

# Health Reports

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## Sexual orientation and mental health

Lesbian, gay and bisexual people tend to have poorer mental health than heterosexual people. In 2015, an estimated 405,000 Canadians identified as either gay or lesbian, while another 444,000 identified as bisexual. Among men, 1.9% identified as gay, and among women, 1.1% identified as lesbian. Significantly more women identified as bisexual (2.2%) than men (1.1%).

A new study released today in *Health Reports*, compares the mental health of gay, lesbian and bisexual people with their heterosexual counterparts in Canada. Specifically, the study explores "complete" mental health—meaning both the presence of positive mental health and the absence of mental illness. Data are from the 2015 Canadian Community Health Survey.

The study found that homosexual and bisexual people were more likely than heterosexual people to have been diagnosed with a mood or anxiety disorder (19%, 40% and 11%, respectively) or to have experienced thoughts of suicide (5%, 13% and 2%, respectively) in the previous year. Gay men (67%) and bisexual men (57%) were less likely than heterosexual men (77%) to have complete mental health, and bisexual women (38%) were less likely to have complete mental health than heterosexual women (72%).

Other factors, such as age, sex, socioeconomic status and marital status, were associated with mental health and well-being. Bisexual people tended to be younger, of lower socioeconomic status and, more often, women. Gay, lesbian and bisexual people were also less likely to be married or in a common-law relationship.

When these factors were taken into account, the association with complete mental health was no longer significantly different between gay men and heterosexual men. However, both bisexual men and bisexual women remained less likely to be in complete mental health than heterosexual people when sociodemographic and health factors were controlled.

### Note to readers

Several concepts can be used to measure sexual orientation. These include sexual attraction, behaviour, and identity. Sexual attraction refers to feelings independent of behaviours. Sexual behaviour refers to whether a person's partner or partners are of the same or opposite sex. Identity refers to social identity, such as whether a person identifies as heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual.

The Canadian Community Health Survey uses the concept of identity. Respondents aged 15 and older were asked whether they considered themselves to be heterosexual (sexual relations with people of the opposite sex), homosexual—that is, lesbian or gay (sexual relations with people of your own sex)—or bisexual (sexual relations with people of both sexes).

Respondents with a combination of high positive emotions and high psychological and social function, as measured by the Mental Health Continuum Short Form (MHC-SF), were considered to be in flourishing mental health. Complete mental health is defined as flourishing mental health with the absence of a mood or anxiety disorder diagnosis and the absence of suicide ideation in the previous 12 months.



**Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [3226](#).**

The article "[Sexual orientation and complete mental health](#)" is now available in the November 2019 online issue of *Health Reports*, Vol. 30, no. 11 (Catalogue number [82-003-X](#)).

This issue of *Health Reports* also contains the article "[Validation of a brief measure of combat exposure among Canadian Armed Forces personnel](#)."

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To enquire about "Validation of a brief measure of combat exposure among Canadian Armed Forces personnel" contact Media Relations, Department of National Defence (613-996-2353; [mlo-blm@forces.gc.ca](mailto:mlo-blm@forces.gc.ca)).

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