

Bullying and LGBTQ Youth

Background

- “Homophobia among adolescents remains an understudied yet prominent social issue relevant to several interrelated areas of research within schools”¹
- “Homophobia includes negative attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors toward non-heterosexual individuals and behavior... This can include verbal, physical, and relational aggression that contains homophobic themes or references”¹
- The psychological and social consequences resulting from being the target of homophobic bullying can be devastating (depression, isolation, fear)
- Students of *all* sexual orientations, genders, and racial or ethnic backgrounds are directly victimized and impacted by homophobic acts.²
- “Bullying of LGBTQ students stems largely from discomfort with students who do not conform to traditional gender roles in their appearance or behavior, i.e., who are gender-non-conforming. A student’s actual sexual orientation may be far less relevant to his or her social victimization than his or her gender identity or gender expression.”²

The Experiences of LGBTQ Youth at School

- 84.6% (nearly 9 out of 10) of LGBTQ students reported being verbally harassed, 40.1% reported being physically harassed, and 18.8% reported being physically assaulted at school in the past year.³
- 72.4% hear homophobic remarks, such as “faggot” or “dyke,” frequently or often at school³
- Nearly two-thirds (61.1%) of students reported that they felt unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation; 39.9% felt unsafe because of their gender expression; nearly one-third of LGBTQ students skipped at least one day of school in the past month because of safety concerns.³
- The reported GPA of students who were more frequently harassed because of their sexual orientation or gender expression were almost half a grade lower than for students who were less often harassed (2.7 vs. 3.1)³
- LGBTQ youth are 2-3x more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual counterparts⁴
- 28% of LGBTQ students will drop out of school, which is more than 3x the average for heterosexual students⁵
- Four out of five LGBTQ students report that they don’t know one supportive adult at school⁶
- Approximately 22% middle school students and 17.7% of high school students reported teasing another student because he/she was gay⁷

Recommendations

- LGBTQ youth who had groups such as the Gay-Straight Alliance in their schools were less likely to report feeling unsafe³
- Students attending school with an anti-bullying policy that included protections based on sexual orientation and/or gender expression experienced lower levels of victimization³
- Being “out” in school was related to higher levels of victimization, but also higher levels of psychological well-being³
- “School personnel need to develop a climate supportive of students who are not constricted by traditional gender norms.”⁸
- “Not all students who identify themselves as LGBTQ will suffer high rates of depression and drug use when families or schools are supportive of their sexual orientation.”⁹

Resources for More Information

The Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN):
www.glsen.org/cgi-bin/iowa/all/antibullying/index.html

GLBT National Help Center
www.glnh.org/index2.html

Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)
www.pflag.org

The Trevor Project
www.thetrevorproject.org

Hotlines

National Suicide Prevention Helpline: 1-800-273-TALK

GLBT National Youth Talkline: 1-800-246-PRIDE

Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender National Hotline: 1-888-THE-GLNH

Peer Listening Line for LGBT Youth: 1-800-399-PEER

GLBT Hate Crimes Hotline: 1-800-686-HATE

LYRIC Youth Talkline: 1-800-246-7743

National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR) Legal Helpline: 1-800-528-6257

References

- [1] Poteat, V.P. (2008). Contextual and moderating effects of the peer group climate on use of homophobic epithets. *School Psychology Review*, 37(2), 188-201.
- [2] National Education Association. (2008). *A report on the status of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people in education: Stepping out of the loser into the light*. Washington, DC.
- [3] GLSEN 2009 National School Climate Survey
- [4] Report from the Secretary's Task Force on Youth Suicide (Paul Gibson, US Department of Health and Human Services), 1989
- [5] Bart, M. Creating a safer school for gay students. *Counseling Today*, Sept. 1998.
- [6] Sessions-Stepp, L. "A lesson in cruelty: Anti-gay slurs common at school; Some say insults increase as gays' visibility rises." *The Washington Post* 19 June 2001.
- [7] Koenig, B., Espelage, D.L., & Biendseil, R. (2005). *The Dane County Youth Assessment*. Unpublished report, The Dane County Youth Commission.
- [8] Swearer, S., Turner, R., Givens, J., & Pollack, W. (2008). "You're so gay!": Do different forms of bullying matter for adolescent males?. *School Psychology Review*, 37(2), 160-173.
- [9] Espelage, D., Aragon, S., & Birkett, M. (2008). Homophobic teasing, psychological outcomes, and sexual orientation among high school students: What influence do parents and schools have?. *School Psychology Review*, 37(2), 202-216.