

**C010434 ABSTRACT:** A report by the Urban Justice Center on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) youth entitled "Justice For All?" focuses on the New York juvenile court system, but incorporates national data. The report contends that because of alienation at home and in school, many LGBT youth become delinquent in an effort to protect themselves. It also asserts that there has been no comprehensive, national research exclusively on the treatment LGBT youth encounter in juvenile correctional and detention facilities.

**Title** Accepted Nowhere: Homosexual, Bisexual and Transgender Youth at Home, on the Streets and in the Juvenile Courts.

**Authors** Coalition for Juvenile Justice.

**Type** Journal Article

**Source** Juvenile Justice Monitor 5(5):3, 2001.

Available From: [www.juvjustice.org](http://www.juvjustice.org)

**Year** 2001      **Length** 1 pages

**Medium**

**Control No:** 010434

## Homosexual, Bisexual and Transgender Youth at Home, on the Streets and in the Juvenile Courts

Rejection starts at home. Parents learn that their children are anything other than heterosexual—lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT)—and often ridicule, abuse or evict them. LGBT youth who are forced onto the streets are joined by other LGBT children fleeing their own repressive homes. Street life soon leads to delinquency, and once in the juvenile court system, LGBT youth often find themselves in a perilous environment they cannot escape. This is the largely ignored vortex that consumes many troubled LGBT youth across the country, according to a recent report from the Urban Justice Center.

A rare study on LGBT youth and the juvenile court system, *Justice for All?* focuses on the New York juvenile court system, but incorporates national data. The report reveals how LGBT youth are consistently overlooked, excluded or persecuted within institutions that should serve them. The findings offer a glimpse into the pressures facing LGBT youth:

- Forty-five percent of parents are “angry, sick or disgusted” when they first learn of their children’s homosexuality;
- More than 25 percent of LGBT youth ultimately have to leave home because of battles over their sexual orientation;
- At school, LGBT students are three times more likely than their heterosexual peers to report being injured or threatened with a weapon in the past year, according to the *Massachusetts State Youth Risk Behavior Survey*; and
- LGBT students are more likely to skip school than heterosexual students because they feel unsafe, according to the *Massachusetts State Youth Risk Behavior Survey*.

*Justice for All?* contends that because of alienation at home and in school, many LGBT youth become delinquent in an effort to protect themselves. For instance, by routinely skipping school to avoid confrontations with classmates, a LGBT becomes a truant. LGBT teenagers living on the streets—regardless of whether they were kicked out or chose to leave home—are deemed runaways. Nationwide, LGBT youth are estimated to constitute 25 to 40 percent of the homeless youth population. (There is, however, no official

estimate on how many LGBT youth are in the general youth population.)

While truancy and running away from home are status offenses, according to the report, LGBT youth can be marginalized to the point that their offenses become more dangerous. In what *Justice for All?* labels “survival crimes,” LGBT youth on the street can turn to prostitution, stealing and drug trafficking to support themselves.

### *Invisible Inside the Juvenile Courts*

Once in contact with the juvenile court system, LGBT youth disappear statistically. *Justice for All?* found no juvenile justice system that tracked the self-proclaimed sexual orientation or gender identity of young offenders. Furthermore, the report asserts that there has been no comprehensive, national research focused exclusively on the treatment LGBT youth encounter in juvenile correctional and detention facilities.

From interviews with young offenders and juvenile court staff in New York, *Justice for All?* drafts a grim, rough sketch about the experiences of LGBT youth in the juvenile court system—a picture stained by bigotry, ignorance, apathy and silence. The report estimates that four to 10 percent of juvenile offenders in New York are LGBT youth. However, very few juvenile court professionals consider the needs of LGBT youth, and those that do often treat the offenders based on negative stereotypes. For example, several LGBT offenders spoke of being segregated for weeks in isolation and observation rooms because staff assumed that they would engage in sexual activities if allowed to live among the general juvenile population.

LGBT youth also revealed that verbal and physical harassment from their peers inside the juvenile court system was a significant problem. Taunting and hateful slurs directed at LGBT youth regularly go unpunished, and when LGBT youth are in fights, all parties involved are usually punished regardless of the circumstances, according to *Justice for All?* interviews. The environment inside the juvenile detention and correctional facilities can cause some LGBT youth to attempt to conceal their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Naturally, *Justice for All?* suggests that problems facing LGBT youth should not have to occur. If LGBT youth could find positive relationships and safety in their homes, schools and communities, then many they would not have to turn to the streets and delinquency. If the juvenile court system took more care to respect the identities of LGBT youth, and helped them build the self-esteem and positive societal connections they often lack, then LGBT youth would not be further victimized by a system designed to serve. *Justice for All?* is an initial cry in a small civil rights movement in desperate need of public awareness, sensitivity and support.