



## ***What does social science research\* tell us about . . .***

### **THE IMPACT OF BULLYING ON LGBTQ YOUNG PEOPLE?**

*Continued bullying severely impacts the mental health, physical wellbeing, and educational achievement of a significant percentage of our nation's children and youth. Bullying and harassment of LGBT students is serious, widespread, has an impact on academic achievement, and the impact is felt into adulthood and can last a lifetime.*

#### **Bullying Has Emotional Consequences, Including Suicide, Depression, and Anxiety**

- LGBT youth ages 14--21 were significantly more likely to report depression and anxiety than heterosexual peers.<sup>(3)</sup>
- Even being **perceived** as being gay can lead to harassment. According to a study that is widely cited by not only mental health advocates but also governmental agencies concerned with bullying, 6% of **heterosexual students** report experiencing anti--gay harassment at school. Based on this misperception, these students are treated as if they were LGBT and are at significantly higher risk for assault, suicidal thoughts, and diminished school performance than other heterosexual youth.<sup>(7)</sup>
- One recent study<sup>(8)</sup> showed lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth were significantly more likely to attempt suicide in the previous 12 months, compared with heterosexuals (22% vs. 5%). LGB young adults reporting family rejection due to sexual orientation or gender identity were 8.4 times most likely to report having attempted suicide.<sup>(11)</sup>
- Analysis indicates a striking disparity in suicide risk between gay and non--gay youth that appears to increase with each level of severity ranging from suicidal ideation ---- to intent with a plan ---- to actual suicide attempts/attempts requiring medical attention.<sup>(5)</sup>
- A national study by Iowa State University researchers found that one out of every two LGBT youths are **regular** victims of "cyber--bullying," that causes psychological and emotional distress to victims, including suicidality, in some who are repeatedly victimized.<sup>(4)</sup>
- Even in college, hearing the phrase, "that's so gay" to describe something undesirable, has been associated with LGB college students' feeling isolated at school, having more headaches, and having trouble eating. Nearly 90% of these students heard the phrase used at least once, including 47% who heard it used more than 10 times in the last year.<sup>(13)</sup>

#### **The Problem is Widespread, Affects Academic Achievement, and Can Last a Lifetime**

- In a 2009 national study<sup>(1)</sup> of over 7,200 LGBT youth ages 13--21:
  - 61% felt unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation; 18% were physically assaulted (e.g. punched, kicked, injured with a weapon)
  - 52.9% of LGBT students were harassed or threatened by their peers via electronic mediums (e.g., text messages, emails, instant messages or postings on Internet sites such as Facebook), often known as cyber bullying.
  - 84% were verbally harassed (e.g. called names or threatened) because of their sexual orientation.
  - 33.8% of the students who did report a bullying incident said that school staff did nothing in response.
  - 30% OF LGBT students missed at least one entire day of school **in the past month** because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable.
- LGBT students drop out of school at 2--3 times the national average for heterosexual students.<sup>(2)</sup>
- LGB students with **high levels** of victimization are more likely to miss or drop out of school and do worse in school. LGB students with **low levels** of victimization are not that different from heterosexual students.<sup>(8)</sup>

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*\* The research cited is generally representative of a larger body of peer--reviewed research. Please note that not all LGBT people or their families and allies are affected in the same way.*

- Gay men, lesbians, and bisexual people are 1.5 -- 2 times as likely to experience violent events, especially in childhood, than the general population and have 2 times the risk of experiencing post--traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as adults as a consequence of these events.<sup>(9)</sup>
- Victimization and bullying is a reason for LGBT young people's distress. A study of 21--25 year--old LGBT people that asked them about their past school experiences found that the positive relationship between adolescent gender nonconformity and young adult depression and life satisfaction was explained by adolescent victimization based on real or perceived LGBT status. In other words, those LGBT people who tended to be more gender non--conforming as adolescents may suffer in well--being as young LGBT adults because they were bullied.<sup>(12)</sup>

### Building Resilience

Supportive families and school environments lower risks. Anti--bullying policies, engaged school personnel, curricular inclusion, and student--led organizations that build peer support are major factors in reducing risks of depression and suicide.<sup>(6)</sup>

Organizations like Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) are significant sources of support and understanding for families and students.

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