



# Mental Health among LGBTQ Mississippians

Findings from a statewide needs assessment study

## Methods and Data

Findings reported in this brief are taken from a statewide needs assessment study conducted in 2018 among self-identified sexual and gender minority Mississippians. Data were collected using a web-based survey that was designed by the research team using both extant survey items and using preliminary findings from a statewide collection of LGBTQ focus groups. The survey was distributed to a convenience sample of LGBTQ Mississippians - at present, no population level data are available for LGBTQ Mississippians and a probability sample is therefore not possible. The initial pool of participants was recruited through targeted social networking advertisement,

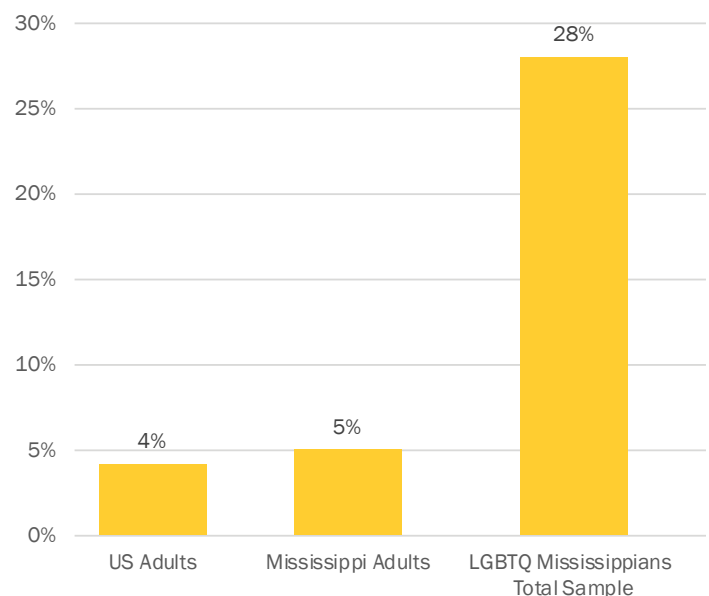
membership lists of participating LGBTQ groups in Mississippi, and through in-person recruitment at LGBTQ-targeted events occurring during the study period. Sponsored advertisements were posted to targeted audiences in Mississippi via Facebook in an effort to reach as wide a cross-section of Mississippi's LGBTQ population as possible. The final dataset includes responses from 500 LGBTQ Mississippians across 51 Mississippi counties. To the knowledge of the research team, this constitutes the largest dataset of LGBTQ Mississippians collected as of the date of publication.

## Prevalence of Mental Health Concerns

Respondents were also asked to respond to 6 items that form a scale for detecting potential serious mental illness (SMI). The Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K6) has been used extensively to detect SMI in the general population in many empirical research studies.<sup>1,2,3</sup>

Among our sample, almost one-third (28%, n = 143) of respondents yielded scores at or above the threshold indicating possible SMI. This finding is in stark contrast with the rate of SMI among the general population, with the average prevalence of SMI at 4.2% among adults in the U.S.<sup>4</sup> and 5% among adults in Mississippi.<sup>5</sup> This finding indicates that this sample of LGBTQ Mississippians report serious mental health problems about six times more often than the general population. Figure 6 below illustrates the prevalence of SMI among our sample compared to adults in the general populations of Mississippi and United States.

Figure 1: Kessler-6 Estimated Prevalence of Serious Mental Illness

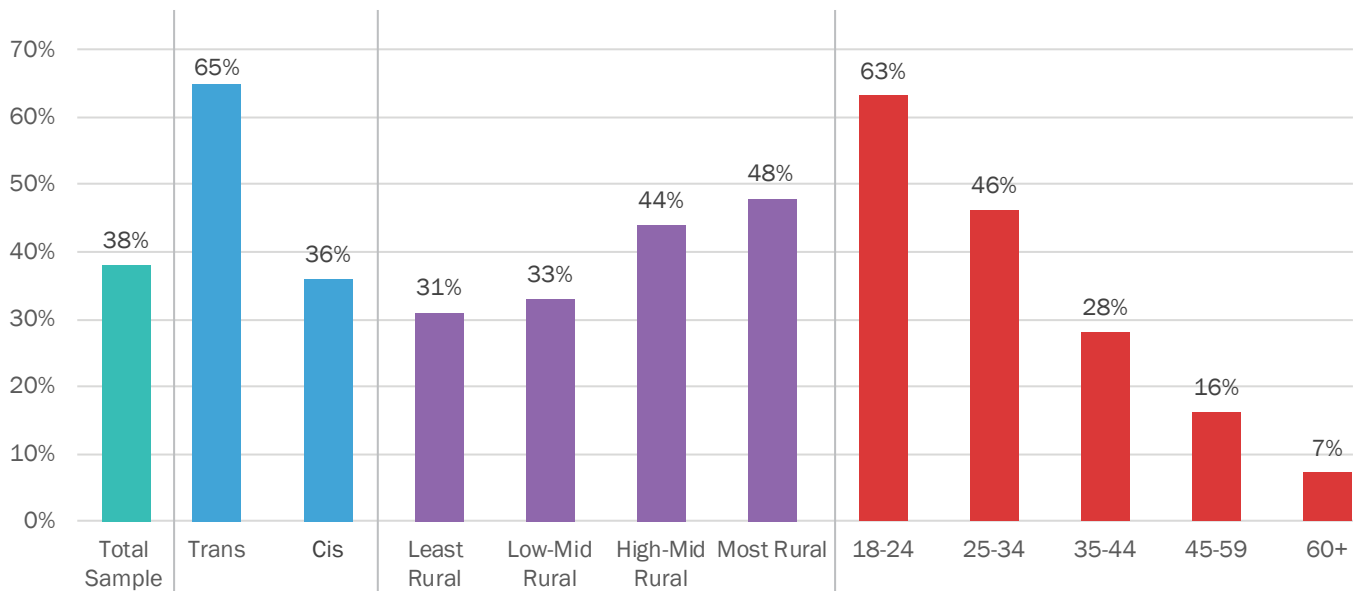


## Sadness & Depression

Over one-third, (38%, n = 190) of respondents indicated feeling really sad or depressed “most of the time” or “often” during the past 12 months. Feelings of sadness as reported by respondents did vary meaningfully across subgroups of gender identity, categories of rurality, and age cohorts. Figure 2 below illustrates the distribution of respondents endorsing feeling depressed “most of the time” or “often” in the past 12 months by subgroups.

- Transgender respondents reported feelings of sadness and depression more often than cisgender respondents; 65% (n = 31) of transgender respondents reported feeling depressed “most of the time” or “often” in the past 12 months, compared to 36% (n = 159) of cisgender respondents who reported the same.
- Respondents from more rural areas reported feeling sadness and depression more often, on average, than respondents from less rural areas; for example, 48% (n = 52) of respondents living in the most rural areas reported feelings of depression “most of the time” or “often” during the past 12 months, compared to 31% (n = 40) of respondents living in the least rural areas.
- Respondents from younger age cohorts reported feeling sadness and depression more often, on average, than respondents from older age cohorts; for example, 63% (n = 75) of respondents age 18-24 areas reported feelings of depression “most of the time” or “often” during the past 12 months, compared to 7% (n = 2) of respondents age 60 years or older.

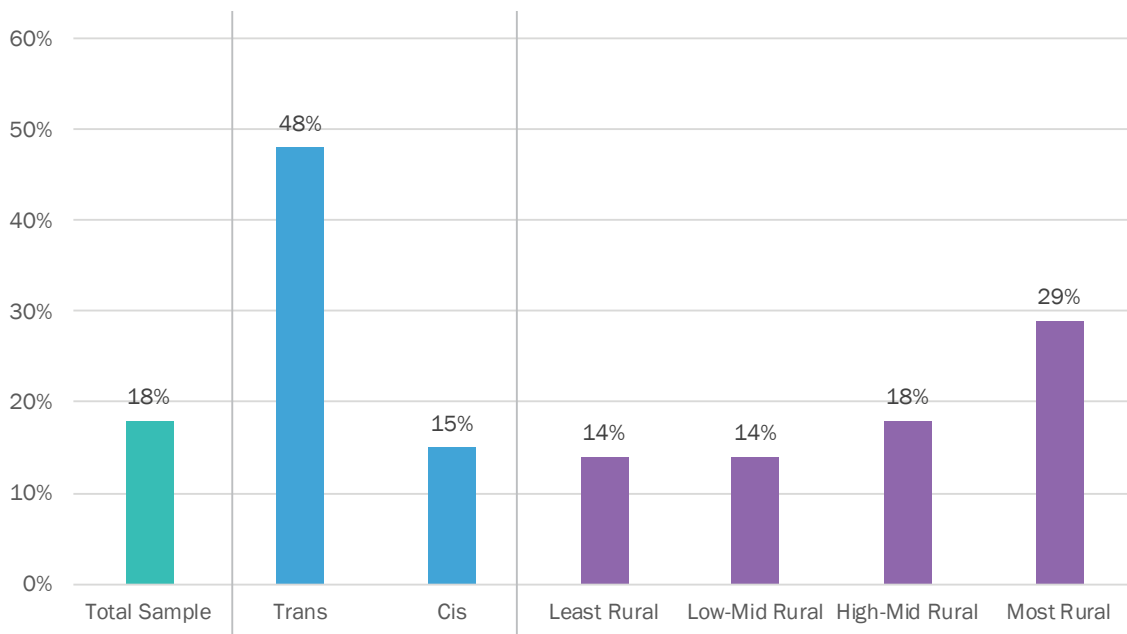
Figure 2: Respondents feeling depressed “most of the time” or “often” in the past 12 months, by subgroups



## Suicidality

The findings surrounding suicidal thoughts are among the most alarming and crucial and call for extra attention. Rates of suicidality among this sample are extremely high. Almost one in five, (18%, n = 56) of respondents reported feeling “like they wanted to die” “most of the time” or “often” during the past 12 months. Feelings of suicidality as reported by respondents did vary meaningfully across subgroups of gender identity, categories of rurality, gender categories, and age cohorts. Figure 3 below illustrates the distribution of respondents endorsing presence of suicidal thoughts “most of the time” or “often” in the past 12 months by gender identity and rurality category.

**Figure 2: Respondents with suicidal thoughts “most of the time” or “often” in the past 12 months, by subgroups**



- Transgender respondents endorsed feelings of suicidality far more often than cisgender respondents; nearly half (48%, n = 23) of transgender respondents reported feeling like they wanted to die “most of the time” or “often” in the past 12 months, compared to 15% (n = 66) of cisgender respondents who reported the same.
- Respondents from more rural areas reported feeling suicidal more often, on average, than respondents from less rural areas; nearly one in three (29%, n = 31) respondents living in the most rural areas reported suicidal feelings “most of the time” or “often” during the past 12 months, compared to 14% (n = 18) of respondents living in the least rural areas.
- Respondents from younger age cohorts reported suicidal feelings more often, on average, than respondents from older age cohorts; for example, 38% (n = 45) of respondents age 18-24 reported feelings of suicidality “most of the time” or “often” during the past 12 months, compared to 7% (n = 2) of respondents who are 60 years or older.
- Notable variation in responses was reported across categories of gender; for example, 53% (n = 8) of nonbinary respondents reported suicidal thoughts “most of the time” or “often” during the past 12 months, compared to 20% (n = 51) of women and 14% (n = 27) of men in our sample.

## Substance Use

Among survey respondents, 18% (n = 56) of respondents reported feeling like they needed drugs or alcohol to block out bad feelings “most of the time” or “often” in the past 12 months. Respondent reports of substance use did not vary meaningfully across any subgroup, suggesting that substance use as a means of coping with distress was a widespread occurrence across the sample.

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## Citations

- [1] Green, J. G., Gruber, M. J., Sampson, N. A., Zaslavsky, A. M., & Kessler, R. C. (2010). Improving the K6 short scale to predict serious emotional disturbance in adolescents in the USA. *International Journal of Methods in Psychiatric Research*, 19, 23–35. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mpr.314>
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