

Queer young people and couchsurfing: Entry pathways, service provision and maintenance strategies

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With the current housing crisis, more and more young people are

couchsurfing.

Couchsurfing is a growing form of homelessness in many countries including Australia; however, new research suggests it is especially common within the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer community.

Couchsurfers traditionally do not view themselves as homeless because they have an indoor place to sleep so are less likely to access housing resources or use [social services](#) than those who are sleeping rough or living in shelters, or are often told they are less of a priority given their roofed status.

When Griffith University researchers set out to collect information about [young people](#) (under 25) who were couchsurfing, they were surprised to discover almost 50% of respondents identified as queer in some way.

Considering only about 4% of the Australian population identify as queer, this is quite an overwhelming statistic.

Additionally, almost all respondents in the study identified as having poor [mental health](#) and high levels of psychological distress.

Lead researcher Dr. Katie Hail-Jares said this is a population that really needs more [support](#).

"There really is a need for better mental health care and support for families because the young people even acknowledged their parents were trying, but they just didn't have the resources, like connections to services or education around mental health to know how to help their child, and that's ended up leading to a lot of problems.

"I think one positive was that queer young people were less likely to mention their sexuality when talking about what led them to leave home, which may suggest parents are becoming more accepting of young people who come out as gay, lesbian, or bisexual.

"Unfortunately, young trans and gender diverse people did often mention their [gender identity](#) as a reason why they became homeless though, so we still have a way to go in supporting queer young people."

A further concern however, was the discovery of how frequently labor or sexual exchange was being added in to couchsurfing arrangements, often in addition to monetary rent.

While [domestic work](#) such as cleaning or yard work was the most common form of compensation, sexual exchange came in third, with respondents identifying a power imbalance leaving them unable to decline advances, or hosts simply expecting that by providing a "couch," they were entitled to sexual access.

This experience was particularly common among bi-sexual or queer women, with almost all reporting sexual exchange as part of couchsurfing.

Young queer people also identified staying in abusive relationships and giving emotional time and labor, in order to maintain housing.

While young queer people are at a substantially greater risk of homelessness and housing precarity than their cis and [heterosexual peers](#), it wasn't all bad news, with some [respondents](#) saying couchsurfing had allowed them to focus more on exploring their gender identity and seek support, with the ability to not be "closeted" eventually leading to improved mental health.

The paper, "Queer Young People and Couchsurfing: Entry Pathways, Service Provision, and Maintenance Strategies," has been published in the journal *Youth*.

More information: Katie Hail-Jares, Queer Young People and Couchsurfing: Entry Pathways, Service Provision, and Maintenance Strategies, *Youth* (2023). [DOI: 10.3390/youth3010014](https://doi.org/10.3390/youth3010014)

Provided by Griffith University

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