

White Paper 21-001
LGBQ Latter-day Saints and Suicide
W. Justin Dyer, Ph.D.

Questions have arisen regarding suicide rates of LGBQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and questioning) individuals who are members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.¹ To date, no study has examined the suicide rates of LGBQ Latter-day Saints. Because U.S. states often do not capture the sexual orientation or religion of decedents, state and national statistics are unknown. That is, no data exist indicating whether the rate of suicide for LGBQ Latter-day Saints differs from others. In addition to suicide rates, “suicidality” is a measure which includes suicide thoughts, plans, and attempts. One study examined the suicidality of LGBQ Latter-day Saints and found the more religious LGBQ Latter-day Saints were, the lower their suicidality.² No studies have compared the suicidality of LGBQ Latter-day Saints to LGBQ non-Latter-day Saints.

This White Paper reports results of analyses of 86,346 Utah youth in 6th, 8th, 10th, and 12th grades, 7,205 of whom identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or “unsure” (i.e., questioning). These data were collected by the Utah Department of Human Services in 2019 and are referred to as the “SHARP” survey.³ Data contain information about sexual orientation, gender identity, and religion. Religions included in the survey were: Latter-day Saint, Protestant, Catholic, other religions (“other”), and no religion. In addition to those who identified as LGBQ, 51,189 identified as heterosexual and 28,132 did not respond to the question. Analyses used weights and cluster variables such that results are representative of all Utah youth in 6th, 8th, 10th, and 12th. Results are reported fully in this paper that has been accepted for publication.⁴

Statistically significant results were that Latter-day Saint LGBQ individuals were:

- lower in suicidal thoughts in the last 12 months than “other” religions and no religion
- lower in suicide attempts in the last 12 months than Catholics, “other” religions, and no religion
- lower in depression than all other religions and those of no religion

Table 1 and Table 2 display levels of suicidality and depression across religions.

These statistically significant differences, however, were largely explained (i.e., became statistically non-significant) by Latter-day Saint LGBQ individuals having, on average, stronger family connections and less substance use. Analyses also found differences were not due to Latter-day Saints having greater social integration in Utah. It was examined whether those who were missing data on sexual orientation were more similar in suicidality and depression to those who were heterosexual or those who identified as LGBQ. Those missing data on sexual orientation tracked closely (particularly for Latter-day Saints) with heterosexuals in suicidality and depression. See accepted paper⁵ for full details on significant differences.

¹ Prince, *Gay Rights and the Mormon Church*.

² Klundt et al., “Sexual Minorities, Mental Health, and Religiosity at a Religiously Conservative University.”

³ Utah Department of Human Services, “SHARP Survey.”

⁴ Dyer, Goodman, and Wood, “Religion and Sexual Orientation as Predictors of Utah Youth Suicidality.”

(<https://foundations.prod.brigham-young.psdops.com/pubs>)

⁵ Dyer, Goodman, and Wood.

Table 1

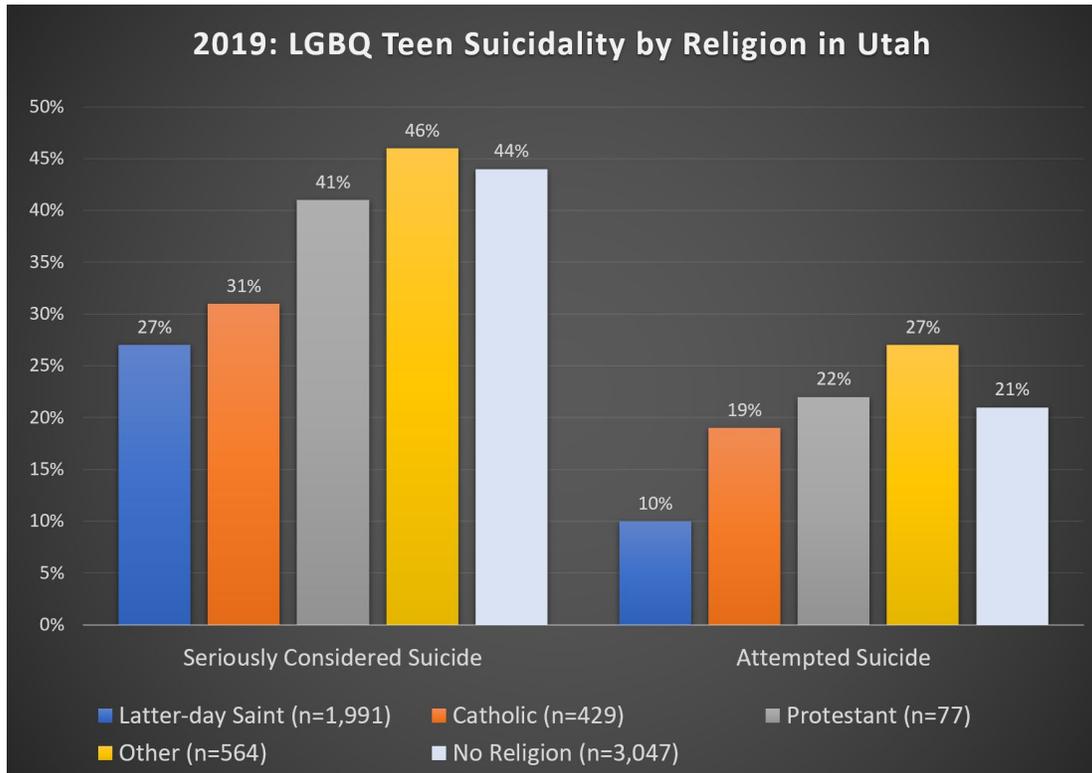
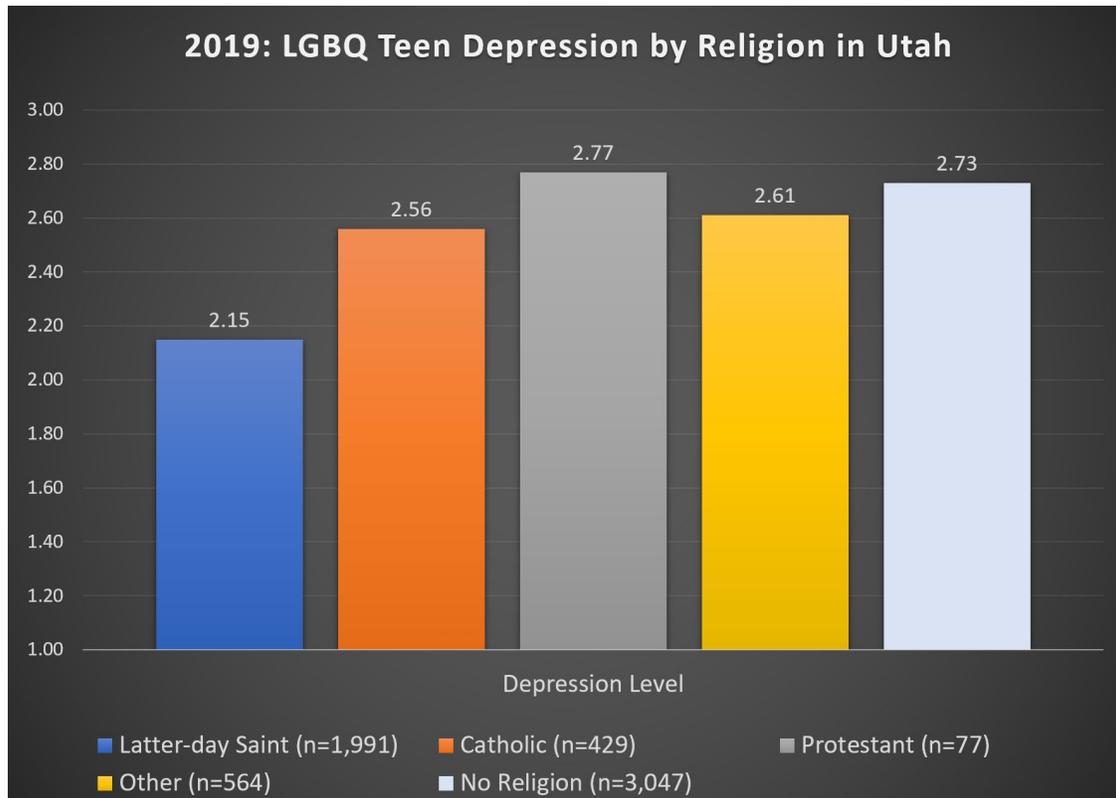


Table 2



It may be that those of “no religion” in Utah are disproportionately former Latter-day Saints. One reason LGBQ Latter-day Saints are lower in suicidality and depression may be because LGBQ individuals who are higher in suicidality and depression are more likely to have de-identified as Latter-day Saints. SHARP data does not contain information about prior religions. However, the Family Foundation of Youth Development (Foundations) project does (see <https://foundations.byu.edu/>).

Foundations data found that 60.5% of LGBQ Utah teens who identified as no religion had, at some point in their lives, identified as Latter-day Saint. Foundations data found 42.4% of former LGBQ Latter-day Saints had seriously considered suicide and 11.5% had attempted suicide. As supplementary analyses using SHARP data, 60.5% of LGBQ individuals of no religion were recoded Latter-day Saints with 42.4% of them having seriously considered suicide and 11.5% of them having attempted suicide. In other words, in the SHARP data, those of no religion who mirror statistics on former Latter-day Saints of no religion were counted as Latter-day Saints. These analyses found LGBQ Latter-day Saints (both current and estimated former Latter-day Saints) remained significantly lower in suicide ideation and suicide attempts than LGBQ individuals of no religion.

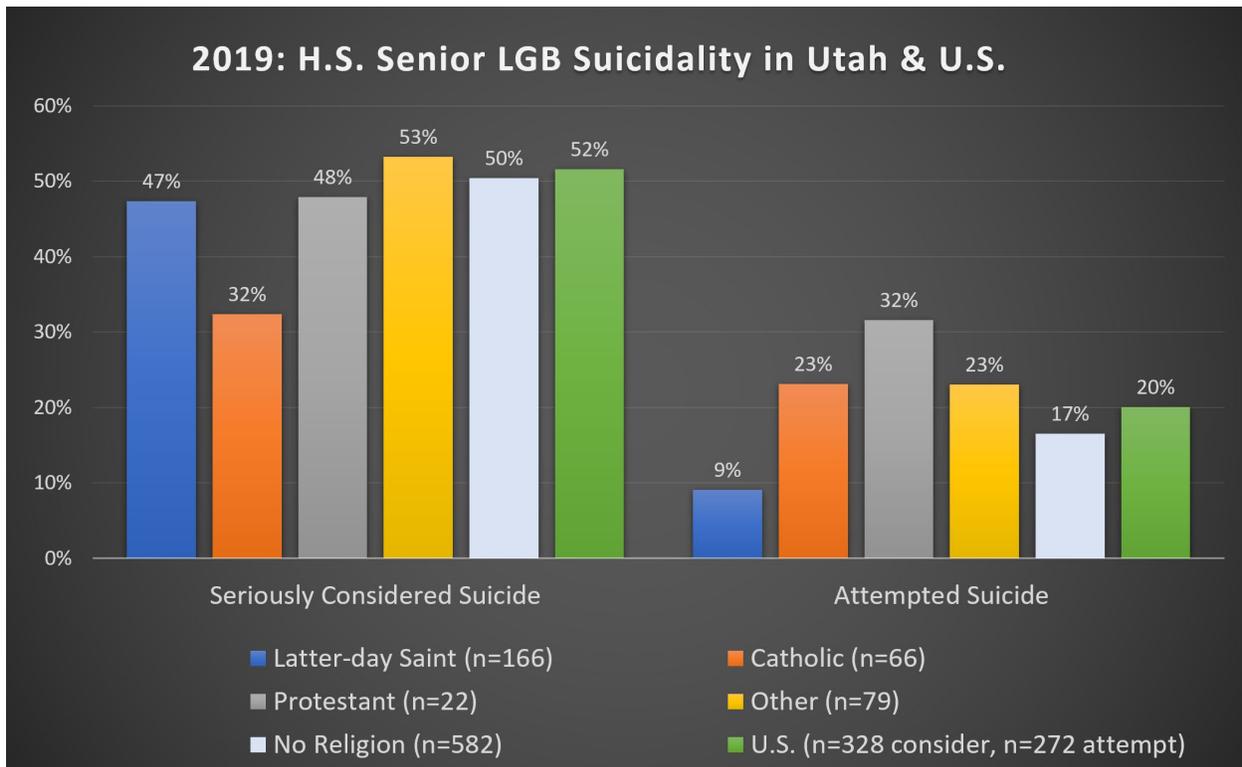
To test the sensitivity of these analyses they were repeated, gradually increasing the percentage of former LGBQ Latter-day Saints who had considered or attempted suicide. These analyses found that the likelihood of LGBQ individuals of no religion being higher on both considering suicide and suicide attempts than combined current and former Latter-day Saints is very small (1.4%).

However, the decision whether to combine both current and former LGBQ Latter-day Saints in estimating differences in LGBQ Latter-day Saint suicidality is a conceptual one and should be made with caution as it obscures differences in those who continued to identify and those who deidentified as Latter-day Saint.

Centers for Disease Control Comparison

Comparisons can also be made to national statistics. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) studies suicidality of teens nationwide. Comparisons between the Utah SHARP data and national CDC data can be made by restricting the sample in the SHARP to LGB High School Seniors. Table 3 contains results of raw percentages. In Utah, across religions, rates of considering suicide were similar to national statistics, though Catholics were particularly low. For suicide attempts, Utah rates were similar to national statistics, though Latter-day Saints were particularly low.

Table 3



The CDC’s analyses examine LGB individuals but do not include those who are questioning. To mirror CDC definitions, analyses within the accepted paper were conducted again using only LGB individuals (omitting questioning individuals). Results largely held, though there were fewer differences between Latter-day Saints and those of any other religion or no religion. Any significant differences were explained by demographics and family connections.⁶

Summary

To date, no studies have examined how LGBQ Latter-day Saints may differ from LBGQ non-Latter-day Saints in their suicide rates. Regarding suicidality (thoughts and attempts), one study found the more religious LGBQ Latter-day Saints were, the lower their suicidality. The paper accepted for publication found LGBQ Latter-day Saints lower in suicidality and depression than those of other religions and no religion. These differences were explained by LGBQ Latter-day Saints, on average, having stronger family connections and less substance use/abuse. Further

⁶ With no controls, Latter-day Saint LGB individuals were less likely to have attempted suicide than those of “other” religions and those of no religion. However, these significant differences became non-significant when controlling for demographics and family connection. Without controls, Latter-day Saints LGB individuals were lower in depression than those of no religion, though this difference became non-significant when adding demographics and family connection. In other words, any benefit of being Latter-day Saint was explained by basic demographics and greater family connections.

analyses find it unlikely differences are due to former LGBQ Latter-day Saints being (possibly) higher in suicidality. Compared to LGB teens nationwide, Utah LGB Latter-day Saints were comparable though proportions of suicidality were somewhat lower for Utah LGB Latter-day Saints.

Findings from the above analyses are in line with the overall literature on religiosity and the well-being of LGBQ individuals. A meta-analysis of 73 studies on the topic found religiosity related to greater wellbeing of LGBQ individuals.⁷ Thus, results of analyses reported here are in concert with overall findings in the research literature.

⁷ Lefevor et al., “The Relationship between Religiousness and Health among Sexual Minorities.”