

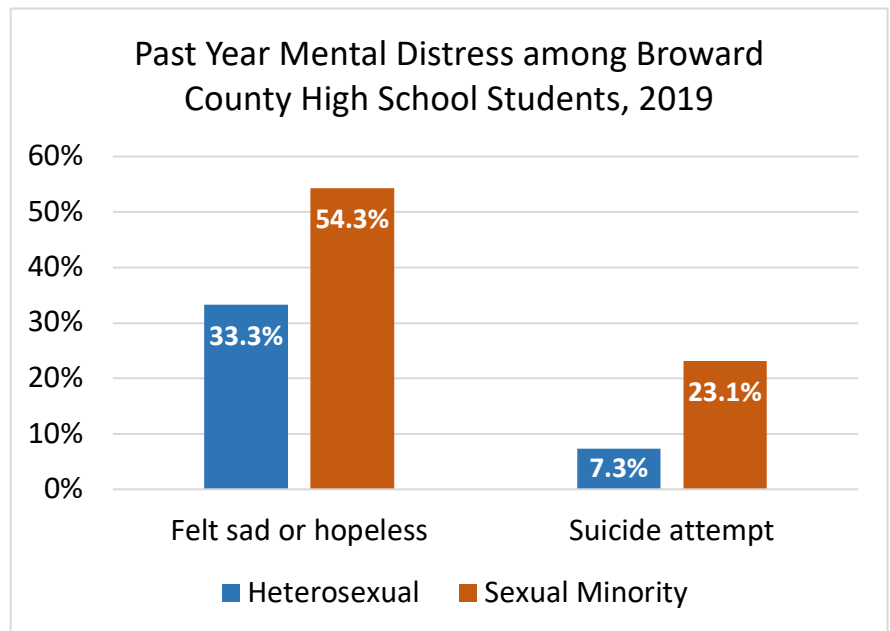
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Mental Distress and Suicide Attempts by Sexual Orientation among Broward County High School Students

Newly released data from the CDC's biennial Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) survey reveals that Broward County high school students identifying as gay, lesbian, or bisexual (sexual minority) have significantly higher levels of mental health problems than their peers and a more frequently reported past year mental distress and suicide attempts. Specifically, 54% of sexual minority students reported feeling sad or hopeless during the past year, compared to 33% of heterosexual students. Moreover, suicide attempts were three times higher for sexual minority students, compared to others. It is important to note that these data were collected in 2019 and reflect students' experiences prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sexual minority youth are also more likely to experience additional complications, including victimization, homelessness, and drug use. As noted in a companion Broward Briefing, sexual minority students in the county also reported greater lifetime use of drugs, including opioids, heroin, cocaine, and methamphetamine.

This constellation of problems likely requires more robust prevention and intervention efforts that address several factors related to mental health. Individuals working with youth populations, including teachers and clinicians, should be attentive to early warning signs of mental distress and consider how unique social stressors can impact the mental health of sexual minority students. Published guidelines emphasize first steps for intervention, including engagement with sexual minority youth through the creation of safe and supportive environments, and the use of mental health and substance use screenings.



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). 1991-2019 High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data. Available at <http://nccd.cdc.gov/youthonline/>. Accessed August 26, 2020; <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/fasd/features/teen-substance-use.html>.

Broward Briefings may be copied. Please cite United Way of Broward County Commission on Behavioral Health & Drug Prevention.