

# Bullying and LGBTQ Youth

## Background

- “Homophobia among adolescents remains an understudied yet prominent social issue relevant to several interrelated areas of research within schools”<sup>1</sup>
- “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”<sup>1</sup>
- 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.<sup>2</sup>
- “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.”<sup>2</sup>

## 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.<sup>3</sup>
- 72.4% hear homophobic remarks, such as “faggot” or “dyke,” frequently or often at school<sup>3</sup>
- 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.<sup>3</sup>
- 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)<sup>3</sup>
- LGBTQ youth are 2-3x more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual counterparts<sup>4</sup>
- 28% of LGBTQ students will drop out of school, which is more than 3x the average for heterosexual students<sup>5</sup>
- Four out of five LGBTQ students report that they don’t know one supportive adult at school<sup>6</sup>
- Approximately 22% middle school students and 17.7% of high school students reported teasing another student because he/she was gay<sup>7</sup>

## Recommendations

- LGBTQ youth who had groups such as the Gay-Straight Alliance in their schools were less likely to report feeling unsafe<sup>3</sup>
- Students attending school with an anti-bullying policy that included protections based on sexual orientation and/or gender expression experienced lower levels of victimization<sup>3</sup>
- Being “out” in school was related to higher levels of victimization, but also higher levels of psychological well-being<sup>3</sup>
- “School personnel need to develop a climate supportive of students who are not constricted by traditional gender norms.”<sup>8</sup>
- “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.”<sup>9</sup>

## Resources for More Information

**The Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN):**  
[www.glsen.org/cgibin/iowa/all/antibullying/index.html](http://www.glsen.org/cgibin/iowa/all/antibullying/index.html)

**GLBT National Help Center**  
[www.glnh.org/index2.html](http://www.glnh.org/index2.html)

**Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)**  
[www.pflag.org](http://www.pflag.org)

**The Trevor Project**  
[www.thetrevorproject.org](http://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.