

Health & Well-Being in Western North Carolina

A Report of the 2021 Southern LGBTQ Experiences Survey

May 2023



The Survey of Southern LGBTQ Experiences is a project of the Southern Equality Research & Policy Center and Campus Pride. The survey, conducted in 2021, highlights the experiences of more than 4,000 LGBTQ adults across 13 states in the US Southeast. To learn more about the survey, including our methodology, visit www.southernequality.org/comingofagesurvey

This special report focuses on respondents to the 2021 Survey of Southern LGBTQ Experiences who live in Western North Carolina.

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Campaign for Southern Equality

works across the South to promote full LGBTQ equality – both legal and lived. Our work is rooted in commitments to empathy and to equity in race, class, and gender. www.southernequality.org

Campus Pride

Campus Pride is the leading national nonprofit organization dedicated to building future leaders and creating safer, more inclusive communities for LGBTQ people and allies at colleges and universities. www.campuspride.org

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www.southernequality.org/ComingofAge#WNC



Coming of Age as an LGBTQ Southerner

About the 2021 Southern LGBTQ Experiences Survey

The 2021 Southern LGBTQ Experiences Survey is a project of the Southern Equality Research & Policy Center and Campus Pride. The overall survey highlights the experiences of 4,146 LGBTQ adults across 13 states. Population estimates suggest more than one-third of the LGBTQ community in the US resides in the South (Williams Institute 2019), where they are likely to have fewer legal protections and face more anti-LGBTQ policies than their peers in other parts of the country (Harless et al. 2019; Johnson et al. 2020; Movement Advancement Project 2022).

The goal of the survey was to better understand the lived experiences of LGBTQ people across social contexts. The self-administered survey, developed in 2021 by a team of sociologists, political scientists, and community organizers, was completed online between August 3 and December 20, 2021. The survey included demographic questions as well as questions related to home and family, faith and spirituality, school and education, and health and well-being. The survey was available in both English and Spanish. Recruitment took place online through targeted social media advertisements. Our team also hired community research ambassadors to promote the survey to LGBTQ people in their networks throughout the region.

Survey participants represent a variety of experiences and backgrounds. Each of the 13 Southern states had at least 100 participants. The average age for the sample is 28 years and over half of the sample (56.23%) is 24 years old or younger. Racially, the sample identifies as White (87.19%), Black (6.76%), multiracial (5.52%), Native American or Alaskan Native (1.77%), Middle Eastern or North African (0.56%), Asian or Pacific Islander (1.92%), or elected to self-describe (1.73%), and 10.15% of the sample is Hispanic. Just under 30% of the sample (29.32%) are transgender, and 26.07% of respondents are nonbinary. The most reported sexual orientations in the sample are bisexual (32.07%), queer (27.75%), lesbian (22.10%), and gay (20.30%).



Introduction

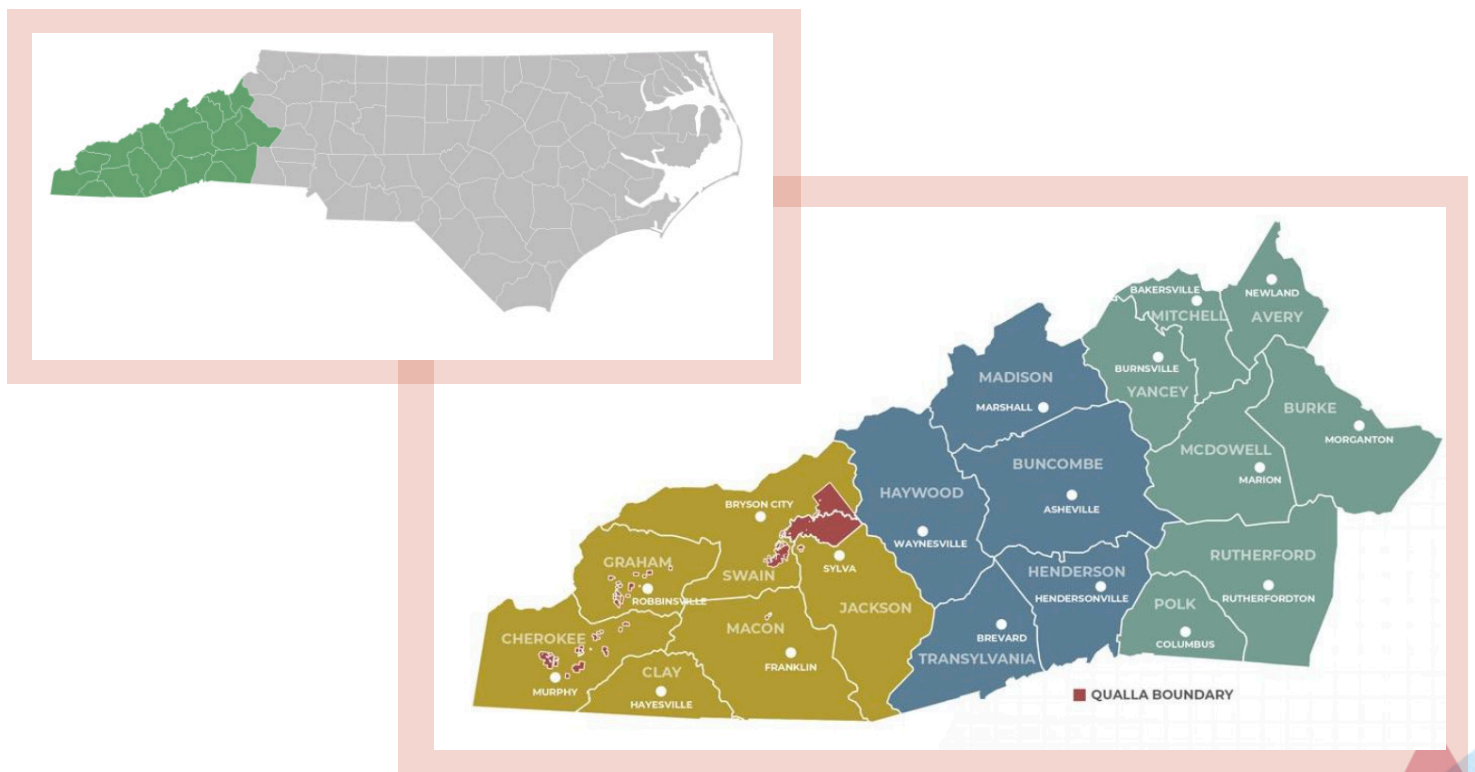
The South is home to more than one-third of the LGBTQ community in the country (Conron and Goldberg 2020), and has fewer legal protections and more anti-LGBTQ policies than other regions (Movement Advancement Project 2022). North Carolina, in particular, is home to an estimated 319,000 LGBTQ adults; 44,750 of which are estimated to be transgender (Conron and Goldberg 2020a).

The 2021 Southern LGBTQ Experiences Survey documents the experiences of 4,146 LGBTQ people in thirteen states across the region, including Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia.

This report highlights the experiences of 165 LGBTQ people in Western North Carolina (WNC). This Appalachian Mountain Region includes the following 18 counties: Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Cherokee, Clay, Graham,

Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Swain, Transylvania, and Yancey. The region also includes the Qualla Boundary, federally recognized land that is the territory of the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians.

Currently, only 6 counties and 18 cities in North Carolina have local protections for sexual orientation and gender identity. Of the eighteen counties in Western North Carolina, Buncombe is the only county, and Asheville the only city, to include local protections for sexual orientation and gender identity. And, North Carolina currently enforces a number of anti-LGBT equality laws and policies at the State level (Human Rights Campaign 2022). Based on the findings of this report, more resources are needed to support the LGBTQ population in this region.

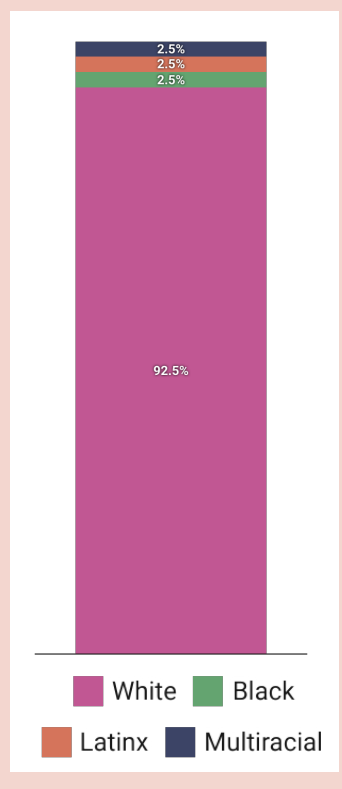


Demographics of the WNC Sample

Race

The majority of respondents from WNC identified their race as White (92.5%). Among the 7.5% of LGBTQ Western North Carolinians who did not identify their race as white, 2.5% identified as Black, 2.5% identified as Latinx, and 2.5% identified as multiracial.

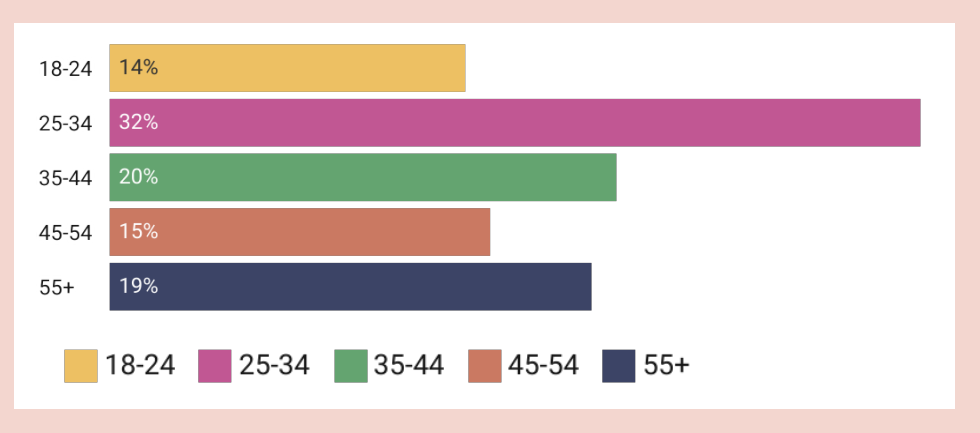
Figure 1: Racial Identification Among WNC Participants



Age

Western North Carolina participants ranged in age from 18 to 80 years. The average age across these individuals was 40.3 years old. The most common age was 31 years old. The most reported age range was 25-34 years old (32%) at the time of the survey. The least reported age range was that of 18-24 years old accounting for 14% of responses.

Figure 2: Age Distribution of WNC Participants



Sexual Orientation

Participants were given the opportunity to select all of the sexual orientation labels that they use to describe themselves. WNC participants most often (55%) identified as Bi+ (i.e., bisexual, queer, or pansexual). The second most common sexual orientation among WNC participants was Lesbian (25%). The third most common was gay (11%). Of the remaining 8% of participants from WNC, 7% identified as asexual and 1% identified as straight.

Figure 3: Sexual Orientations Among WNC Participants



Gender Identity

Participants from WNC were most likely to identify as women (48%) or as a nonbinary gender identity (35%) including nonbinary, genderqueer, agender, or genderfluid. The remaining 17% of participants from WNC identified as men.

Among the WNC participants, 29% identified with a transgender identity and 7% were questioning a trans identification.

Figure 4: Gender Distribution of WNC Participants

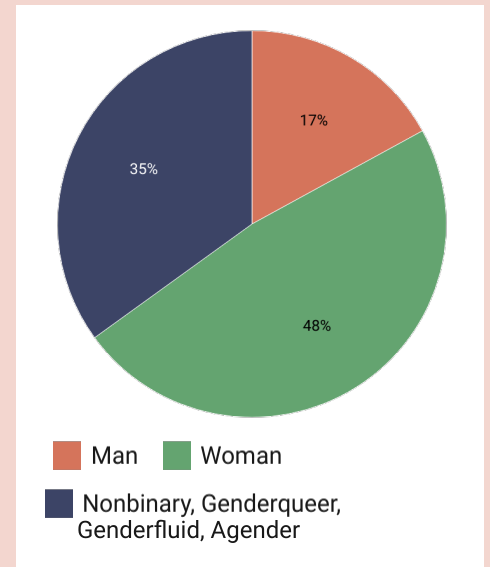
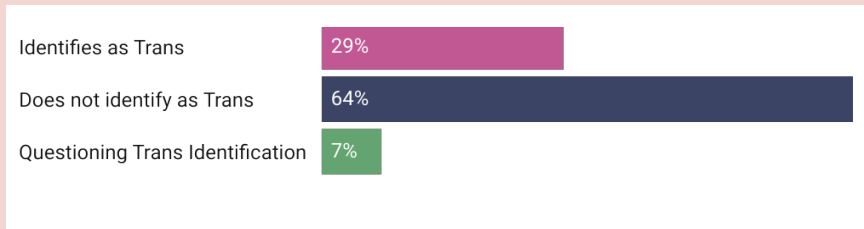


Figure 5: Gender Identity of WNC Participants



Education

Participants from WNC have a high level of educational attainment with more than two-thirds of participants in the region earning at least a Bachelor's degree. Among participants from WNC, 29% have earned a Bachelor's Degree, 25% have earned a Master's Degree, 10% have earned a Doctoral Degree, and 4% have earned a professional degree such as a JD or MD.

Income

More than a quarter of WNC participants qualify as "low-income," with 26% earning less than \$20,000 per year and more than half earning less than \$40,000 per year. Of the remaining 47% of participants, 18% reported earning between \$40,000 and \$60,000 per year, 12% reported earning between \$60,000 and \$80,000 per year, and 17% reported earning more than \$80,000 per year.

Figure 6: Educational Attainment of WNC Participants

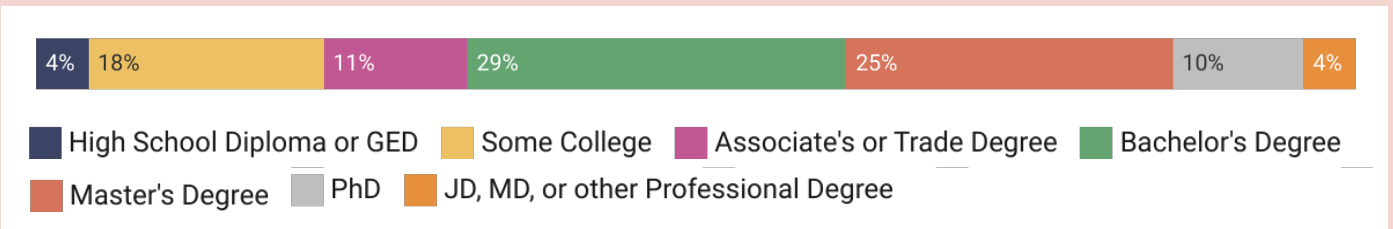
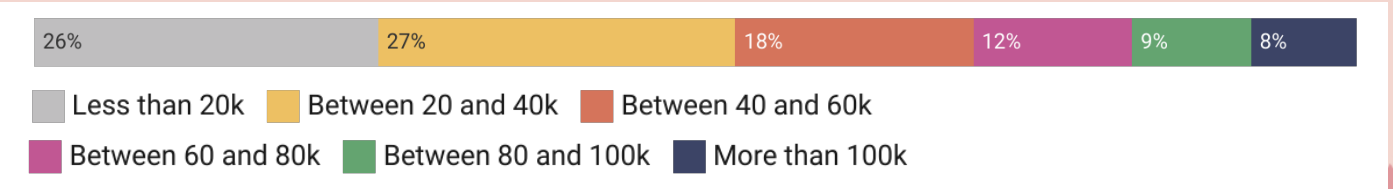


Figure 7: Income Distribution of WNC Participants



LGBTQ+ Health in Western North Carolina

Self-Reported Physical & Mental Health

To measure participants' physical and mental health, we asked them to offer a self-reported rating of both dimensions of their health. On a scale from Poor to Excellent, participants in Western North Carolina who responded to this question most often gave a self-reported physical health rating of Fair (49%) or Good (37%), and a self-reported mental health rating of Fair (50%) or Poor (22%).

Figure A: Self-Reported Physical & Mental Health of LGBTQ People in WNC



Physical Health Experiences

To better understand participants' experiences of health, we asked if they were living with a disability or chronic illness, and in a separate question we asked if they are living with HIV. Among participants from WNC, 43% indicated that they are living with a disability or chronic illness, and 2% indicated that they are living with HIV. We also asked participants about their exercise habits, specifically asking them to report the number of days per week that they engaged in at least 30-minutes of sustained physical activity. Participants' responses to this question varied, with 17% indicating zero days, 36% indicating 1-2 days, 29% indicating 3-4 days, 14% indicating 5-6 days, and 4% indicating that they exercised 7 days per week.

Figure 4: Gender Distribution of WNC Participants

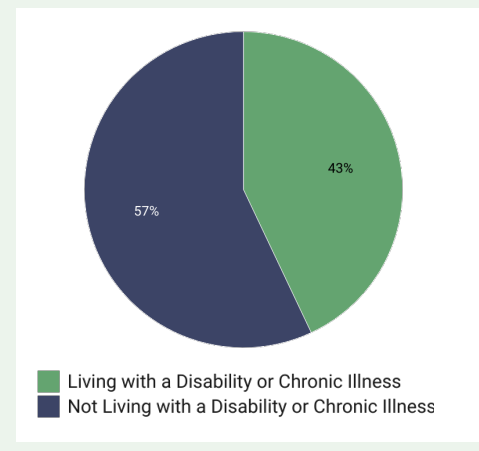
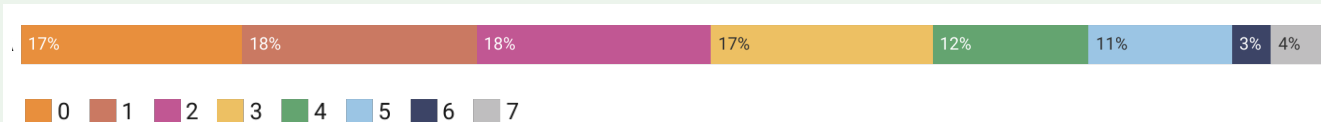


Figure C: Exercise Habits of Participants in WNC



Mental Health Experiences

In order to better understand participants' experiences of mental health, we asked participants to report if they had any of the following mental health experiences in the 12 months prior to the survey: suicidal ideation, suicide attempt, self-harming behaviors, disordered eating, isolation from support network, or hospitalization due to mental health for their own safety. Of the participants who responded to this question, 59% reported experiencing suicidal ideation, 11% reported attempting suicide, 27% reported engaging in self-harming activities, 45% reported disordered eating, 65% reported self-isolating from their support network, and 7% reported being hospitalized for their mental health.

Figure D: Recent Mental Health Experiences of LGBTQ People in WNC

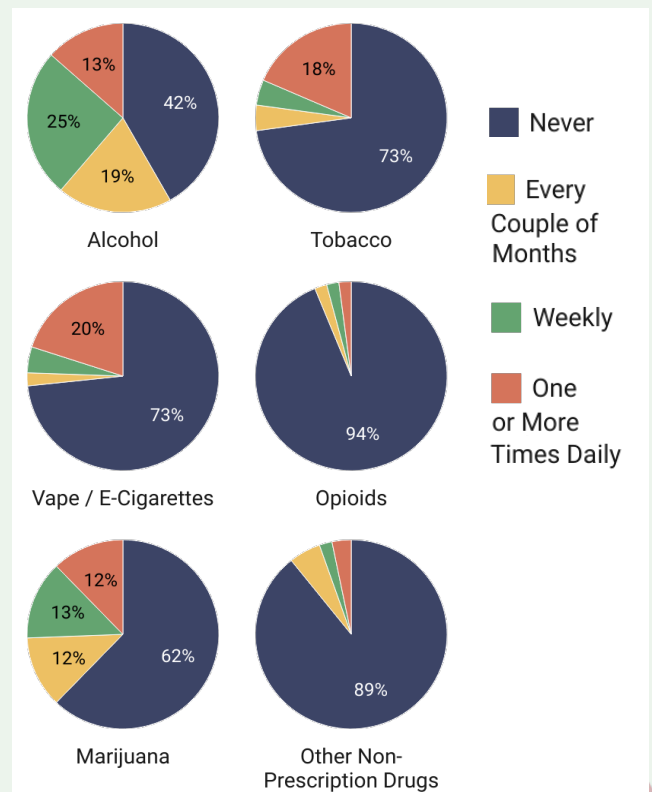


Alcohol, Tobacco, and Substance Use

Finally, we asked participants to report their experiences of substance use in the six months prior to the survey, with attention to the following substances: tobacco products, vapes and e-cigarettes, alcohol, marijuana, opioids, and other non-prescription recreational drugs.

When asked about their alcohol intake, 28% of the participants who responded to this question reported that they never consume alcohol, and 9% indicated that they consume alcohol at least once per day. Of the participants who responded to this question, more than half have never used tobacco (67%) or vape/e-cigarettes (66%), opioids (91%), marijuana (51%), or other non-prescription drugs (83%). A small portion of participants who responded to this question reported using these substances at least once per day: tobacco (17%); vape/e-cigarettes (18%); opioids (2%); marijuana (10%); other non-prescription drugs (3%).

Figure E: Alcohol, Tobacco & Substance Use Among LGBTQ People in WNC



Avoidance of Care & Experiences of Healthcare Discrimination

In order to understand participants' experiences seeking and receiving care, we first asked participants how much they agree or disagree with the following statements: I have avoided healthcare due to fear of mistreatment; and, I have avoided healthcare due to fear of being denied treatment. Among those who responded to these questions, 40% reported that they somewhat or strongly agreed that they had avoided healthcare due to fear of mistreatment, and 40% somewhat or strongly agreed that they had avoided healthcare due to fear of being denied treatment.

When asked if they have ever experienced discrimination in a healthcare setting, 15% reported that they had experienced healthcare discrimination.

Additionally, when asked if they had received support for their LGBTQ identity from a doctor or mental health professional, 11% reported that a doctor had supported them and 35% reported that a mental health professional had supported them.

Figure F: Avoidance of Healthcare Due to Fear of Being Denied Treatment

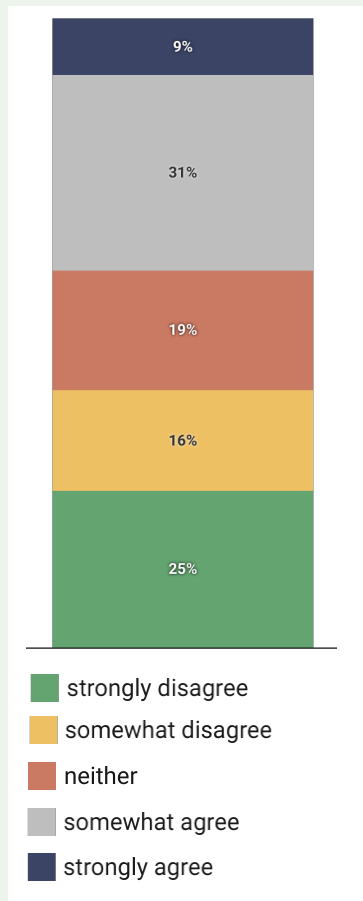


Figure G: Avoidance of Healthcare Due to Fear of Mistreatment

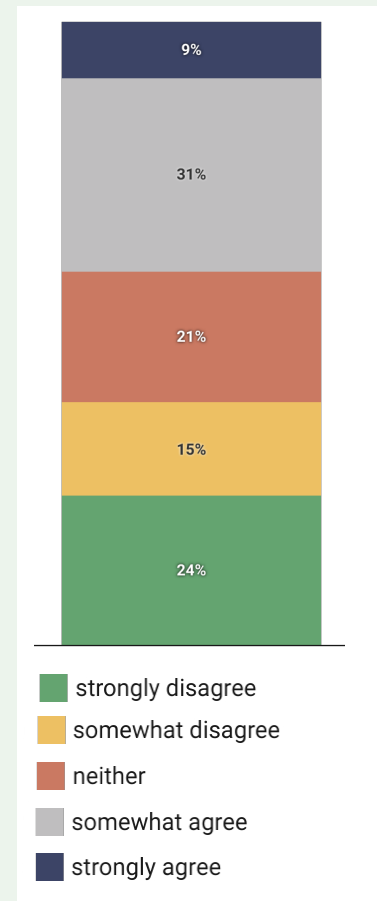


Figure H: Experiences of Healthcare Discrimination

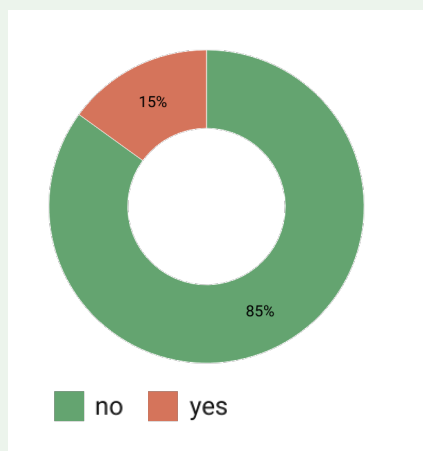
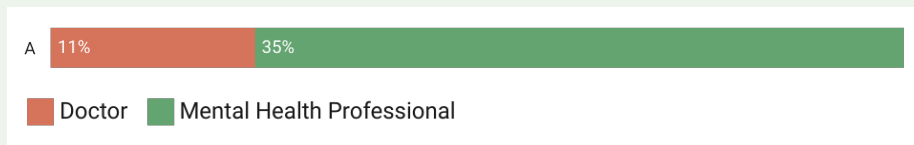


Figure I: Experiences Receiving Support from a Provider for LGBTQ Identity



Access to Social Support for LGBTQ Identity

We asked participants to report who in their life provided them support for their LGBTQ identity while growing up. The most reported source of support was a mental health professional, yet only 35% of participants reported receiving support from this source. Among those who responded to this question, 27% reported receiving support from a parent; 23% reported receiving support from a family member; 17% reported receiving support from a teacher; 11% reported receiving support from a spiritual faith leader; 11% reported receiving support from a doctor; and only 5% reported receiving support from a club advisor.

Unfortunately, 39% of respondents from Western North Carolina reported that no one supported them in their LGBTQ identity growing up.

Additionally, we asked participants if they currently have someone that they can talk to about LGBTQ issues; and, if they feel socially isolated as a result of their LGBTQ identity. Among those who responded to this question, most participants somewhat or strongly agreed that they have someone to talk to related to their LGBTQ identity (91%), but 26% of participants somewhat or strongly agreed that they feel socially isolated due to their LGBTQ identity.

Figure J: Sources of Support for LGBTQ Identity

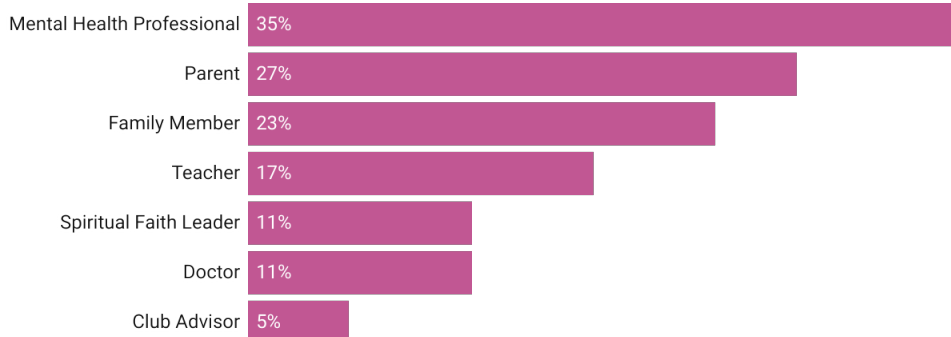


Figure K: Absence of Support for LGBTQ Identity

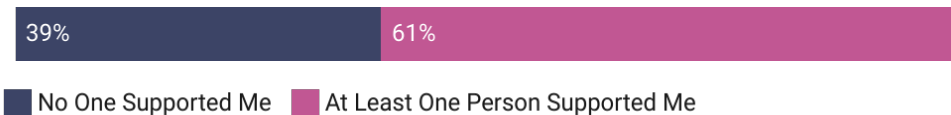


Figure M: Social Isolation Due to LGBTQ Identity

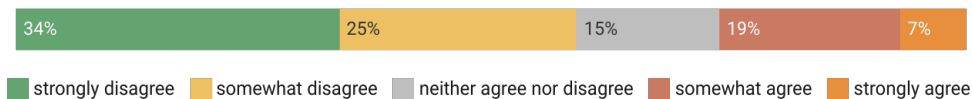
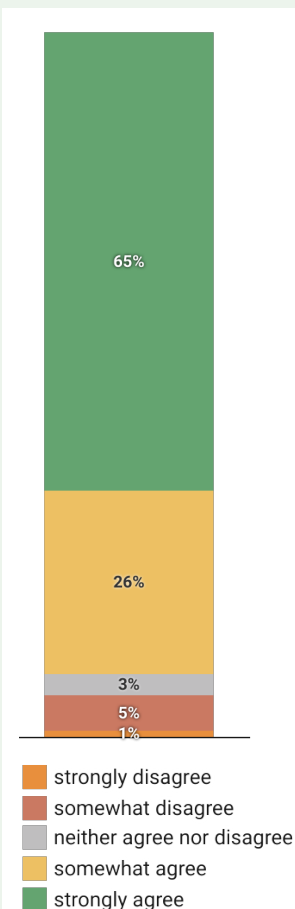


Figure L: Current Support for LGBTQ Identity



Efforts to Repress or Change LGBTQ Identity

We asked participants to report if they had experienced efforts to repress or change their LGBTQ identity, sometimes referred to as conversion efforts. Among participants who responded to this question, only 27% did not experience these efforts. For participants who did experience these efforts, 45% were pressured and 5% were forced to change their LGBTQ identity.

Participants who experienced efforts to repress or change their LGBTQ identity most often reported that the source of these efforts was a parent or caregiver (39%). Other reported sources of these efforts were spiritual or faith leaders (26%), other relatives (22%), siblings (14%), and counselors or mental health providers (4%).

A majority of participants (93%) indicated that they considered any efforts to change or repress LGBTQ identity to be harmful for LGBTQ people, with 63% indicating that these efforts are extremely harmful and 30% indicating that these efforts are somewhat harmful.

Figure N: Efforts to Repress or Change LGBTQ Identity

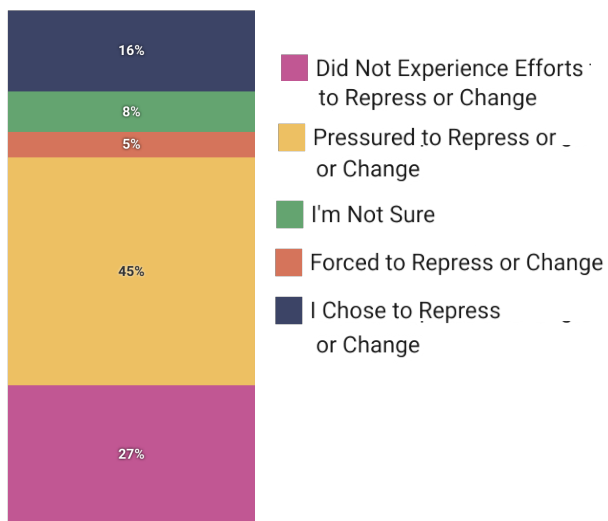


Figure P: Impacts of Efforts to Repress or Change LGBTQ Identity

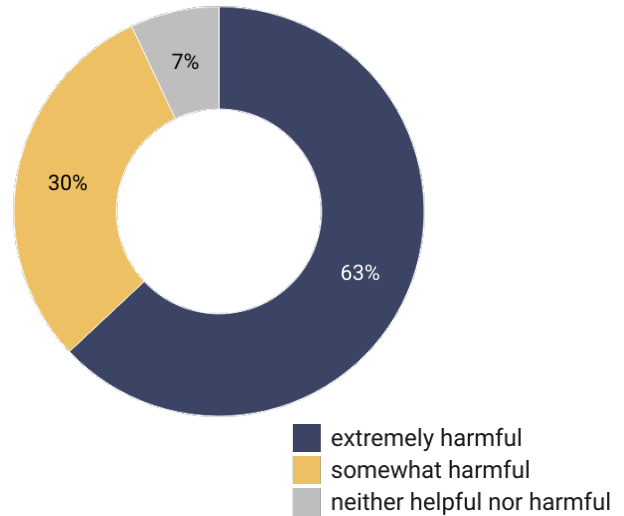
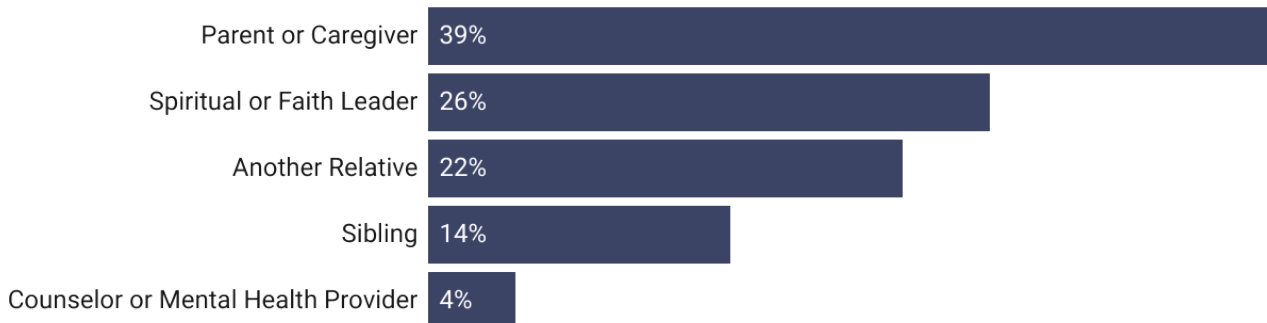


Figure O: Source of Efforts to Repress or Change LGBTQ Identity



Experiences of Violence & Discrimination Related to LGBTQ Identity

To further understand the experiences of LGBTQ people in the region, we asked them to report if they had ever experienced physical or emotional/verbal violence that was related to their LGBTQ identity. A quarter of participants reported that they had experienced physical violence, and more than three-quarters (80%) reported that they had experienced emotional/verbal violence related to their LGBTQ identity.

We also asked participants to report whether they had experienced social or institutional discrimination related to their LGBTQ identity across a variety of social contexts. Only 27% of participants reported that they had never experienced social or institutional discrimination related to their LGBTQ identity. The most common context wherein participants reported experiencing discrimination was related to Hiring or Employment (24%), followed by healthcare (15%).

Figure Q: Experiences of Violence Related to LGBTQ Identity

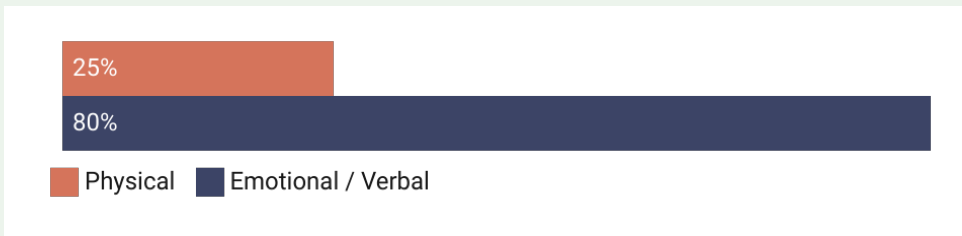
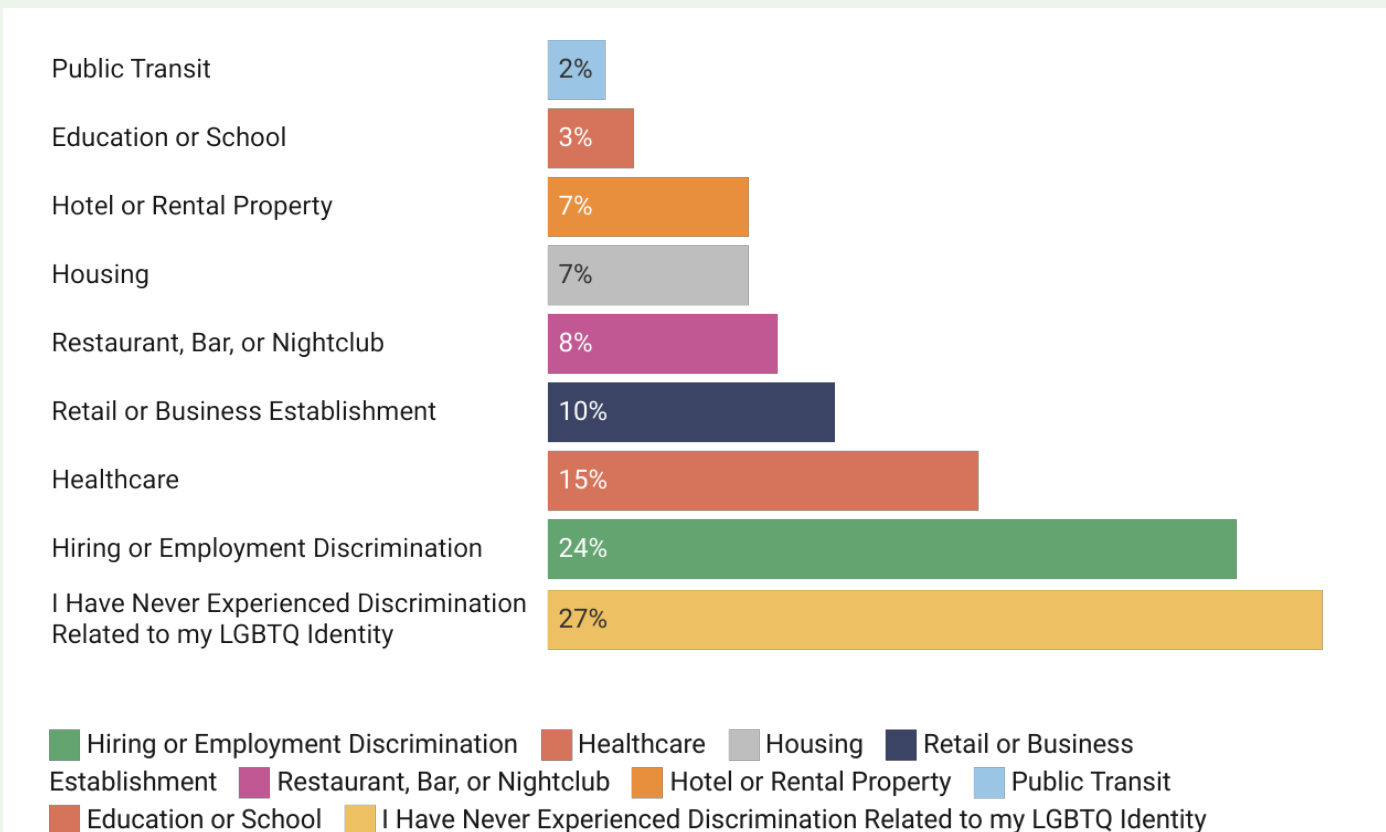


Figure O: Source of Efforts to Repress or Change LGBTQ Identity



North Carolinians' Guide to Supporting LGBTQ+ People



Make sure you are registered to vote in North Carolina.

Register or check your registration status at www.vote.org



Contact your North Carolina state lawmakers and urge them to protect LGBTQ+ North Carolinians by voting against legislative discrimination.

Find your lawmakers and their contact information: www.openstates.org/find_your_legislator



Get to know North Carolina's political landscape and stay up to date on all issues affecting LGBTQ people in North Carolina.

Check out the Movement Advancement Project: www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/profile_state/NC



Get involved in the NC is Ready campaign: This coalition, led by Equality NC and the Campaign for Southern Equality, is committed to defeating anti-LGBTQ+ legislative attacks and promoting inclusive nondiscrimination protections in communities across North Carolina. Learn more at www.ncisready.org.



Stay up to date on anti-LGBTQ+ bills that are being filed in North Carolina

Follow a tracker, like the one at ACLU: www.aclu.org/legislative-attacks-on-lgbtq-rights



Support the work of local LGBTQ advocacy organizations working in North Carolina, including the organizations on the next page.

Resources for LGBTQ+ People in Western NC

Asheville's Gay Men's Chorus

www.ashevillegaymenschorus.org

Asheville Lesbian Social Club

www.meetup.com/asheville-lesbian-social-club

Blue Ridge Pride Center

www.blueridgepride.org

butchOUT

www.Butchout.org

Campaign for Southern Equality

www.southernequality.org

Cornbread and Roses

www.cornbreadroses.com

Hendersonville LGBTQ+ Social Group

www.meetup.com/HendersonvilleLGBTQ

Hendersonville Pride

www.hendersonvillepride.org

MAHEC's Gender Health Clinic

www.mahec.net/family-health/gender-health-clinic

PFLAG - Asheville

www.pflagasheville.org

PFLAG Hendersonville/ Flat Rock

www.pflaghendersonville@gmail.com

Phoenix Transgender Support

www.Phoenixtgs.weebly.com

Sylva Pride

www.sylvancpride.org/

Tranzmission

www.tranzmission.org

Western North Carolina Community Health Services

www.wncchs.org

Western North Carolina Aids Project

www.wncap.org

Youth OUTright

www.youthoutright.org