



Definition

Problems pertaining to sexual preference or sexual orientation.

Kids Help Line (KHL) counsellors respond to over 1,500 calls each year from children and young people regarding sexual orientation, accounting for 1.5% of all calls made to the service.

Nature & Severity of Calls

Kids Help Line counsellors record both quantitative and qualitative information as to the nature of calls concerning sexual identity and sexual orientation. The quantitative information provides a depiction of the severity or extremity of the issues while the qualitative information highlights the main themes and issues concerning these callers.

Almost a third of the calls are from young people seeking information or clarification about a sexual orientation issue. For example:

- Female, 11* friend told her she's a lesbian. She didn't know what it meant.
- Male, 14* wondering if he might be gay because he shaves his legs.
- Female, 17* wanted information on where she could meet up with other lesbians.
- Male, 17* caller looking for some information or support services for gay people where he lives. He finds the lack of services in his rural area a problem.

A quarter of the sexual orientation calls received are from young people aware of an attraction to the same gender. For example:

- Male, 13* has had a couple of girlfriends but has had sexual thoughts about guys. He is not sure if he is gay or not. He has been wanting to ring up for ages and finally got the courage today.
- Female, 14* confused about whether she is gay or not because she likes girls and not boys.
- Male, 16* has had one sexual experience with a male and another with a female. He is trying to feel OK about homosexuality in a Catholic home environment.
- Female, 18* she and best friend are in a lesbian relationship and she is wanting to tell her parents. She feels her parents would be supportive but wondered what she would say.

A further twenty-two percent (22%) of young people report experiencing confusion about their sexual orientation. For example:

- Male, 16* had a sexual experience with his male friend and is very confused about what happened and if he is gay or not.
- Female, 17* is attracted to both girls and boys which she is having a lot of trouble dealing with because it is not the norm.
- Male, 18* is a 'woman in a man's body' suffering extreme confusion and unhappiness in his present circumstances.

As would be expected, a number of young people (18%) are experiencing problems with consequences of their sexual choice. For example:

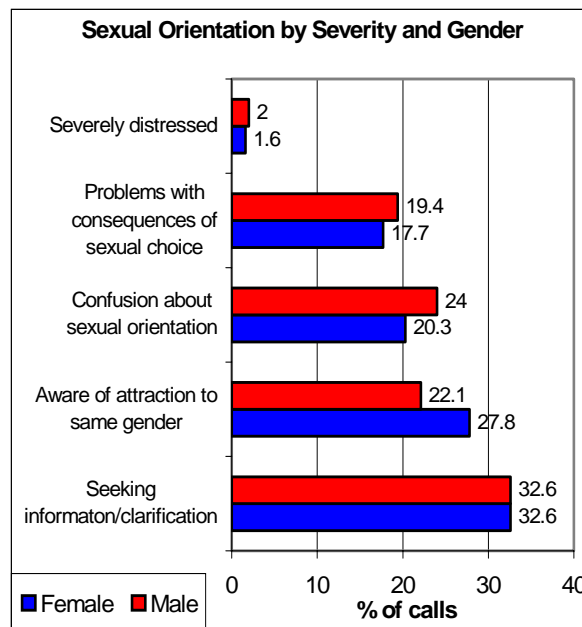
- Male, 13* has confided in a friend that he is gay. This has been passed on to other friends who are now rejecting him.
- Female, 15* parents won't accept that she is a lesbian.
- Male, 15* constantly bullied because peers assume (correctly) he is gay.
- Male, 17* came out to his family over 12 months ago. His parents have taken things OK but it has damaged his relationship with his brother.

The remaining 2% of callers about this issue are severely distressed due to a sexual orientation issue.

Age & Gender Differences

Of the 4,441 calls regarding sexual orientation received between 1998 and 2000, females made 52% of calls and males made 48%. This finding is noteworthy given that across all problem types, females make 73% of calls to the service and males make 27%.

Examination of the nature of sexual orientation calls shows very little difference between the concerns of males and females. Females are slightly more likely to be aware of an attraction to the same sex while males are slightly more likely to be report confusion about their sexual orientation.



Sexual orientation was the 9th most common reason (out of a possible 35 KHL problem categories) that young males contacted the service. For females, sexual orientation ranked as the 23rd most common reason for contacting KHL.

The table below highlights that over half (61%) of those contacting KHL with sexual orientation issues are aged between 15 and 18 years. This proportion of older callers is 40% greater than the representation across all counselling calls.

AGE	FEMALE	MALE
5-9 years	0.2%	0.2%
10-14 years	23.7%	15.2%
15-18 years	28.3%	32.5%

Comparison of call rates for males and females aged between 10 and 14 years may indicate that females become aware of sexual orientation issues at an earlier age. Alternatively, females may be more likely to seek help at an earlier age.

Main Themes

Analysis of the corresponding qualitative information highlights in greater depth, some of the main themes of the calls concerning sexual orientation. These include in rank order:

- Distress about being teased and bullied at school because of sexual orientation or perceived sexual orientation
- Distress about 'coming out' to parents
- Rejection from friends after disclosing sexual orientation
- Relationship breakdown with family after disclosing sexual orientation
- Seeking clarification on whether attraction to the same sex indicated homosexuality
- Confusion about what makes a person a homosexual
- Working through feelings associated with the first same-sex experience
- Seeking gay/lesbian support groups and ways to meet other young gay people
- Seeking strategies on how to deal with gay/lesbian friends
- Exploring feelings about parent's homosexuality
- Exploring feelings about cross-dressing and/or wanting to change sex.

The above information highlights that, for the young people who contact KHL, sexual orientation involves a range of complex issues. These issues cover the spectrum from exploring sexuality, coming to terms with own sexual orientation, seeking strategies for disclosing, and dealing with the treatment from others. KHL counsellors perform a vital role in enacting a non-judgmental, supportive and empowering approach to young people who are working through issues associated with sexual orientation.

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Geographical Location

Children and young people with sexual orientation issues are mostly located in metropolitan areas (66%) with the remaining 34% in rural and remote areas. This proportion of calls from rural and remote areas is very similar to the population distribution of 35%.

Ethnic Background

Counsellors record the young person's ethnicity in 20% of sexual orientation calls. With over 90% of these callers from Anglo-Australian backgrounds, children and young people from diverse ethnic backgrounds make a smaller proportion of sexual orientation calls than other problem types (see table below).

ETHNIC BACKGROUND	SEXUAL ORIENTATION CALLS	ALL PROBLEMS
Anglo-Australian	92.3%	86.6%
Non-English Speaking	5.1%	7.0%
Indigenous-Australians	1.4%	3.8%
Other (English-speaking)	1.2%	2.6%

Counselling and Outcome of Calls

KHL counsellors spend (on average) 14 minutes talking to young people each time they phone about a sexual orientation issue. The length of calls vary from 9 minutes when young people are seeking information or clarification to 26 minutes for those individuals who are severely distressed due to a sexual orientation issue.

The majority (72%) of calls concerning sexual orientation issues are not referred to other services.

Kids Help Line is also able to provide young people with information about other agencies in the community which can provide additional support. Eighteen percent of those who phone are referred to other support services. The majority of these referrals are to

- Gay & Lesbian Switchboard, Vic
- Gay & Lesbian Welfare Services, Brisbane
- Gay & Lesbian Counselling Service of NSW
- Gay & Lesbian Counselling Service of SA
- Toehold, West End, Brisbane
- Australian Transgender Support Association
- Gay & Lesbian Community Services, Perth
- Fun & Esteem, Darlinghurst
- Twenty Ten Association, Glebe
- Newcastle Gay & Lesbian Information Service
- Gay Information & Counselling Service, Canberra

Of the remaining callers 10% terminate the call before their counsellor can make a referral while less than 1% are unable to be referred to an appropriate service.

For more information

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