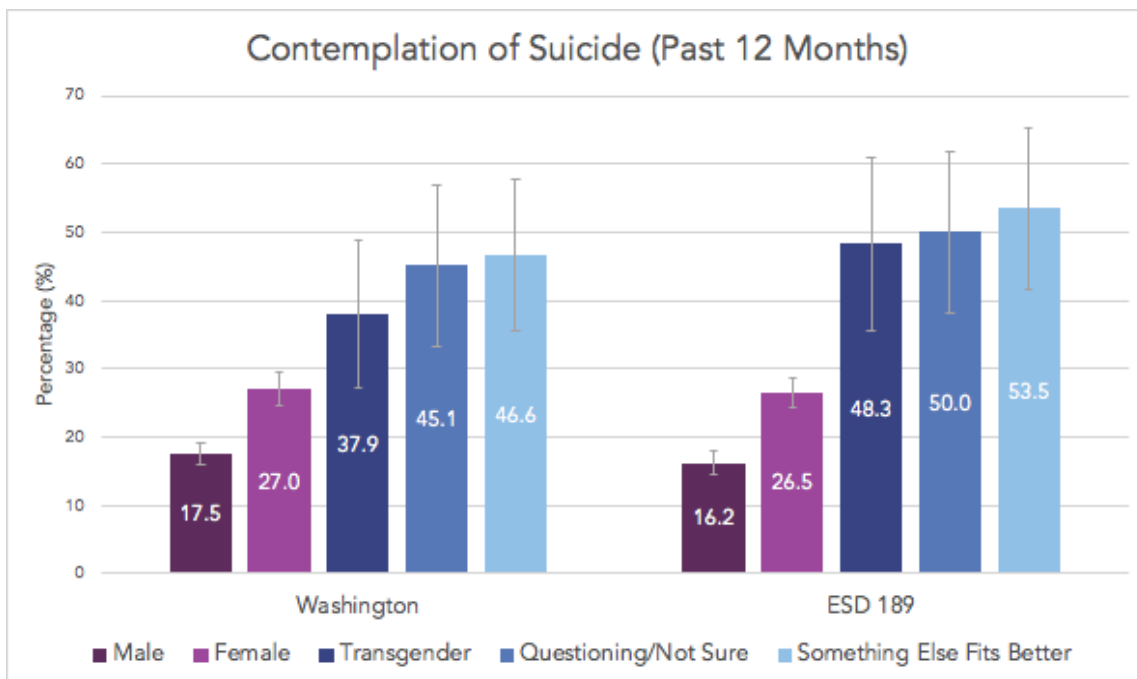


Figure 6. Suicidality among 10th Graders by Gender Identity, 2018 Healthy Youth Survey, Washington State and North Sound (ESD 189).



Substance Use

Research have consistently shown that LGBTQ+ youth experience disparities in rates of substance use.¹ Studies have reported significantly higher rates of cigarette smoking among lesbian and bisexual girls and higher rates of binge drinking among gay and bisexual boys compared to their straight peers.^{6,7} The increased rates of substance use seen among LGBTQ+ youth may be explained by increased stigma, prejudice, and discrimination, which can result in substance abuse disorders and other mental health problems.⁸

Substance Use at School

In Washington state, one-third of gay and lesbian students (33.0%) and 26.9% of bisexual youth reported having been high or drunk at school in the past year compared to straight youth at 13.9%. Nearly half of transgender students in Washington (47.8%) reported substance use at school over three times the percentage for male students at 14.4% and female students at 15.8%. (Figure 7 and Figure 8)

Figure 7. Substance Use at School by 10th Graders by Sexual Orientation, 2018 Healthy Youth Survey, Washington State.

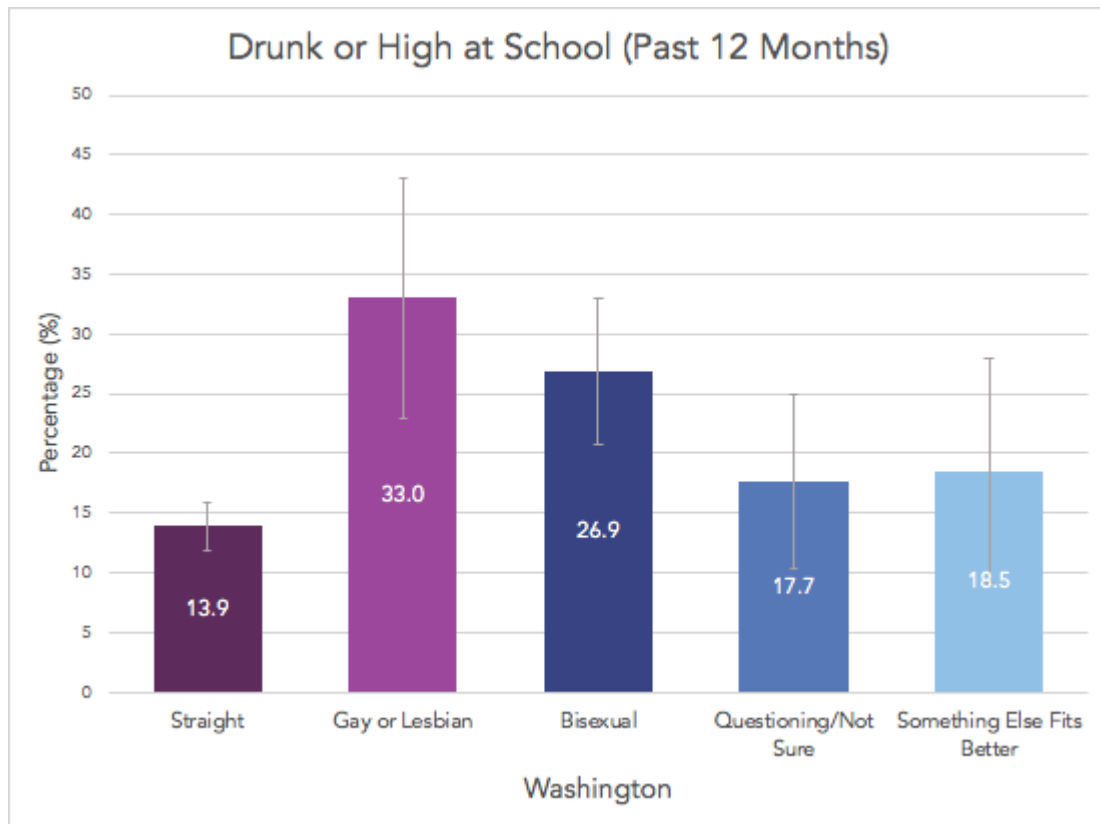
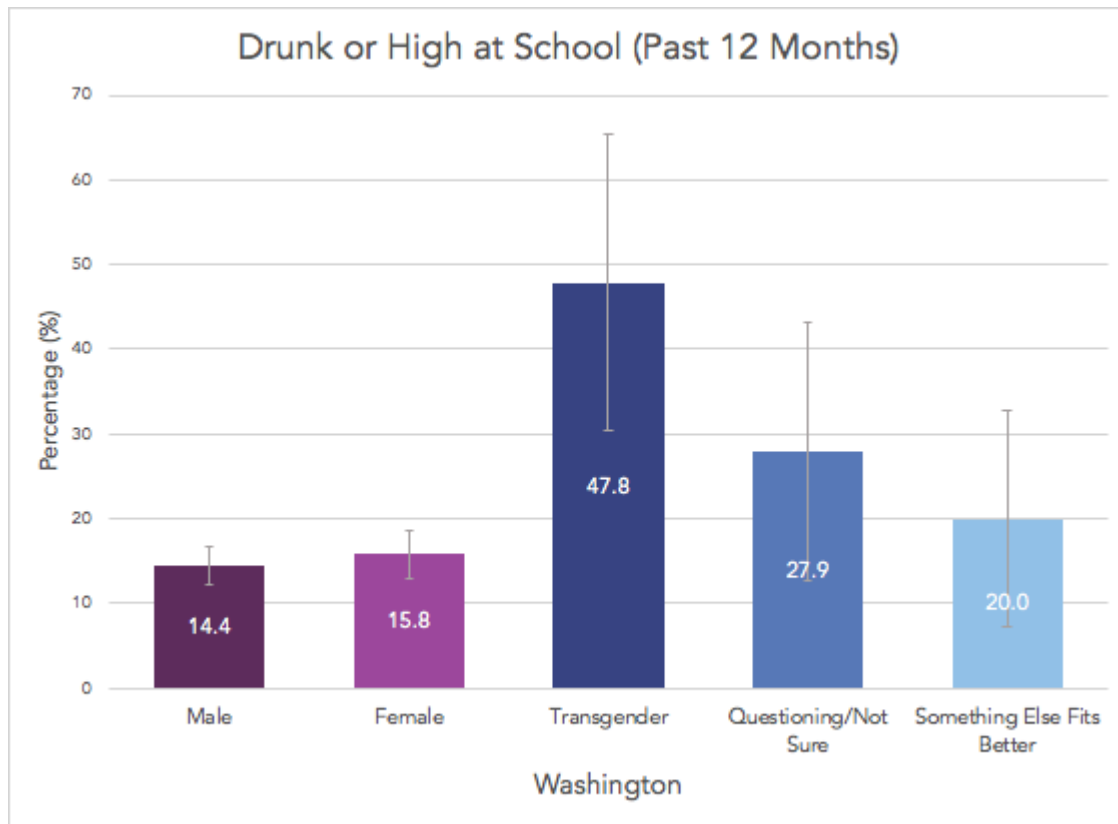


Figure 8. Substance Use at School by 10th Graders by Gender Identity, 2018 Healthy Youth Survey, Washington State.



Cigarette Use

In Washington state, 12.5% gay and lesbian students and 10.2% of bisexual youth reported smoking cigarettes in the past month compared to straight youth at 3.7%. Nearly one in four transgender students in Washington (22.4%) reported smoking in the past month, over five times the percentage for male students at 4.4% and female students at 4.3%. (Figure 9 and Figure 10)

Figure 9. Cigarette Smoking by 10th Graders by Sexual Orientation, 2018 Healthy Youth Survey, Washington State.

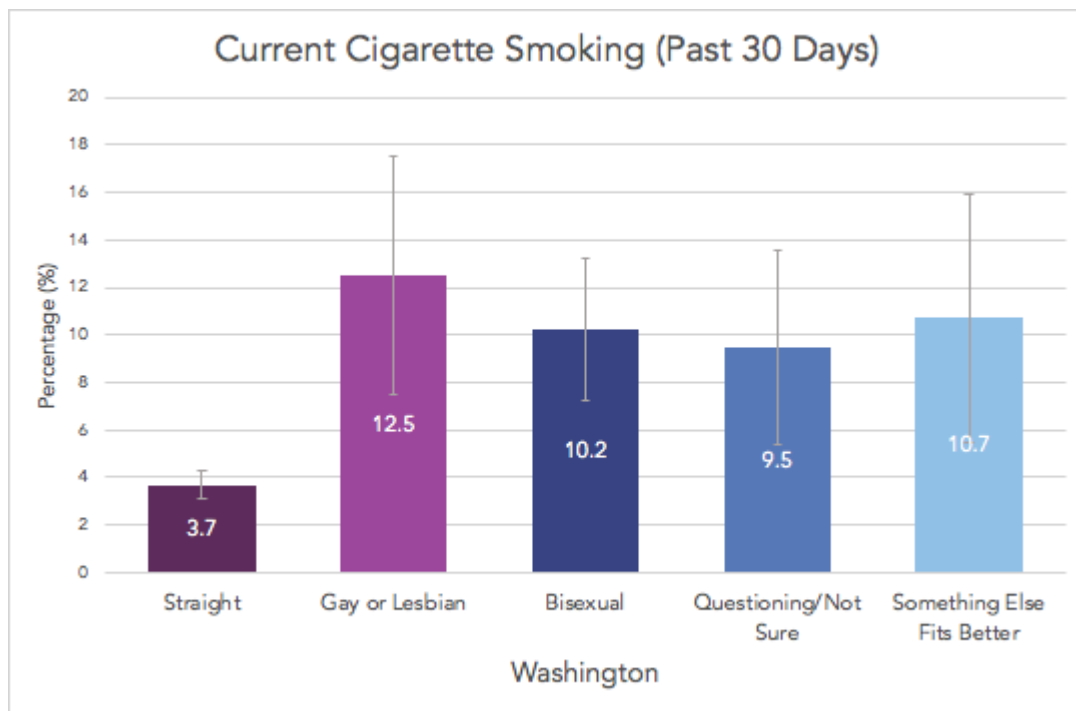
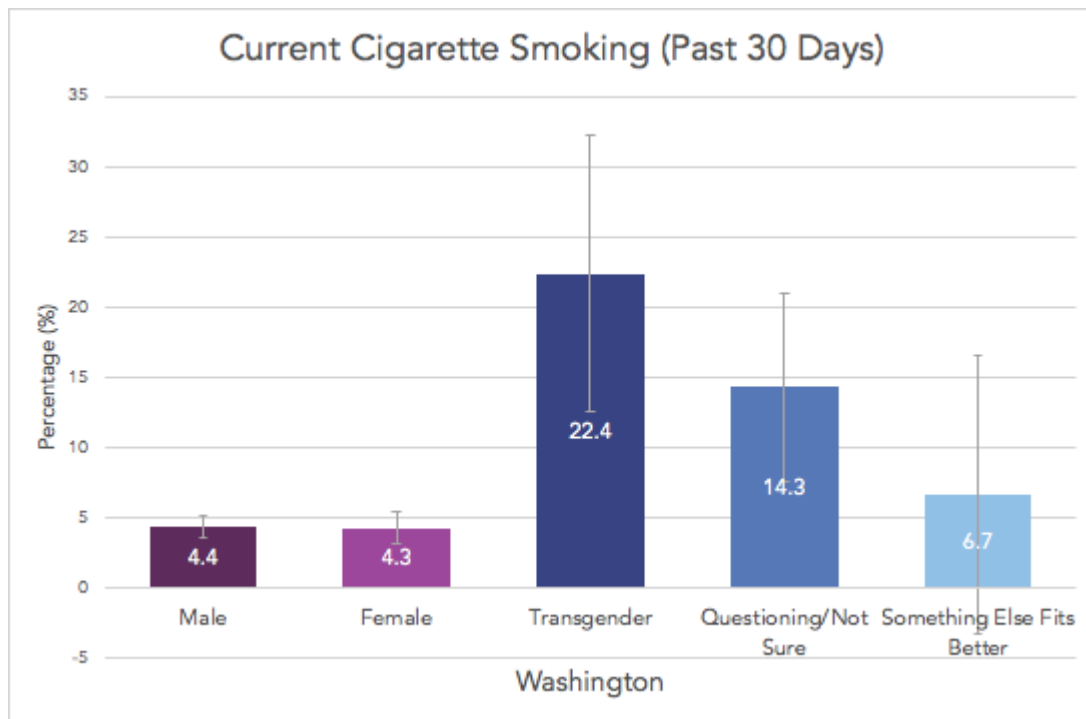


Figure 10. Cigarette Smoking by 10th Graders by Gender Identity, 2018 Healthy Youth Survey, Washington State.



Drug Use

In Washington state, over one in five gay and lesbian students (20.6%) reported using drugs other than alcohol, marijuana, or tobacco in the past month compared to straight youth at 4.4%. One-third of transgender students in Washington (33.3%) reported drug use in the past month, significantly more than male students at 5.8% and female students at 3.7%. (Figure 11 and Figure 12)

Figure 11. Drug Use by 10th Graders by Sexual Orientation, 2018 Healthy Youth Survey, Washington State.

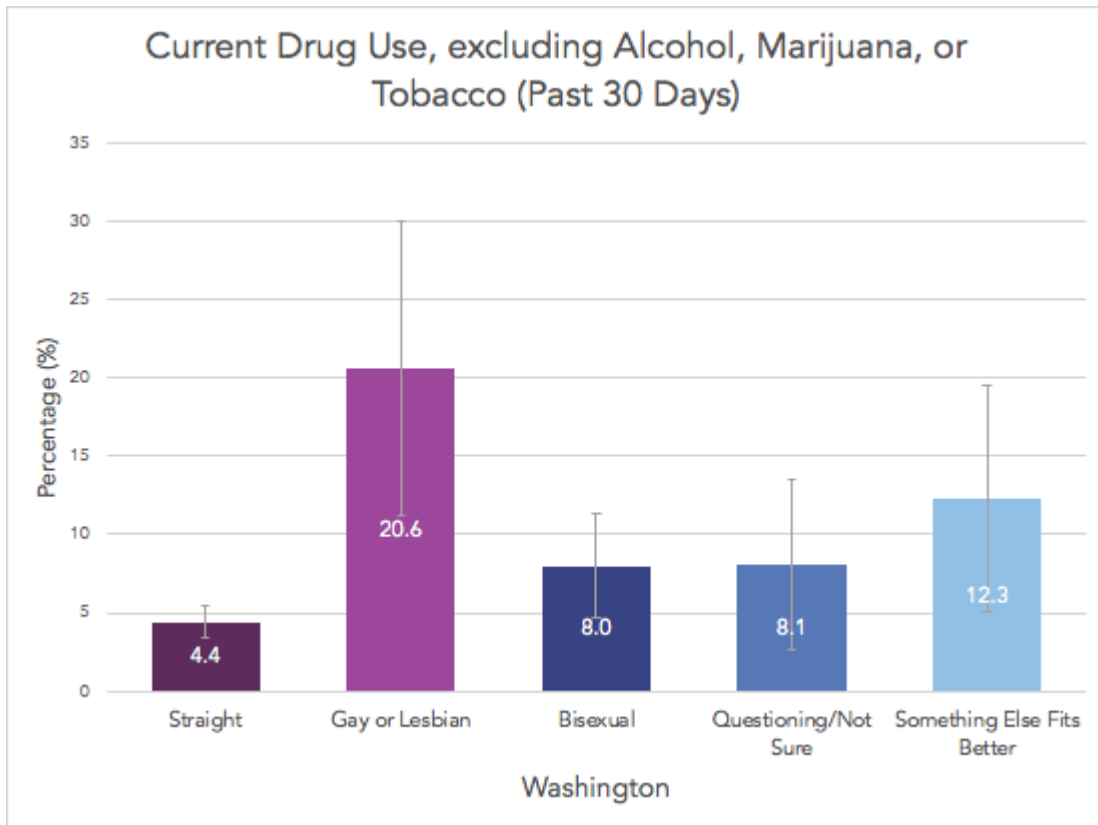
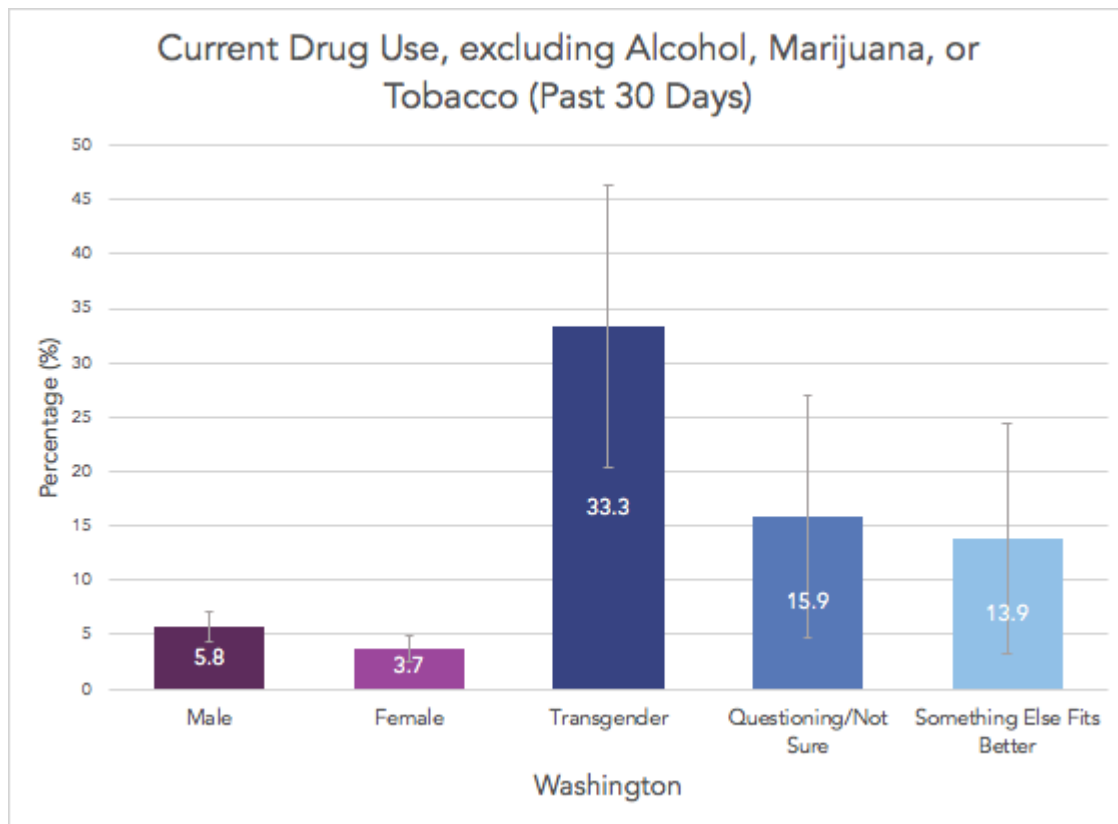


Figure 12. Drug Use by 10th Graders by Gender Identity, 2018 Healthy Youth Survey, Washington State.



Abuse

Studies of high school students in the United States and Canada have found that the prevalence of sexual and physical abuse are significantly higher for LGB youth compared to their peers. This is especially significant for sexual abuse of lesbian and bisexual girls.⁹ Research is lacking about abuse and gender identity among youth. Studies have also indicated that the prevalence of intimate partner violence is higher among the LGBTQ+ community than the general population, however these studies tend to focus on adults and not youth.¹⁰

Sexual Assault

In the North Sound region, nearly one-third of gay and lesbian students (31.8%) and 42.3% of bisexual students reported being forced into a sexual situation at some point in their lives, statistically significantly more than straight youth at 15.8%. Transgender students in Washington face alarmingly high rates of sexual assault, with 64.9% reporting having been forced into a sexual situation, significantly more than male students at 9.6% and female students at 24.2%. (Figure 13 and Figure 14)

Figure 13. Sexual Assault by 10th Graders by Sexual Orientation, 2018 Healthy Youth Survey, Washington State and North Sound (ESD 189).

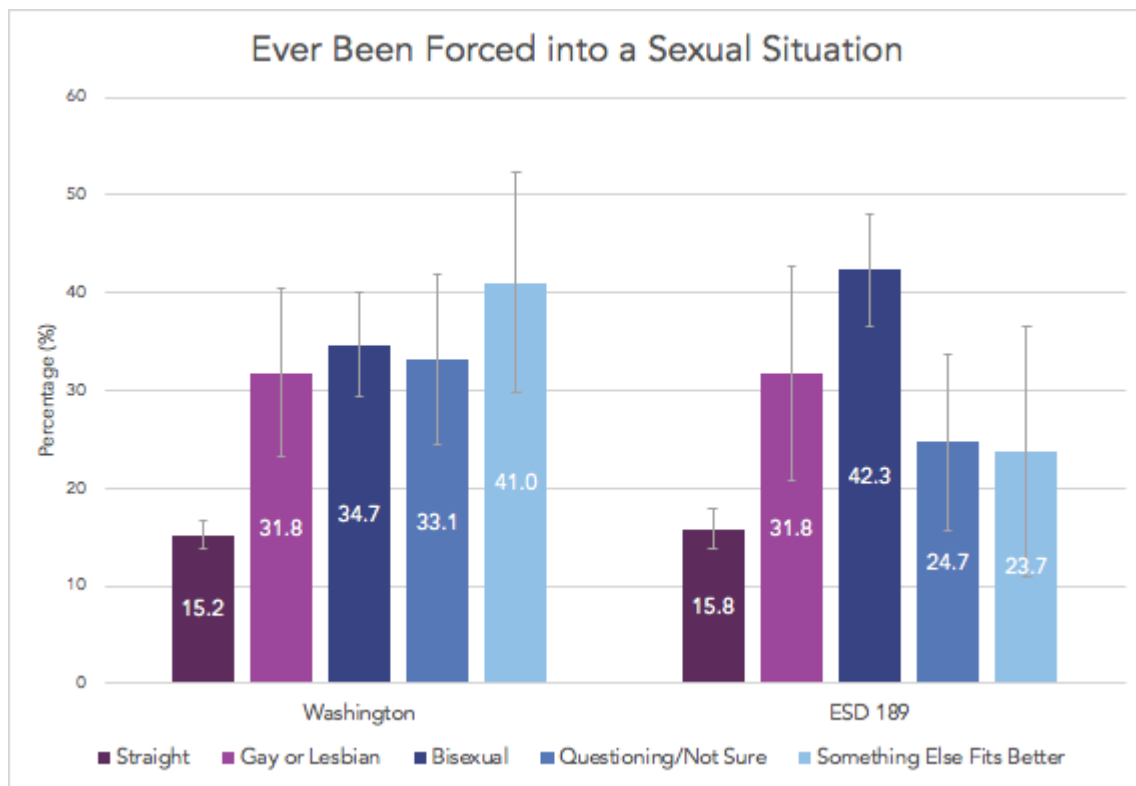
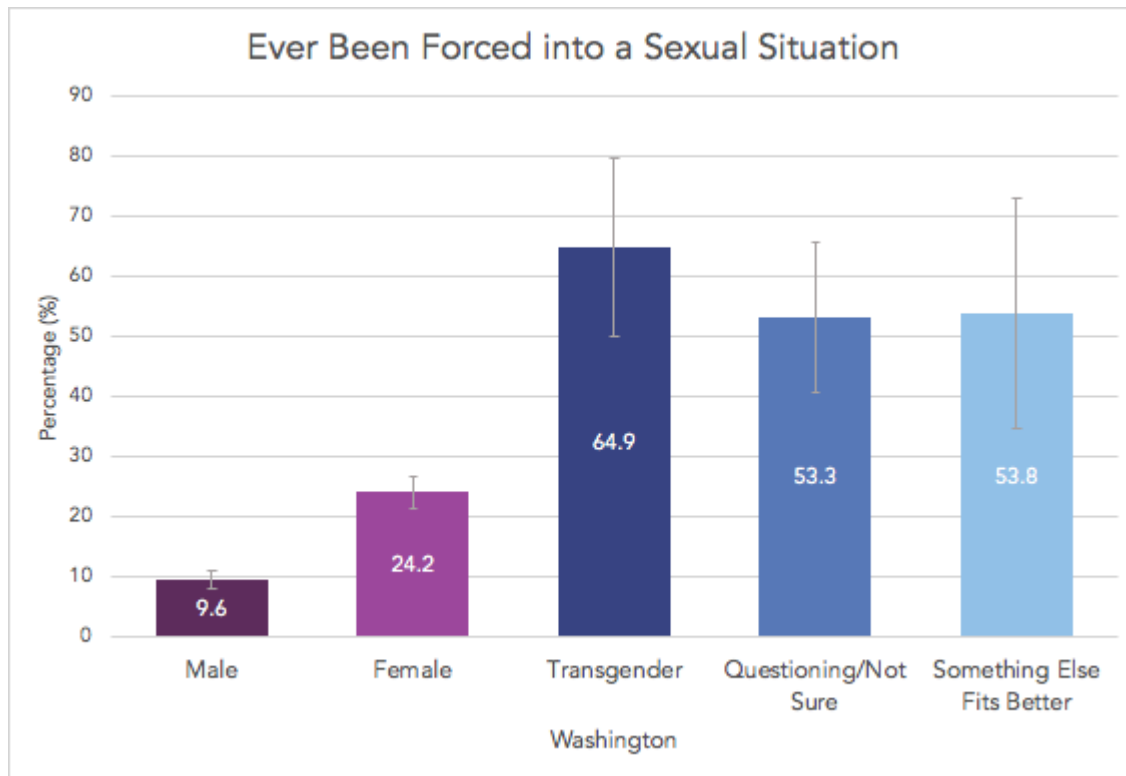


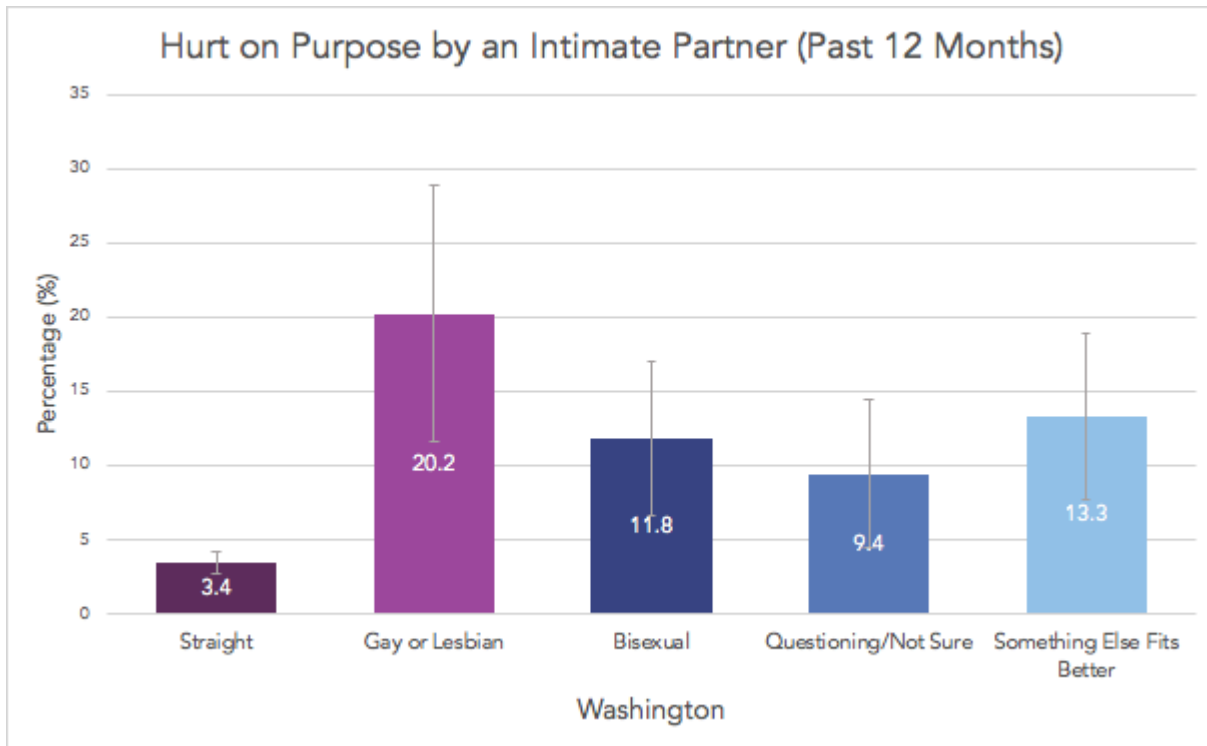
Figure 14. Sexual Assault by 10th Graders by Gender Identity, 2018 Healthy Youth Survey, Washington State.



Intimate Partner Violence

In Washington State, one in five gay and lesbian students (20.2%) and 11.8% of bisexual students reported being intentionally hurt by an intimate partner in the past year, statistically significantly more than straight youth at 3.4%. Data were suppressed for gender identity for this question. (Figure 15)

Figure 15. Intimate Partner Violence of 10th Graders by Sexual Orientation, 2018 Healthy Youth Survey, Washington State.



Abuse

In the North Sound region, 35.9% of gay and lesbian students and 38.6% of bisexual students reported being intentionally hurt physically by an adult, statistically significantly more than straight youth at 21.2%. Over half of transgender students in Washington (54.1%) reported abuse by adult compared to male students at 23.2% and female students at 24.7%. (Figure 16 and Figure 17)

Figure 16. Abuse of 10th Graders by Sexual Orientation, 2018 Healthy Youth Survey, Washington State and North Sound (ESD 189).

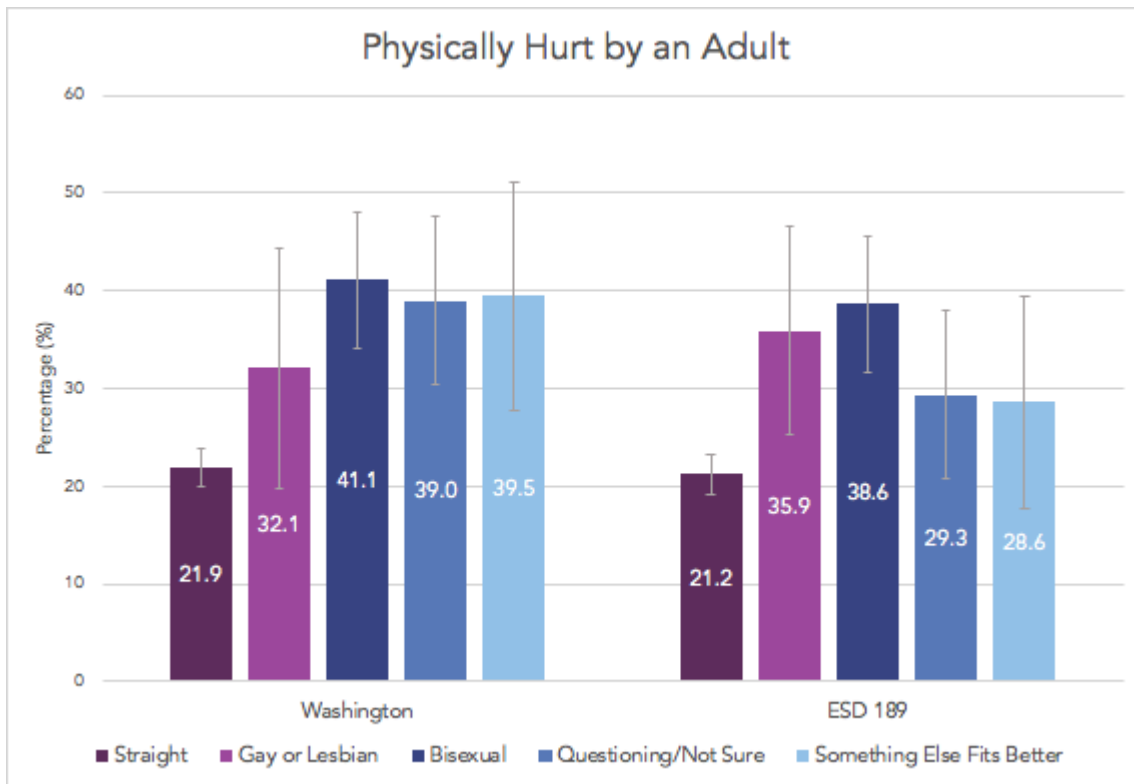
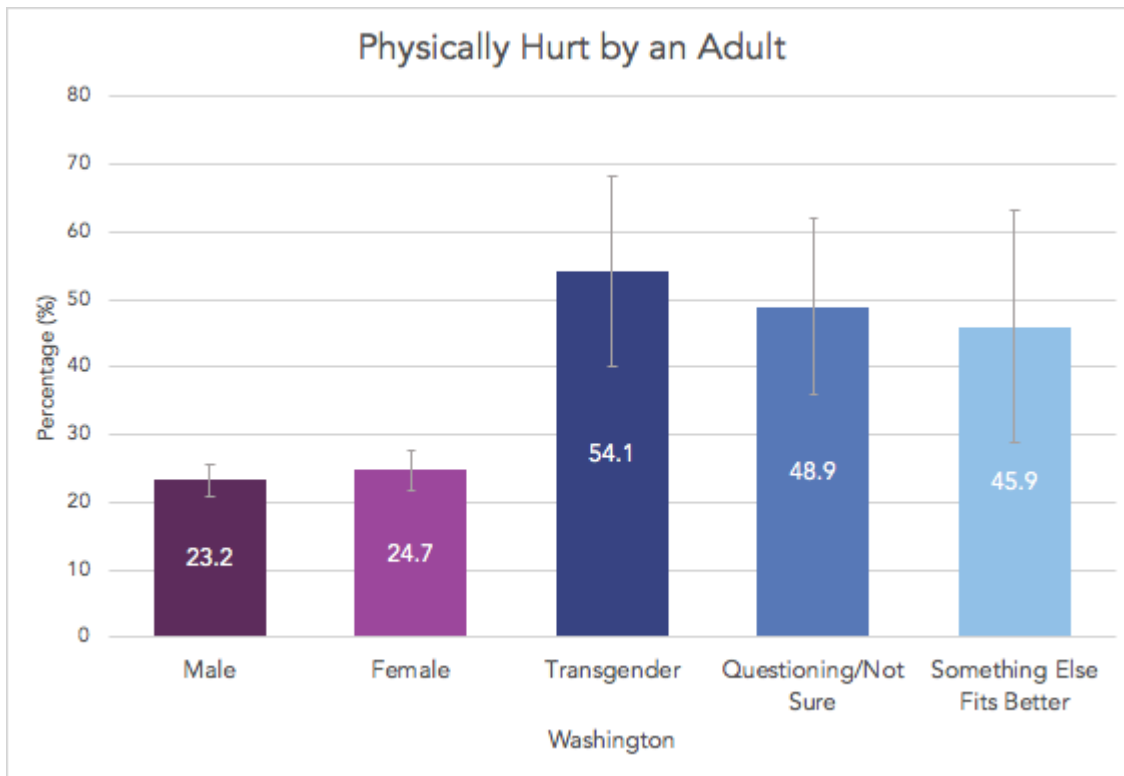


Figure 17. Abuse of 10th Graders by Gender Identity, 2018 Healthy Youth Survey, Washington State.



Bullying and Harassment

LGBTQ+ youth experience higher levels of harassment, victimization, and violence than their straight, cisgender peers.¹¹ School-based harassment, including being threatened or injured with a weapon, bullying, and sexual assault are reported due to sexual orientation, gender identity, or exhibited gender-atypical behavior.^{12,13} Experiences of school-based harassment and bullying can lead to lower grades and increased absenteeism among LGBTQ+ students.¹⁴

Social Media Harassment

In the North Sound region, 28.4% of gay and lesbian students and 26.7% of bisexual students reported being bullied or harassed on social media in the past 30 days, statistically significantly more than straight youth at 11.8%. 37.8% of transgender students in Washington reported social media harassment compared to male students at 11.7% and female students at 14.7%. (Figure 18 and Figure 19)

Figure 18. Social Media Harassment of 10th Graders by Sexual Orientation, 2018 Healthy Youth Survey, Washington State and North Sound (ESD 189).

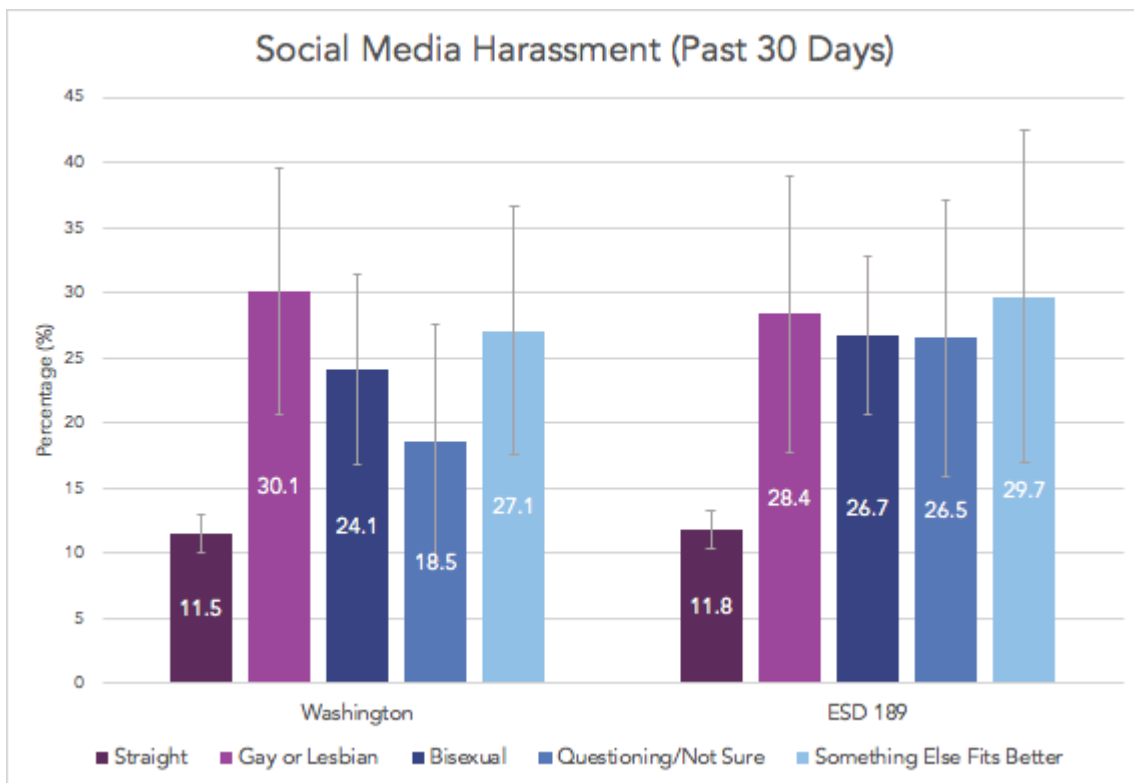
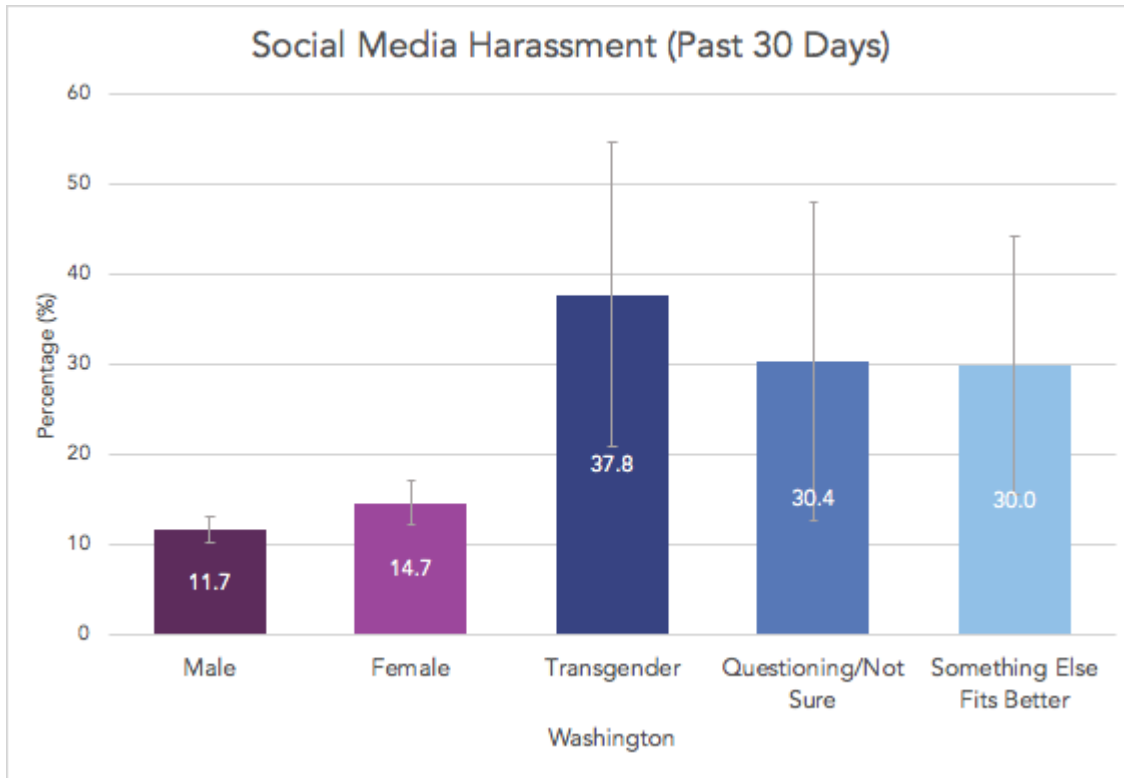


Figure 19. Social Media Harassment of 10th Graders by Gender Identity, 2018 Healthy Youth Survey, Washington State.



Safety at School

In the North Sound region, 36.7% of gay and lesbian youth 30.8% of bisexual youth reported feeling unsafe at school compared to 18.5% of straight students. 42.4% of transgender students in the North Sound region reported feeling unsafe at school, over double the percentage for male students at 18.8% and female students at 21.0%. (Figure 20 and Figure 21)

Figure 20. Safety at School of 10th Graders by Sexual Orientation, 2018 Healthy Youth Survey, Washington State and North Sound (ESD 189).

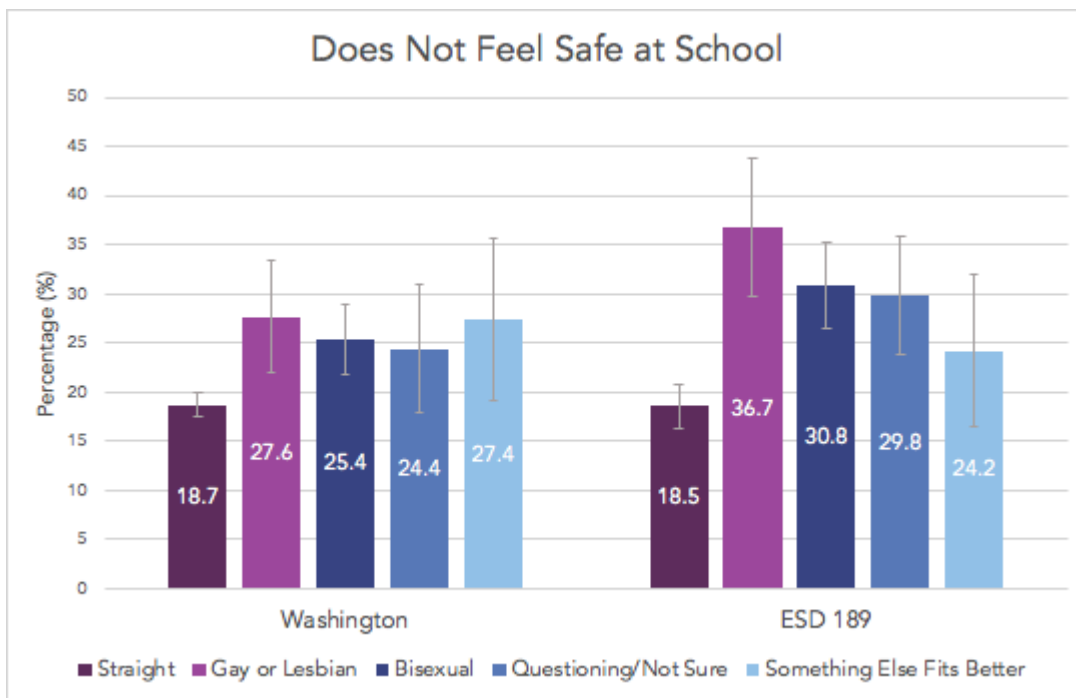
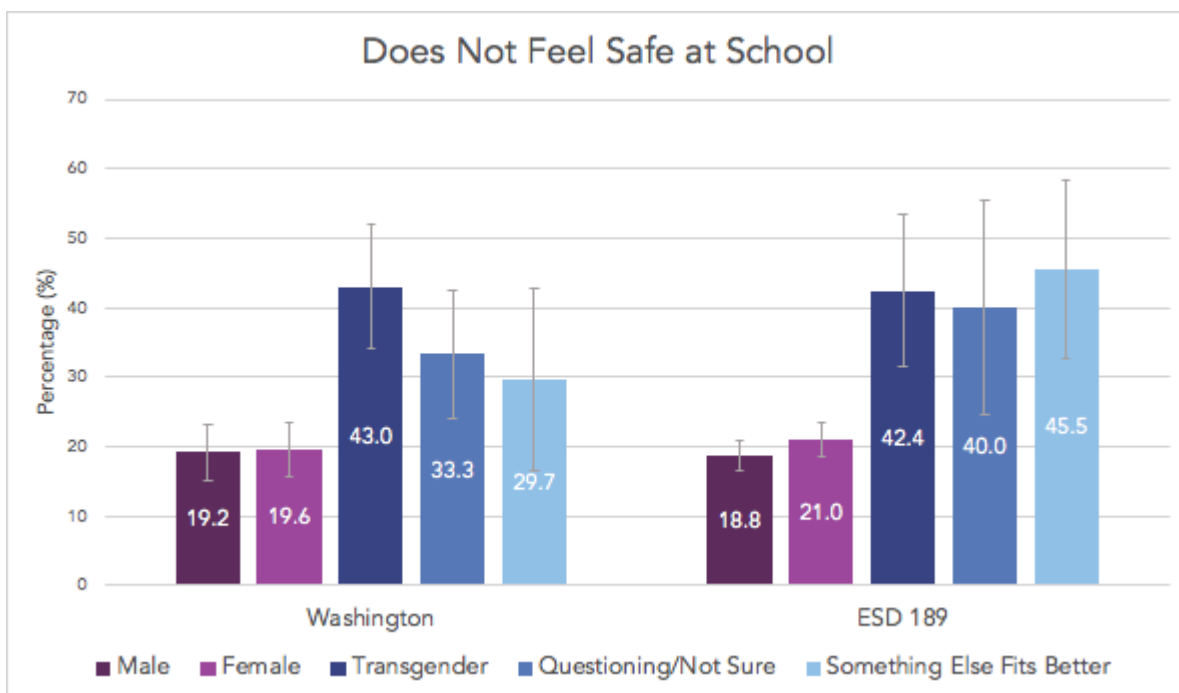


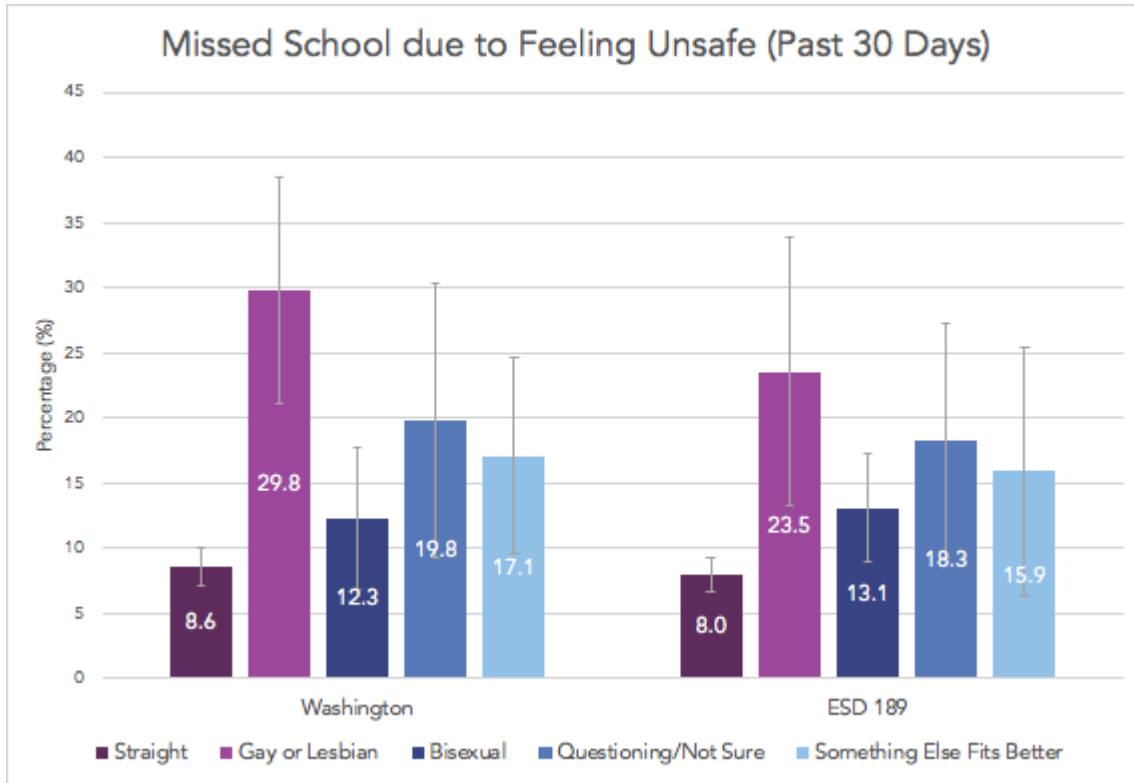
Figure 21. Safety at School of 10th Graders by Gender Identity, 2018 Healthy Youth Survey, Washington State and North Sound (ESD 189).



Absenteeism due to Feeling Unsafe

In the North Sound region, nearly one-quarter of gay and lesbian students (23.5%) reported missing at least one day of school in the past month due to feeling unsafe, statistically significantly more than straight youth at 8.0%. Data were suppressed for gender identity for this question. (Figure 22)

Figure 22. Absenteeism due to Feeling Unsafe of 10th Graders by Sexual Orientation, 2018 Healthy Youth Survey, Washington State and North Sound (ESD 189).



Conclusions

LGBTQ+ youth in Washington state and the North Sound region experience increased mental health concerns, substance abuse, abuse, and harassment compared to their straight, cisgender peers. While these increased risks are consistent with research on LGBTQ+ individuals and health disparities, research has also indicated protective factors that may decrease these risks and support youth. For example, LGBTQ+ youth who attend schools with supportive staff, anti-bullying policies, and Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) clubs are less likely to report bullying, absenteeism due to safety concerns, and suicidality.¹ Family acceptance has also been shown to lower rates of depression, substance use, and suicidality.¹ Providing inclusive and nonjudgement spaces for LGBTQ+ youth is essential to decrease these disparities, leading to healthier LGBTQ+ youth and communities.

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