

RESEARCH BASED TEMPLATE

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Depression, anxiety, self-harm and suicidality in young adolescents: Associations with sexuality and gender diversity

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Background:

Mental health problems are more common in gender and sexuality diverse young people than in their cisgender heterosexual counterparts. However, little is known about associations with potentially modifiable contextual characteristics in gender and sexuality diverse adolescents under 15 years.

Methods:

Using baseline population cohort (Future Proofing Study) data, we compared mental health outcomes between heterosexual and sexuality diverse (SD) adolescents and between cisgender and gender diverse (GD) adolescents. These included self-reported recent (past-fortnight) depression symptoms (Patient Health Questionnaire for Adolescents); recent anxiety symptoms (Spence Children's Anxiety Scale); lifetime self-harm (Self-Harm Questionnaire); recent (past-year) suicidal ideation, plan, attempt (Youth Risk Behavior Survey); and current (past-month) suicidal ideation (Suicidal Ideation Attributes Scale). We used multivariate, multinomial logistic regression models, considering effects of modifiable contextual variables.

Results:

Of 6388 participants (M_{age} 13.9y), 12.0% (n=767) were SD; 3.3% were GD. In bivariate analysis, all outcomes were more common in SD than heterosexual participants and more common in GD than cisgender participants. After adjustment, SD remained associated with increased risk of all outcomes. GD remained associated with all but recent suicide attempt. In all models relating sexuality or gender diversity to anxiety or depression, hyperactivity, peer problems, being bullied, maladaptive social media use, and school connectedness were significant covariates. In all models relating sexuality or gender diversity to self-harm or suicidality, adverse childhood events, self-reported diagnosed mental health problems, conduct problems, and emotional problems were significant covariates. Positive family support was a significant covariate in all models of all outcomes except that relating sexuality diversity to anxiety.

Conclusion:

In this population study, sexuality or gender diverse young adolescents experienced marked disparities in mental health, which were attenuated after adjustment for individual characteristics and experiences. These findings can inform inclusive mental health interventions and prevention strategies, which are needed from at least early adolescence.

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Disclosure of Interest Statement:

The authors have no conflicts of interest to disclose.