

Critical Study Finds Direct Link between School Victimization of Gender-nonconforming LGBT Youth with Depression and Quality of Life in Adulthood

New research has found that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth who do not conform to societal gender norms have compromised mental health that is clearly linked to the bullying and harassment they receive in school. The study, published in the November 2010 print edition of *Developmental Psychology*, is the first to thoroughly analyze the relationship between the victimization suffered by gender non-conforming LGBT students and their psychosocial adjustment as young adults. [Online First Publication, September 6, 2010, doi:10.1037/a0020705]

Analyzing data from the Family Acceptance Project's young adult survey, the authors examined the school-related experiences of 245 LGBT young adults, ages 21 to 25. They found that LGBT young adults who did not socially conform to gender roles as adolescents reported higher levels of anti-LGBT victimization, with significantly higher levels of depression and decreased life satisfaction in young adulthood. This research shows that the negative impact of anti-LGBT school victimization affects both quality of life and the LGBT young adult's capacity to enjoy life. Most crucially, the findings show that anti-LGBT bullying in school largely accounts for this psychological harm.

The study calls for schools to take action to address the bullying, violence, and social isolation that gender-nonconforming LGBT youth face, including the implementation of education programs for students and faculty, offering support programs including Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs), and protecting students through robust enforcement of nondiscrimination policies.

Co-author Stephen T. Russell said: "There is increasing attention on anti-LGBT bullying in schools. Our research makes it crystal clear that anti-LGBT bullying is a major reason that youth who don't conform to gender rules or expectations have poorer mental health later in life." Added co-author Russell Toomey: "Clearly, gender nonconforming and LGBT students need protections in schools that are specific to their sexual orientation and gender identities to interrupt the strong link between bias-victimization and poorer mental health."

By proactively supporting gender-nonconforming and LGBT youth, the authors conclude that schools can change the hostile and harmful environments these adolescents face each day, and prevent future tragedies such as the suicides of Asher Brown in Texas and Seth Walsh in California and the 2008 murder of fifteen-year-old Lawrence King.

Concluded co-author, Caitlin Ryan, Director of the Family Acceptance Project: "Each day we see tragedies directly related to anti-LGBT school victimization. This study provides clear evidence of the lasting effects of school bullying related to gender expression and LGBT identity. Schools can no longer turn a blind eye to these problems without being held accountable for the mental health problems these children suffer."

The Family Acceptance Project is a community research, intervention, education and policy initiative that studies the impact of family acceptance and rejection on the health, mental health and well being of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) youth. Results are being used to help families provide support for LGBT youth; to improve their health and mental health outcomes; to strengthen families and help maintain LGBT youth in their homes; to develop appropriate programs and policies; and train providers to improve the quality of services and care these youth receive in a wide range of settings. The Family Acceptance Project is based at San Francisco State University. For more information, please visit <http://familyproject.sfsu.edu>