

# Sexual minority young people in Canada more likely to experience harmful police contact, finds study

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While there has been much public scrutiny and research on police interactions and violence towards sexual minorities in the United States,

there is a gap in the current literature on how sexual minorities fare with law enforcement contact in Canada.

A new study [published](#) in the *Annals of Epidemiology* aims to fill this research gap by examining the relationship between [sexual orientation](#) and experiences with [police](#) contact, including intrusion and harassment from the police, in Canada.

Among a sample of 940 adolescents and [young adults](#) across Canada, the study found that the prevalence of police contact was highest among persons identifying as bisexual (28%) compared to those identifying as heterosexual (21%). Furthermore, despite Canada's comparatively progressive attitude towards LGBTQ+ rights, sexual [minority](#) participants, specifically bisexual participants, were more likely than heterosexual participants to report police contact that included harassment.

"Our study suggests a troubling pattern of disproportionate rates of police contact among sexual minority," says lead author Alexander Testa, Ph.D., assistant professor in the Department of Management, Policy, and Community Health at UTHouston School of Public Health. "Overall, these findings are consistent with minority stress theory, which posits that sexual minority groups may face elevated levels of harassment and microaggressions compared to their heterosexual peers."

The study's authors say that the results are a startling revelation, especially in Canada, a country that prides itself on being a strong advocate for LGBTQ+ persons and minority rights. Their new research has revealed that the country still has much work to do to ensure [sexual minorities](#) are not specifically targeted by the police and harassed during police contact. This work is particularly important given the growing body of research showing that harmful law enforcement contact can

damage health, well-being, and developmental outcomes for victims.

"The findings have important implications for understanding health inequalities commonly observed among sexual minority persons, particularly those identifying as bisexual," says senior author Kyle T. Ganson, Ph.D., MSW, assistant professor at the University of Toronto's Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work. "Adverse experiences with the police may have [profound implications](#) for mental and behavioral health during the crucial developmental period of adolescents and young adulthood."

The findings of this study suggest the need for greater police training to improve interactions with sexual minority persons in Canada, as well as the development of intervention efforts to support sexual minority persons in the aftermath of adverse experiences with police contact. Finally, the authors hope that this study can pave the way for future, more in-depth research on police contact with sexual minority persons in Canada.

**More information:** Alexander Testa et al, Sexual Orientation and Experiences with Police Contact in Canada, *Annals of Epidemiology* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/j.annepidem.2023.12.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annepidem.2023.12.002)

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