

# The Diverse Adolescent Sexuality and Health (DASH)

Study:

## Indianapolis Site Report

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The authors would like to acknowledge Jennifer Prichard for her oversight of the early stages of this project, as well as her assistance with data analysis. We would also like to thank Lida Rogers for her work in coordinating the Indianapolis site. Finally, we would like to thank the entire staff at the Indiana Youth Group for their tremendous support of this project.

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## Brief Study Summary

Overall, 140 youth were included in these analyses. Of these 140 youth:

### Demographics:

- Most (95%) identified as gay, lesbian or bisexual
- About half (51%) were attending high school
- All but two youth (98%) were “out” to someone in their life
- Over half (61%) lived with parents or caregivers

### School Mistreatment as a Result of Sexual Orientation: While in school...

- About half (52%) have been pushed, shoved, slapped, hit or kicked
- Over half (78%) have had mean rumors spread about them
- Over half (77%) have had sexual jokes, comments, or gestures made about them
- About half (52%) have been made fun of because of looks or the way they talked
- Over half (71%) have been picked on

### Mental Health:

- Nearly half (47%) had high/severe depression scores
  - However, about half (53%) had little or no depression
- About half (52%) attempted suicide at some point in their lives
  - However, over half (54%) had no suicidal ideation in the past year

### Substance Use:

- Over half (57%) have smoked a cigarette or cigar in the past 30 days
- Nearly half (46%) have participated in binge drinking in the past six months
  - Conversely, about half (54%) have not participated in binge drinking in the past six months
- About half (56%) have taken drugs that were not prescribed by a physician.
  - Conversely, nearly half (44%) have not taken drugs that were not prescribed
- Less than half (35%) have smoked marijuana in the past 30 days

### Sexual Behavior of the Sexually Active Boys:

- Over half (86%) have been sexually active in the past six months
- About half (53%) have engaged in either unprotected insertive or receptive anal sex at some point during the past six months
  - Conversely, about half (47%) had maintained only safe sex practices
- About half (51%) have been tested for HIV; all were HIV-negative

### Sexual Behavior of the Sexually Active Girls:

- Over half (77%) have been sexually active with a male in their lifetime
- Less than one quarter (21%) have engaged in unprotected vaginal or anal sex with a male in the past six months
  - Conversely, over three quarters (79%) had maintained only safe sex practices in the last six months
- About half (50%) have been tested for HIV; all who returned for their results were HIV-negative.

## **Study Overview**

The aim of this study is to better understand the experiences that gay, lesbian bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning youth have while growing up. We set out to learn more about behaviors that adolescents engage in, with the goal of informing what services are most needed for this population. In addition, we are interested in learning about strengths and positive factors that may contribute to healthy behaviors and improved quality of life in adolescents who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT).

Adolescents for this study were recruited from one of three collaborating youth centers that serve LGBT adolescents and young adults. These centers included the Attic Youth Center in Indianapolis, PA, BAGLY in Boston, MA, and Indiana Youth Group in Indianapolis, IN. The data for this report come only from the Indianapolis location.

This report presents mostly descriptive findings from the study, such as the numbers of and percentages of LGBT adolescents who engage in various behaviors. It is important to remember that because all participants in this study were recruited from the Indiana Youth Group (IYG), these data might not accurately represent the experiences of all LGBT youth, particularly those who do not participate in activities offered by LGBT youth centers. However, these findings do provide a good picture of the experiences of youth who attend IYG.

In the case of all descriptive findings we report here, we examined whether there were gender differences in the behaviors reported (e.g., were boys more likely than girls to report alcohol use?). Unless otherwise noted in the report, you can assume that boys and girls were not different on the outcomes we show. In the future, more elaborate statistical analyses will be performed with these data, and the findings from those analyses will be submitted for publication in scientific journals, as well as shared regularly with each of our collaborating youth centers.

## **Who were our participants?**

To be eligible to participate in the current study, participants had to meet the following criteria: (1) they needed to identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, transgender, homosexual, or same gender loving OR have had sexual contact with someone of the same sex in the last year; and (2) they needed to be between the ages of 14-19.

One hundred and forty-one adolescents from Indianapolis met these criteria. Ninety-one percent of the adolescents approached agreed to complete the study (141/155). Of these 141 adolescents, 140 cases were used for analyses (one participant needed to have his data removed because of invalid responding -- for example, responding "1" to all questions on the computerized survey).

Adolescents in the sample ranged from 14-19 years in age, with an average age of 18 years ( $SD = 1.4$ ). Approximately 50% of the sample was in the 17-18 year age range. Forty-one percent of the sample reported being born biologically male (58/140). Fifty-nine percent of the sample reported being born biologically female (82/140). Of the 58 adolescents who were born male, 56 currently identified themselves as being male (97%). Of the two adolescents who were born male that no longer identified as male, one identified as transgender and one identified as "a little bit of both [male and female]." Of the 82 adolescents who were born female, 73 currently identified themselves as being female (89%). Of the nine adolescents who were born female that

no longer identified as female, five identified as transgender, two identified as male, one identified as “male on the inside, female on the outside,” and one identified as “mixed.”

The ethnic identities of the sample were as follows: 7.9% African American, 4.3% African American and another race, 72% European American, 4.3% Latino, 5% American Indian, and 6.4% other ethnicities.

All adolescents in the study provided information on their sexual orientation. Eight categories were used to describe their orientation (see Table 1).

**Participant’s Self Reported Sexual Orientation (n = 140)**

Gay	43 (31%)
Bisexual	44 (31%)
Lesbian	46 (33%)
Queer	4 (3%)
Same Gender Loving	0 (0%)
Homosexual	1 (1%)
Heterosexual	1 (1%)
Other	1 (1%)

In our sample, 78 participants (56%) reported being employed. Of the participants who are employed, 30 (38%) reported working full-time and 48 (62%) reported working part time. Participants were asked to report their highest level of education (see Table 2).

**Highest grade completed (n= 140)**

Less than elementary school	0 (0%)
Elementary school	4 (3%)
Currently in high school	71 (51%)
High school graduate	50 (36%)
Some college	15 (11%)

In addition, information was also provided regarding current education status. One hundred and one participants (72%) reported currently being enrolled in school. Students were predominantly currently enrolled in high school.

### **Type of school attending**

**(of those currently attending school; n= 101)**

High school	65 (64%)
Community college	8 (8%)
4 year college	15 (15%)
Art school	5 (5%)
Trade or vocational school	3 (3%)
Other	5 (5%)

### **Sexual orientation milestones**

Participants were asked to provide information about their experiences with their sexual orientation. The majority of the participants reported that they were between 10 and 14 years old when they first realized they were attracted to another person of the same sex. The ages of realizing their first attraction ranged from 4 – 18 years of age. The average age of participants when someone else found out about their sexual orientation was 14 years old (mode = 13). However, participants ranged in age from 9 – 19 when someone first found out. Two participants reported that no one currently knows about their sexual orientation. Of the 138 participants who reported someone else knowing, participants were asked to describe their relationship with the person to who they first came out (See Table).

### **Relationship of person who first found out about their sexuality**

**(of those whose sexuality has been found out; n= 138)**

Parent or caregiver	16 (12%)
Sibling	6 (4%)
Other relative	11 (8%)
Friend	100 (72%)
Teacher or counselor	2 (1%)
Other	3 (2%)

Seventy percent (97) of these participants reported that they told the person who first found out about their orientation. Fourteen percent reported that the person found out without them telling them directly (e.g., by reading a note, etc). Sixteen percent reported that the person asked them first and then the adolescent told them about it. Of the 138 participants who reported being out to at least one person, 15 (11%) reported that no one in their immediate or extended family knows about their orientation, and 123 (89%) reported that someone in their family

knows. The average age that participants disclosed their sexuality to their family members was 15. Family members found out about participants' sexual orientation in a number of ways (see table below). However, the majority of the participants told the family member first.

**How family members found out about sexual orientation  
(of those whose sexuality has been found out; n=138)**

Participant told them	97 (70%)
They found out without anyone telling them (Reading a note, etc. )	19 (14%)
Family member asked, participants told them	22 (16%)
Someone else told them with permission	0 (0%)
Someone else told them without permission	0 (0%)

Participants varied in the number of immediate family members that know about their sexual orientation. Forty-four percent reported that all of their immediate family members know about their sexual orientation. Fourteen percent reported that most of their family members know. Seven percent said about half of their family members know. Twenty-two percent reported that a few family members know, and only one percent stated that none of their immediate family members know about their sexual orientation.

Only 2% of participants reported that their caregivers or parents ever attended a PFLAG meeting. Twelve percent of participants reported that parents or caregivers attended another type of support group for parents of lesbian, gay or bisexual youth.

Participants also provided information regarding other people in their high school, college or work that know about their sexual orientation. Of the 138 participants who reported being out, the majority of the participants responded that "all or most" people in their high school, college or workplace know about their orientation, although a significant portion said at least some people did not know (See table).

**Number of people in HS, college or work place who know about sexual orientation  
(of those whose sexuality has been found out; n=138)**

None	3 (2%)
A Few	27 (20%)
About half	16 (12%)
Most	46 (33%)
All	46 (33%)

While many participants responded to being out to family members and friends, being out to other important adults was less common. For example, 56% responded that none of their doctors or pediatricians know about their sexual orientation. Only 24% responded that most or all of their providers know about their sexual orientation.

Participants reported where they currently lived. Most reported living with their parents or caregivers (see Table). Note: some participants endorsed living in more than one situation.

### **Housing status for participants (n= 140)**

Live alone in house or apartment	4 (2%)
Live with friends or roommate in house or apartment	7 (5%)
Living with friends or roommates and living with other relatives	3 (2%)
Live with parents or caregivers	85 (61%)
Living with parents and living with sexual partner	5 (4%)
Live with other relatives	6 (4%)
Live with sexual partner or lover	12 (9%)
Live in school dorm or campus housing	9 (6%)
Live in transitional housing or group home	1 (1%)
Homeless – not living in a shelter	1 (1%)
Living in drug or rehabilitation housing	1 (1%)
Other living situation	6 (4%)

### **School**

To better understand how adolescents are treated in school, we asked participants to provide information about negative experiences that may have occurred in school. Combining the 71 individuals currently in high school with the 50 participants who had graduated high school, but not gone on to college, there were a total of 121 individuals whose most recent school experience was high school. These participants reported their experiences of mistreatment during school (see table below).

**Reported school mistreatment (of those currently in high school or high school graduates not yet in college; n=121)**

Types of mistreatment in schools (while on school property or attending school event)	Number of adolescents who report the occurrence	Number of adolescents who report that one or more of the occurrences were due to sexual orientation
Been pushed, shoved, slapped, hit or kicked	74 (61%)	63 (52%)
Been threatened or injured with a weapon	26 (21%)	15 (12%)
Been afraid of being beat up	62 (51%)	54 (45%)
Been in a physical fight	53 (44%)	31 (26%)
Had mean rumors spread about them	106 (88%)	94 (78%)
Had sexual jokes, comments, or gestures made about them	103 (85%)	93 (77%)
Been made fun of because of looks or the way they talked	80 (66%)	63 (52%)
Had your property stolen or deliberately damaged	45 (37%)	26 (21%)
Have been picked on	93 (77%)	86 (71%)
Been treated unfairly by teachers or administrators	63 (52%)	52 (44%)

Attendance was assessed for participants who were currently attending high school. Participants were asked to indicate how many days they had missed in the past month due to illness. Thirty-nine percent did not miss any days due to illness, 27% missed 1 – 2 days in the past month due to illness, and 34% missed 3 or more days in the past month due to illness. Participants were also asked to indicate how many days of school they missed in the past month due to “skipping.” Fifty-eight percent of the participants did not miss any days due to skipping, 24% of the participants missed 1 – 2 days due to skipping, and 19% missed 3 or more days due to skipping.

### Relationships

All participants were asked to indicate their involvement with significant others. Of the 58 males in the study, 25 (43%) responded that they had a boyfriend, 31 (53%) responded that they did not have a boyfriend. Two (3%) of the boys were not asked about having a boyfriend because they responded “no to any sexual contact with a male.” Of the 73 participants who identified themselves as female, 32 (44%) responded that they had a girlfriend and 41 (56%) responded that they did not have a girlfriend. Eight of the girls (10%) responded that they

currently had a boyfriend. Sixty-five (90%) responded that they did not currently have a boyfriend.

### **Depression & Suicide**

As part of the interview, participants were asked to provide information on their mood using the Center for Epidemiological Studies – Depression Scale. All participants provided information on their mood. Cut-off scores were used to determine categories for low, moderate and high/severe depression. A score of 0-15 was classified as little or no depression, 16-23 was classified as moderate depression, and over 24 was classified as high/severe depression. Of the 140 participants, 19 (14%) had depression scores indicating little or no depression, 55 (39%) had moderate depression scores, and 66 (47%) had high/severe depression scores.

Study participants were asked about suicide and suicidal behaviors. Of the 140 participants, 73 (52%) had attempted suicide at some point in their lives. The participants who had attempted suicide ranged in number of attempts between 1 – 45 times.

#### **Number of suicide attempts (of entire sample; n=140)**

None	67 (48%)
1	17 (12%)
2 – 3	28 (20%)
4- 6	16 (11%)
6 or more	12 (09%)

Of the 140 participants in the study, 43 (31%) participants had 1 or more lifetime attempts that were serious enough to require treatment by a doctor or nurse. With respect to recent suicidal ideation, 64 (46%) of participants had seriously thought about committing suicide in the past 12 months.

### **Use of Tobacco, Alcohol and Drugs**

The use of tobacco, alcohol, and other substances was assessed as part of the survey. Of the 140 participants, 87 (62%) reported smoking a cigarette or cigar in the past six months and 79 (57%) reported smoking a cigarette or cigar in the past 30 days. Of those 79 participants, 46 (33%) reported smoking more than three cigarettes or cigars per sitting. One hundred and seventeen participants (84%) reported having an alcoholic beverage in their lifetime. The participants who consumed alcohol were asked to report the number days they drank alcohol in the past 12 months (see table).

**Days of alcohol use in past 12 months (of entire sample; n=140)**

None	3 (2%)
1 to 2 times in the past 12 months	39 (28%)
Once a month or less	35 (25%)
2 to 3 days a month	16 (11%)
1 to 2 days a week	20 (14%)
3 to 5 days a week	3 (2%)
Everyday or almost everyday	1 (1%)

Binge drinking was assessed for the participants who reported drinking in the past 12 months. Binge drinking was defined as drinking more than 5 drinks in a row.

**Frequency of consuming more than 5 drinks in a row (of entire sample; n=140)**

None	51 (36%)
1 to 2 times in the past 12 months	35 (25%)
Once a month or less	9 (6%)
2 to 3 days a month	10 (7%)
1 to 2 days a week	7 (5%)
3 to 5 days a week	3 (2%)
Everyday or almost everyday	2 (1%)

Seventy-eight participants (56%) responded that they have taken drugs that were not prescribed by a physician. Substances were assessed for using the drug ever during the adolescent's lifetime, as well as, use of the substance in the past year (see table).

**Type of substances used (of entire sample; n=140)**

	Number of adolescents who report ever using the substance	Number of adolescents who report use in the past year	Number of adolescents who report use in the past 30 days
Sedatives	39 (28%)	32 (23%)	22 (16%)
Tranquilizers	31 (22%)	19 (14%)	11 (8%)
Pain killers, such as percocet	54 (39%)	47 (34%)	29 (21%)
Marijuana	74 (53%)	67 (48%)	50 (35%)
Cocaine or crack cocaine	29 (21%)	15 (11%)	5 (4%)
Crystal methamphetamine	8 (6%)	3 (2%)	1 (.01%)
Heroin	11 (8%)	3 (2%)	1 (.01%)
Ecstasy	21 (15%)	14 (10%)	7 (5%)
Hallucinogens	18 (13%)	12 (9%)	6 (4%)
Inhalants	19 (14%)	7 (5%)	4 (3%)
Other stimulants	23 (16%)	12 (9%)	7 (5%)

**Sexual Risk Behavior**

Sexual behaviors were assessed to better understand the frequency of behaviors that place adolescents at risk for HIV infection. Because the predominant mode of HIV transmission is through unprotected anal or vaginal intercourse, these are the behaviors on which this report focuses.

**Boys' Sexual Behaviors**

Of the 57 biological boys in the sample (one who identified as transgender), 54 (95%) reported that they had been sexually active with another male at some point in their lives. Forty-nine (86%) of the boys in the sample indicated that they had been sexually active in the past 6 months. Boys who were sexually active reported an average of 3 different male sexual partners in the past 6 months.

Examining the full sample of 57 biological boys, 30 (53%) reported that they had engaged in either unprotected insertive or receptive anal sex at some point during the past 6 months. Twenty-three (40%) of the boys reported unprotected insertive anal sex specifically, and 25 (44%) reported unprotected receptive anal sex. Boys who reported that they currently had boyfriends were no more or less likely to report unprotected anal intercourse.

Given the financial hardships faced by many of the boys in this urban sample, we also examined the frequency of exchanging sex for money or drugs. Five (9%) of the boys in this

sample reported that they had exchanged sex for money or drugs at some point in the past six months.

### **Girls' Sexual Behaviors**

Of the 78 biological girls (five who identified as transgender) in the sample, 63 (81%) reported that they had been sexually active with another female at some point in their lives. Fifty-four (69%) of the girls in the sample indicated that they had been sexually active with a girl in the past 6 months. Girls who were sexually active reported an average of two different female sexual partners in the past 6 months.

Because sex among females poses minimal risk for HIV transmission, we also examined whether the girls in this sample were having sex with men. Sixty (77%) of the girls reported having had some form of sexual contact with a male in their lifetimes, and 28 (36%) girls reported sexual contact with a male in the past six months. Moreover, 16 (21%) of the girls indicated that they had engaged in unprotected vaginal or anal sex with a male in the past six months. Two (3%) of the girls reported exchanging sex for money, drugs, or other items at some point in the last six months.

### **HIV and Other Sexually Transmitted Diseases**

Participants were asked to report on HIV testing, as well as whether or not they had ever been told that they have a sexually transmitted disease. Two (4%) of the boys had been told by a doctor or nurse at some point in their lives that they had a sexually transmitted disease other than HIV. Twenty-nine (51%) of the boys had been tested for HIV. Of the boys who had been tested, 29 (100%) were HIV-negative. Data from other large samples of urban adolescent boys who have same-sex contact suggest that HIV prevalence is much higher in this population than was reported by the boys in this sample. There are many possible reasons for this difference: (a) boys in this sample might have been unwilling to report their HIV status accurately, (b) some of the boys who reported never being tested might unknowingly have HIV, (c) boys who attend programs at the Indiana Youth Group might be at lower risk than boys who comprise samples for other studies, or (d) some combination of the above factors might be operating.

Nine (12%) of the girls reported that at some point in their lives, they had been diagnosed by a doctor or nurse as having an STD. Thirty-nine (50%) of the girls had been tested for HIV. Of those who had been tested, 38 (97%) reported that they were HIV-negative and 1 (3%) indicated that she did not return for her results.