

Extended abstract submitted to 30<sup>th</sup> IPC IUSSP 2025  
Sexual Orientation and Adolescent Health and Wellness in  
Indonesia Global Early Adolescent Study

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## **Introduction:**

Studies in various context found that young people with non-heteronormative sexual orientation experience higher level of physical and mental health problems and poorer wellbeing, due to rejection, stigma, violence, and discrimination. In Indonesia, research and intervention on non-heterosexual adolescents are minimal and a sensitive topic as sociocultural and legal context maintain rejection and do not provide support and protection. Family and societal rejection, withdrawal of support, and fear and violence stemmed from criminalization probably contribute to higher level of mental distress and self-harm/suicidal ideation among non-heterosexual youth in Indonesia.

This analysis uses three waves (2018-2022) of Global Early Adolescent Study (GEAS) conducted in Indonesia to describe and compare the various aspects of health and wellbeing between heterosexual and non-heterosexual adolescents. By highlighting the inequalities and challenges, this analysis aims to promote further research and advocacy activities for social-institutional supports and non-violence and non-discrimination approach, to improve adolescents overall well-being and sexual-reproductive health. This analysis would explore *social safety perspective* proposed by Diamond and Alley (2022) to explain the determinants of non-heterosexual adolescent health and wellbeing.

## **Data and Methodology:**

The three waves of Indonesia GEAS were conducted between 2018-2022 in three cities (Bandar Lampung, Denpasar, and Semarang), followed (initially) 4,684 boys and girls from 7<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> grade; to understand gender socialization process and how it affects adolescent health and wellbeing. The cities were purposively chosen to represent socioeconomic, cultural, and religious diversity of Indonesia. The GEAS questionnaire includes wide range aspects such as family and peer relationship, school, body image, bullying and violence, mental health, and sexual behaviors.

We used questions about whether adolescent have ever felt in love with a boy or a girl to approximate adolescents' sexual orientation (*"Have you ever felt that you were in love with a boy or a girl?"*: (1) Yes, with a girl, (2) Yes, with a boy (3) Yes, with both boys and girls, (4) No, neither); as GEAS did not directly ask sexual orientation. Variables on relevant health and wellbeing outcomes were generated and presented by sexual orientation.

### Findings:

By the end of the GEAS in 2022, 98.8% of adolescent have ever felt in love (compared to 81.9% in 2018 when the mean age of respondents is 12.1). Based on the question *“Have you ever felt that you were in love with a boy or a girl?”* asked in wave 1-3, 89.3% were categorized as heterosexual, 3.8% as homosexual, and 5.6% as bisexual (compared to 2.3% as homosexual and 1.4% as bisexual in 2018). Compared to heterosexual adolescents; the proportion of boys, the proportion of caregiver with primary-secondary education, and the proportion of Bandar Lampung residents are higher among homosexual and bisexual adolescents.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of GEAS Indonesia adolescent by sexual orientation

	Sexual orientation			p-value
	Heterosexual (n=3537)	Homosexual (n=152)	Bisexual (n=222)	
Sex				0.000
Boys	42.1%	69.9%	53.2%	
Girls	57.9%	30.1%	46.7%	
Wealth index quintile				0.317
Lowest	19.7%	23.9%	19.3%	
Middle	20.0%	25.4%	18.8%	
Highest	17.8%	14.9%	18.3%	
Caregiver’s education				0.005
Primary	12.8%	17.9%	16.9%	
Secondary	59.0%	62.7%	57.9%	
Higher/university	27.4%	17.9%	24.0%	
City				0.000
Bandar Lampung	30.4%	43.8%	36.2%	
Denpasar	33.6%	28.1%	37.2%	
Semarang	36.0%	28.1%	26.6%	

Based on sexual orientation, there was no statistically significant difference in body comfort, feeling of closeness to their main caregiver, and feeling that there is an adult in school who cares about them. However, the proportion who reported poor/fair health was higher among bisexual adolescents other categories. Non-heterosexual adolescents reported feeling guilty to be romantically attracted someone else at higher rate but were less likely to report feeling guilty to have sexual feelings. Non-heterosexual adolescents reported at higher proportion than heterosexual adolescents to think their grades are lower than their classmates and to sometimes/often think about dropping out.

About half of GEAS adolescents reported 5 or more adverse childhood experiences (ACES), however the proportion reported 5 or more ACES was much higher among non-heterosexual adolescents than heterosexual adolescents. Common mental health problems such as depression and anxiety were also more common among non-heterosexual adolescents. For example, the proportion of severe depression was 8.1% among bisexual adolescents compared to 3.6% among heterosexual adolescents. In addition to exposure to mental health issues, non-heterosexual adolescents were also exposed to sexual behaviors at higher rate than their heterosexual counterparts.

Table 2. Physical and mental health and wellbeing of GEAS Indonesia adolescent by sexual orientation

	Sexual orientation			p-value
	Heterosexual (n=3537)	Homosexual (n=152)	Bisexual (n=222)	
<b>General health</b>				
Poor/fair	35.4%	22.8%	39.3%	0.000
Good/excellent	63.2%	71.7%	58.2%	
<b>Body comfort</b>				
Agreed: I'm satisfied with my body	40.7%	44.1%	35.6%	0.374
Disagreed: I often wish my body was different	13.1%	14.5%	14.9%	0.371
<b>Sexuality</b>				
If I were romantically attracted to someone else I would feel (a little, somewhat, or very) GUILTY	20.7%	32.2%	29.2%	0.000
If I had sexual feelings I would feel a little, somewhat, or very) GUILTY	73.5%	64.4%	64.0%	0.007
<b>Relationships and schools</b>				
Feel close with their main caregiver	82.7%	73.6%	76.3%	0.069
Feel their main caregiver cares about their thought & feeling	84.3%	68.8%	73.7%	0.000
Think their grades are worse than other students in class	3%	7.1%	8.6%	0.000
Sometimes/often thought about dropping out of school this year	6.9%	15.0%	19.4%	0.000

Feel there is an adult in school who really cares about them	61.9%	60.6%	55.4%	0.55
<b>Adverse childhood experience</b>				0.000
No experience	9.2%	2%	2.7%	
1-2 ACES	20.8%	10.5%	5.4%	
3-4 ACES	25.3%	14.5%	15.3%	
5 or more ACES	44.8%	73.0%	76.6%	
<b>Depression (based on PHQ9)</b>				0.000
Moderate	12.3%	9.9%	18.0%	
Moderately-severe	6.2%	13.2%	14.0%	
Severe	3.6%	2.0%	8.1%	
<b>General Anxiety Disorder (based on GAD7)</b>				0.000
Moderate	8.6%	12.5%	17.6%	
Severe	5.7%	5.3%	9.9%	
<b>Sexual Behaviors</b>				
Ever sent sexual pictures of themselves	3.5%	24.3%	19.8%	0.000
Ever touched/been touched private parts of body	8.0%	36.2%	31.1%	0.000
Ever had sexual intercourse	3.6%	33.3%	28.6%	0.000
Ever had oral sex	2.5%	23.7%	16.7%	0.000