

# Eating Disorders Among LGBTQ Youth

*A 2018 National Assessment*



# Introduction

The mission of The Trevor Project is to end suicide among gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning young people. To do so, we not only provide direct services 24/7 for LGBTQ youth in crisis, but are committed to new, groundbreaking research to better understand the mental health and lived experiences of LGBTQ young people.

This survey is aimed specifically towards a better understanding of eating disorders among LGBTQ youth. Its findings are alarming and highlight the need for further research to improve the lives of LGBTQ young people in this country.

The Trevor Project is proud to have partnered with the National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA) and Reasons Eating Disorder Center to complete the first national survey of LGBTQ youth focused specifically on the relationships between sexual orientation, gender identity, eating disorders and suicidal ideation. Our partnership with NEDA was vital, as the organization supports individuals and families affected by eating disorders, and serves as a catalyst for prevention, cures and access to quality care. Because eating disorders disproportionately affect some segments of the LGBTQ population, and research on this population is limited, NEDA is committed to a better understanding of risk and protective factors.

The unique stressors that LGBTQ-identified people experience, such as coming out and harassment in schools or the workplace, can impact levels of anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and unhealthy coping mechanisms such as substance abuse. All of these can be contributing factors in the development of an eating disorder and are common co-occurring conditions.

This study represents a major step in the continued rigorous examination of the relationship between the sexual orientation and gender identity of LGBTQ youth and eating disorders.

We hope that this research will shine a line on the prevalence of eating disorders and disordered eating among LGBTQ youth and lead to actions that will help the lives of all young people, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.



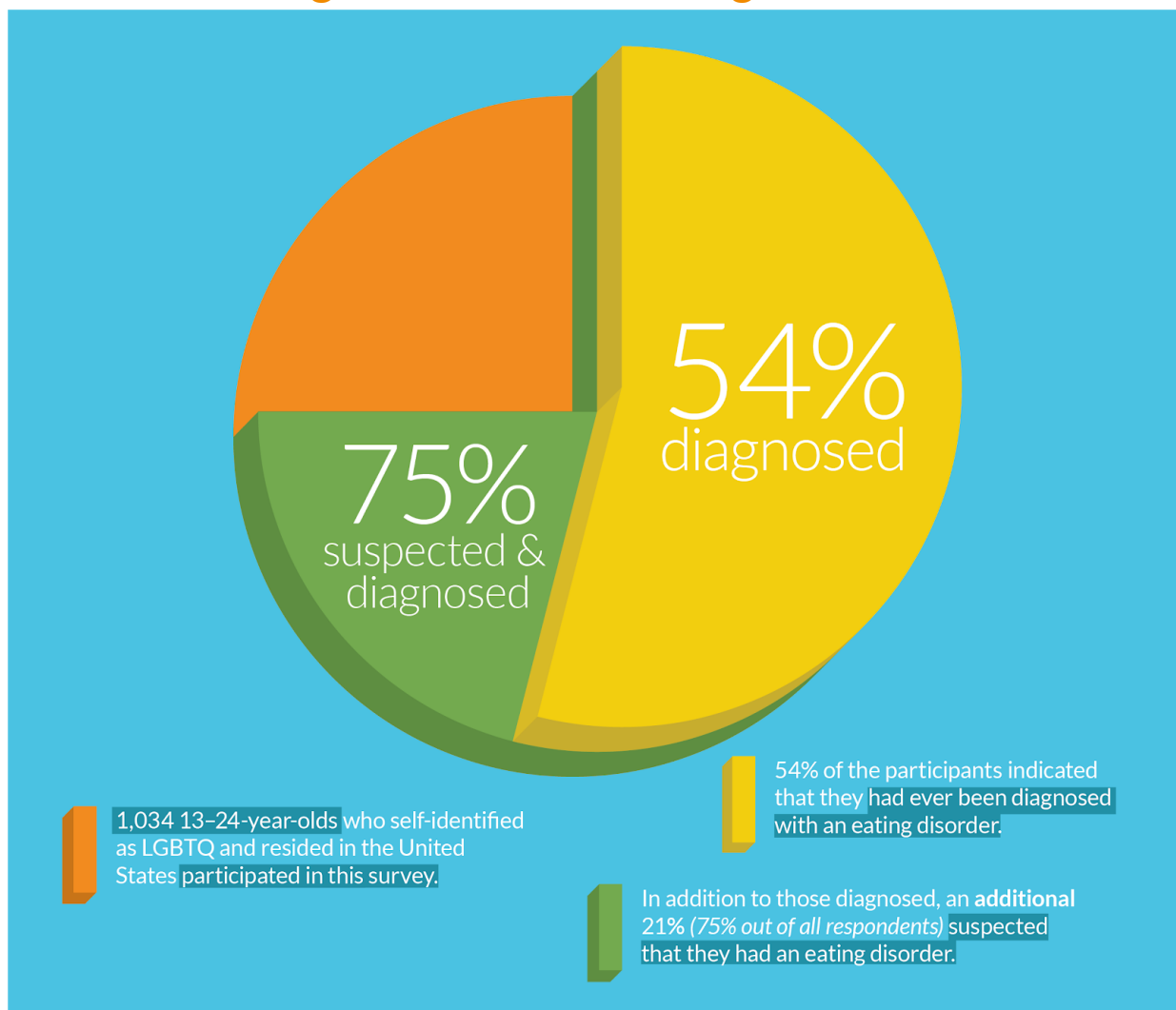
Amit Paley  
CEO & Executive Director  
The Trevor Project

# Prevalence of Eating Disorders in LGBTQ Youth

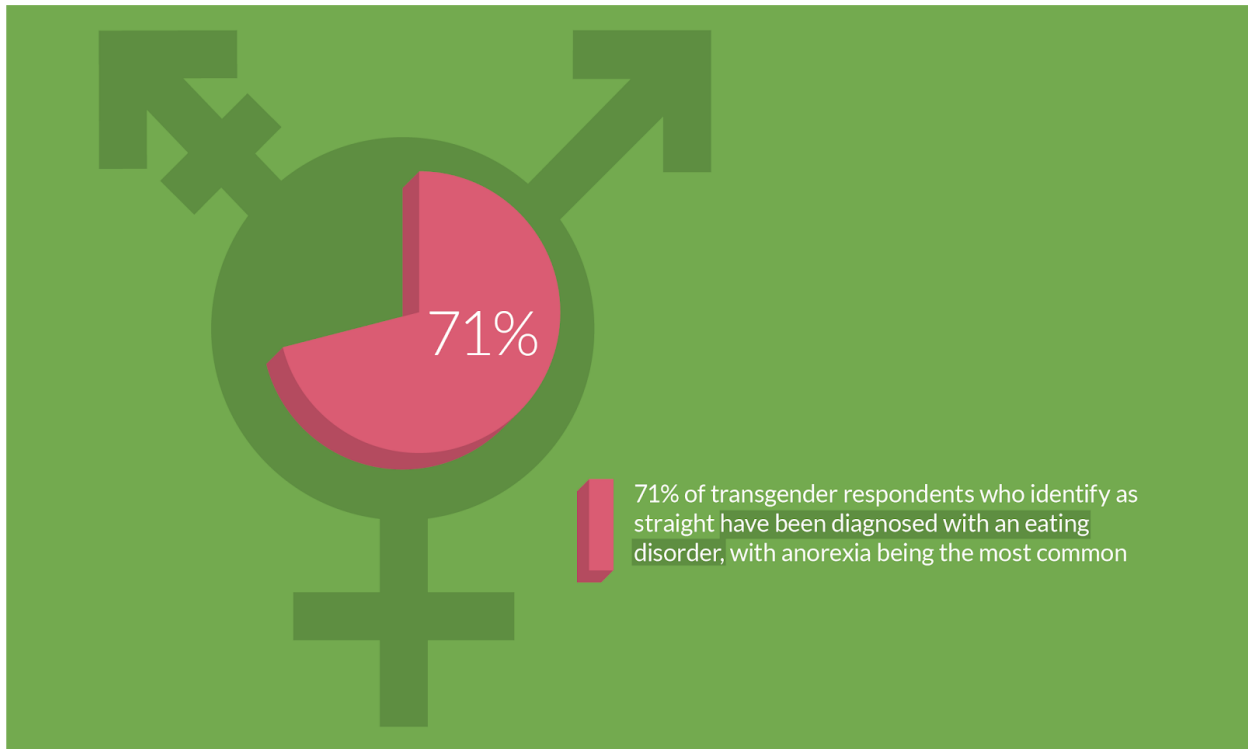
The survey found a high prevalence of eating disorders and disordered eating among LGBTQ youth:

- A majority of LGBTQ youth surveyed (54%) reported that they had ever been diagnosed with an eating disorder.
- Of the 46% of LGBTQ youth surveyed who had not been diagnosed with an eating disorder, 54% reported that they suspected that they had an undiagnosed eating disorder.

## Over Half of the LGBTQ Youth Surveyed Have Been Diagnosed with an Eating Disorder



## Trans Youth Are at a Disproportionate Risk



### We examined prevalence of eating disorders by gender identity and found the following:

- *Cisgender female LGBTQ youth had a higher prevalence of eating disorder diagnoses than any other gender identity in the survey. 54% of those who identified as female in the survey reported being diagnosed with an eating disorder, with bulimia being the most common diagnosis.*
- *Gender non-conforming and transgender male LGBTQ youth had the next highest rates of eating disorders, with 40% of LGBTQ youth who identified as gender non-conforming and genderqueer, and 39% who identified as transgender male reported being diagnosed with an eating disorder.*
- *Cisgender male and transgender female LGBTQ youth had lower rates of eating disorders than other gender identities, with 31% of cisgender male and 12% of transgender female LGBTQ youth reporting being diagnosed with eating disorders.*
- *Cisgender male, transgender male and gender non-conforming LGBTQ youth reported binge eating disorder as the most common eating disorder they were diagnosed with.*
- *Cisgender female and transgender female LGBTQ youth have reported bulimia as the most common eating disorder they were diagnosed with.*
- *Among those who identified as another gender identity, 60% had been diagnosed with an eating disorder with "other eating disorder" being the most common*

- 57% of those who identify as female who had never been diagnosed with an eating disorder suspected they had an eating disorder, with bulimia being the most common suspicion
  - Among those transgender females who had never been diagnosed, an additional 41% suspected that they had an eating disorder with anorexia being the most common.

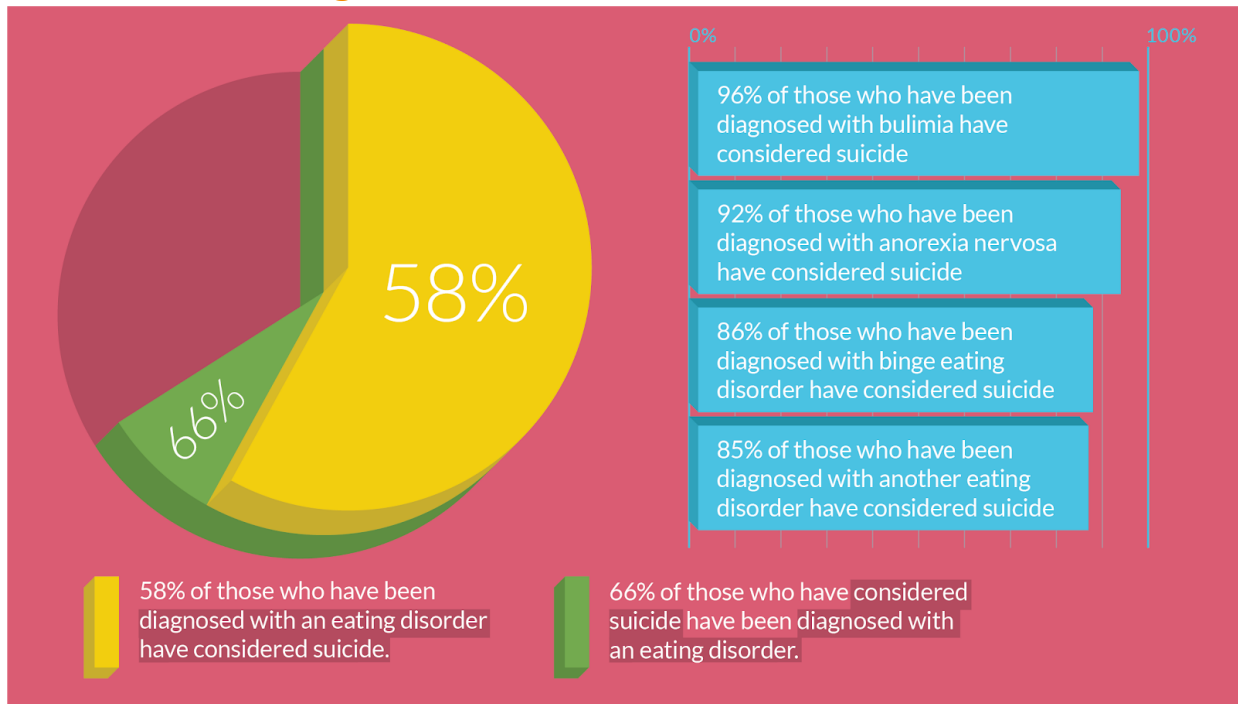
**We examined prevalence of eating disorders by sexual orientation and found the following:**

- *LGBTQ youth who identify as straight (i.e., straight and not cisgender) had higher rates of eating disorder diagnoses than other sexual orientations, 71% of those who identify as straight have been diagnosed with an eating disorder.*
- *Bisexual LGBTQ youth reported the next highest rates of eating disorder diagnoses, with 51% of those who identify as bisexual have been diagnosed with an eating disorder.*
- *Gay or lesbian LGBTQ youth had slightly lower rates, with 45% of those who identify as gay or lesbian have been diagnosed with an eating disorder.*
- *Of the LGBTQ youth surveyed who identify as other (Asexual, Pansexual, Demisexual, etc.) 35% have been diagnosed with an eating disorder, with anorexia being the most common.*
- *Overall, anorexia was the most common eating disorder for straight, bisexual and gay/lesbian LGBTQ youth.*

**Overall, we found the following in terms of common habits of disordered eating:**

- *Fasting, skipping meals and eating very little food were the most common habits of disordered eating across sexual orientations and gender identities.*
- *Making oneself throw up either sometimes or on a regular basis was significantly higher among those who identified as straight.*
- *Habits of disordered eating were lowest among those who identify as transfemale.*

## Eating Disorders and Suicidal Ideation



### We examined the relationship between suicidal ideation and eating disorders and found:

- A majority of LGBTQ youth (58%) who reported having been diagnosed with an eating disorder said they had considered suicide.
- LGBTQ youth who had been diagnosed with bulimia report having considered suicide at higher rates than those diagnosed with other eating disorders:
  - 96% of those who have been diagnosed with bulimia have considered suicide.
  - 92% of those who have been diagnosed with anorexia nervosa have considered suicide.
  - 86% of those who have been diagnosed with binge eating disorder have considered suicide.
  - 85% of those who have been diagnosed with another eating disorder have considered suicide.
- 66% of those who have considered suicide have been diagnosed with an eating disorder.
- 34% of those who have attempted suicide in the last 12 months have been diagnosed with an eating disorder.

# Methodology

This survey was conducted online within the United States by The Trevor Project with input from the National Eating Disorders Association and funding from Reasons Eating Disorder Center. The survey was fielded January 6 to February 2, 2018 among 1,034 13-24 year olds who self-identified as LGBTQ and resided in the United States. Respondents were defined as being LGBTQ if they identified with a sexual orientation other than straight/heterosexual, a gender identity other than cisgender, or both.

The survey methodology was approved by an Independent Institutional Review Board. Qualified respondents were recruited via the Internet and social media and completed a questionnaire of 97 questions, including demographic information, previous history of suicide or suicidal ideation, previous diagnosis of eating disorders, or engagement in disordered eating behaviors. A rigorous safety plan was in place to ensure the safety of all participants.

This online survey is not based on a probability sample and, therefore, no estimate of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

For complete survey methodology, please contact [Research@thetrevorproject.org](mailto:Research@thetrevorproject.org)

## Respondent Demographics

