Bullying and LGBTQ Youth

Background

• “Homophobia among adolescents remains an understudied yet prominent social issue relevant to several interrelated areas of research within schools”

• “Homophobia includes negative attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors toward non-heterosexual individuals and behaviors... This can include verbal, physical, and relational aggression that contains homophobic themes or references”

• 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.

• “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.”

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.

• 72.4% hear homophobic remarks, such as “faggot” or “dyke,” frequently or often at school

• 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.

• 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)

• LGBTQ youth are 2-3x more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual counterparts

• 28% of LGBTQ students will drop out of school, which is more than 3x the average for heterosexual students

• Four out of five LGBTQ students report that they don’t know one supportive adult at school

• Approximately 22% middle school students and 17.7% of high school students reported teasing another student because he/she was gay

Recommendations

• LGBTQ youth who had groups such as the Gay-Straight Alliance in their schools were less likely to report feeling unsafe

• Students attending school with an anti-bullying policy that included protections based on sexual orientation and/or gender expression experienced lower levels of victimization

• Being “out” in school was related to higher levels of victimization, but also higher levels of psychological well-being

• “School personnel need to develop a climate supportive of students who are not constricted by traditional gender norms.”

• “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.”
Resources for More Information

The Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN):
www.glsen.org/cgibin/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

[3] GLSEN 2009 National School Climate Survey

Compiled by Heather E. Cosgrove

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