

2.3 Estimating the Bisexual, Gay and Lesbian Youth Population in Reading

Estimating the number of bisexual, gay and lesbian young people in Reading is a useful exercise from a service planning perspective and in terms of the research project.

These estimates provide ReachOUT with information about its potential service user base. They also provide a guide for the research project in terms of what proportion of this population was sampled. Figures 5 and 6 summarise the results of British general population surveys that attempted to estimate the incidence of homosexual experience among men and women.

Figure 5: Percentage Rates of Homosexual Experience within British General Population Surveys of Men

The Cox Report (Department of Health/Welsh Office, 1988)	3-7%
Forman & Chivers (1989)	1.5%
Orton & Samuels (1990)	4-6%
McQueen <i>et al</i> (1991)	2.3%
Johnson <i>et al</i> (1994)	6.1%
Average:	4%

Source: Health Education Authority (1996)

Figure 6: Percentage Rates of Homosexual Experience within British General Population Surveys of Women

Johnson <i>et al</i> (1994)	3.4%
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Source: Health Education Authority (1996)

These surveys suggest that four per cent of men and 3.4 per cent of women were homosexual, or had had homosexual experiences.

The Reading population is summarised in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Reading's Population from the 1991 Census

Total Reading Population	128,877
Female	65,107 (50.5%)
Male	63,770 (49.5%)
Population aged 16-19	6,547 (5.1%)
Population aged 20-24	12,721 (9.9%)
Black Population	5,196 (4.03%)
South Asian Population	4,733 (3.67%)

Source: Berkshire County Council (1993)

It is now possible to apply the estimated incidence of homosexual experience among men and women (four per cent and 3.4 per cent respectively) to the youth population in Reading, including the Asian and Black youth population. This provides an estimate of the number of young gays and lesbians, as shown in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: Estimate of the Number of Young Gays and Lesbians in Reading

	Total Number (From 1991 Census)	Estimated Number who are Gay or Lesbian
Young Men aged 16-19	3,240	130
Young Women aged 16-19	3,307	112
Young Men aged 20-24	6,297	252
Young Women aged 20-24	6,424	218
Total	19,268	712

Table 2: Estimate of the Number of Young Asian and Black Gays and Lesbians in Reading

	Total Number (From 1991 Census)	Estimated Number who are Gay or Lesbian
Young Asian Men aged 16-19	119	5
Young Asian Women aged 16-19	121	4
Young Asian Men aged 20-24	231	9
Young Asian Women aged 20-24	236	8
Young Black Men aged 16-19	131	5
Young Black Women aged 16-19	133	5
Young Black Men aged 20-24	254	10
Young Black Women aged 20-24	259	9
Total	1,484	55

The results suggest there are 712 young gays and lesbians in Reading: 382 young gay men and 330 young lesbian women. Of these, an estimated 26 are Asian and 29 are Black. It is important to note that these figures are conservative and therefore probable underestimates, as they do not include those who identify as bisexual or those who are uncertain about their sexual identity. They are also based on now dated 1991 Census data, an important point given that the number of young gays and lesbians in Reading will undoubtedly be higher. According to the Office for National Statistics, “Reading’s population is growing more than three times as fast as the national average” (Branagan, 1998).

Ford’s (1991) study, shown in Figure 8, provides an opportunity for more detailed estimates.

Figure 8: Sexuality of Teenagers Surveyed in Southwest England, Ford (1991)

Identifying as Heterosexual	95.5%
Identifying as Bisexual	1.5%
Identifying as Homosexual	0.9%
Unsure	2.1%

Source: Health Education Authority (1997)

These findings can be applied to Reading’s youth population, as shown in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3: Estimate of the Number of Young Bisexuals, Gays and Lesbians, and Those Who Are Unsure, in Reading

	Total Number (From 1991 Census)	Estimated Number who are Bisexual	Estimated Number who are Gay or Lesbian	Estimated Number who are Unsure
Young People aged 16-19	6,547	98	59	137
Young People aged 20-24	12,721	191	114	267
Total	19,268	289	173	404

Table 4: Estimate of the Number of Young Asian and Black Bisexuals, Gays and Lesbians, and Those Who Are Unsure, in Reading

	Total Number (From 1991 Census)	Estimated Number who are Bisexual	Estimated Number who are Gay or Lesbian	Estimated Number who are Unsure
Young Asian People aged 16-19	240	4	2	5
Young Asian People aged 20-24	467	7	4	10
Young Black People aged 16-19	264	4	2	6
Young Black People aged 20-24	513	7	5	11
Total	1,484	22	13	32

The results suggest that 866 young people in Reading are bisexual, gay, lesbian or unsure about their sexual identity. Of these 32 are Asian and 35 are Black. Again, care needs to be taken with these estimates given the limitations of the survey data and the use of dated 1991 Census data.

Using the estimates based on Ford's (1991) study, this research project sampled approximately 24 per cent of Reading's bisexual, gay and lesbian youth population (as 169 young people completed the Young People's Health and Housing Survey and 35 young people participated in interviews).