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## **Gay, lesbian and bisexual teens half as likely to play sports as straight youth**

While participation in sports has been declining among high school students in British Columbia overall, even fewer gay, lesbian and bisexual (LGB) teens are involved in sports than 15 years ago, says a new University of British Columbia study. The study is the first of its kind to track sports involvement among LGB youth in Canada and was conducted in collaboration with the youth research nonprofit McCreary Centre Society.

In 1998, five out of 10 gay students played formal or coached sports. By 2013, that proportion had dropped to three in 10. Participation also dropped among lesbian girls (to 52 per cent, from 62 per cent in 1998); bisexual girls (38 per cent, from 48 per cent), and bisexual boys (42 per cent, from 59 per cent).

Straight boys and girls were also less likely to be active in sports in recent years – proportions dropped from 71 per cent and 66 per cent in 1998 respectively, to 68 per cent and 61 per cent.

“In every year we measured, LGB youth were about half as likely, or even less, to participate in coached sports than straight youth were,” said senior author Elizabeth Saewyc, a nursing professor who leads the Stigma and Resilience Among Vulnerable Youth Centre at UBC. “And unfortunately, that gap has persisted and even widened over time.”

Participation in informal sports such as pickup games also decreased over time for youth of all sexual orientations, with the biggest drops seen for straight and bisexual males and females.

The study used data from the BC Adolescent Health Survey, conducted by McCreary Centre Society, and involved 99,373 adolescent students across B.C.

“This study shows how important it is for grassroots and community sports programs to reach out to and create a welcoming, inclusive space for LGBT youth,” said co-author Annie Smith, McCreary’s executive director who studies youth sports. “The decline in participation in both informal and coached sports tells us that there should be a range of exercise opportunities for young people who may not want to play traditional team sports.”

She added that if youth take part in sports and other types of physical activity they are more likely to be active in adulthood, and also to see more immediate benefits such as improved mental and physical health.

Saewyc agrees, and adds that while the research cannot explain the reason for the gap between straight and LGB youth, it’s likely that stigma and discrimination in sports clubs play a role.

“For all these reasons, it’s encouraging to see growing support for anti-homophobia measures in clubs like hockey’s NHL and the U.K. premier soccer leagues, and to have more athletes coming out as gay without fear of being stigmatized,” said Saewyc.

The study (<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2095254616300916>) was funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and published this month in the *Journal of Sport and Health Science*.