Project AWARE Ohio Information Brief

BULLYING OF LGBT STUDENTS IN SCHOOLS

SCHOOL EXPERIENCES OF LGBT YOUTH

School can be an unwelcoming and even harmful experience for many lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students.[5,10] These students may face hostile school environments that contribute to health and academic risks.[2,17]

One such risk is LGBT students' increased likelihood of being bullied in school.[3] LGBT bullying is a subset of bias-based bullying, which is bullying based on one's prejudices against a particular group.[7] This type of bullying is a widespread problem with serious short-term and long-term effects.[10,19]

Furthermore, there is very little in the way of protection for victims of LGBT bullying.[8,10,21] This information brief aims to briefly describe the problem of LGBT bullying in schools and offer suggestions for ways in which youth-serving adults can make a difference.

WHAT IS BULLYING?

Ohio broadly defines bullying as multiple written, verbal, graphic or physical acts toward a student that are intentional. These acts cause mental or physical harm that is severe, persistent or pervasive enough to create an educational environment that is intimidating, threatening or abusive for the student. Ohio's definition also includes violence within dating relationships and notes that the harassment, intimidation or bullying can be conducted electronically.[14]

Bullying of LGBT students is one type of bias-based bullying that can be defined as the bullying of another due to his or her real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity.[20] Any student can be a victim of this type of bullying, regardless of the individual's sexual orientation or gender identity. A verbal taunt, such as "you're so gay," is an example of this type of bullying that can be aimed at, and negatively affect, any individual who is subjected to such harrassment.[22]

NEGATIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE

Bias-based bullying is just one aspect of the negative school climates that LGBT youth may face on a daily basis. For example, in Ohio schools, nearly 90 percent of LGBT students have to endure hearing homophobic remarks "often" or "frequently," and about 18 percent hear such remarks from staff members or teachers.[11] In addition to these remarks,

school policies often can leave LGBT students feeling discriminated against. For example, a lack of formal anti-bullying policies that could help protect LGBT students, along with potentially discriminatory rules regarding dress codes, the use of bathrooms or locker rooms, disciplinary actions, or school dances may prohibit or discourage these students from asserting their LGBT identities.[10] Finally, school curricula and library materials often exclude mentions of LGBT people, history and issues.[10,13]
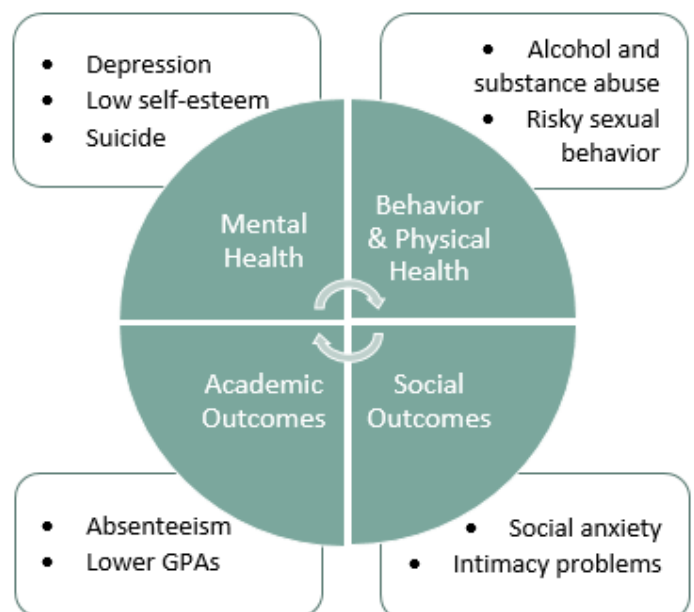
BULLYING OF LGBT STUDENTS

INCREASED RISK OF VICTIMIZATION FOR LGBT STUDENTS
Research studies have repeatedly reported that LGBT students are much more likely than their non-LGBT peers to experience bullying in school.[3,4,12] For example, 51 percent of LGBT students, compared to 25 percent of non-LGBT students, reported experiencing verbal harassment in a 2012 study.[12]

EFFECTS OF BIAS-BASED BULLYING
Bias-based bullying has been found to be associated with a multitude of negative health, academic and social outcomes in its victims, including in LGBT students.[4,6,10,16,18] Furthermore, some studies have even suggested that victims of LGBT bullying may experience more severe outcomes than victims of other types of bullying.[7,15,22] Some potential negative outcomes include:

- Depression
- Low self-esteem
- Suicide

- Alcohol and substance abuse
- Risky sexual behavior

Mental Health

Behavior & Physical Health

Academic Outcomes

Social Outcomes

- Absenteeism
- Lower GPAs

- Social anxiety
- Intimacy problems

LACK OF PROTECTION

LACK OF INTERVENTION EFFORTS AND ANTI-BULLYING POLICY

Many schools offer very little in the way of protection for LGBT students and victims of LGBT bullying.[10,21] For example:

- According to the 2013 GLSEN National School Climate Survey, frequent teacher intervention in cases of verbal harassment was only reported by 18 percent of LGBT students.[10]
- Anti-bullying programs in schools often neglect to include LGBT students.[21]
- Only 10 percent of students nationwide and 4 percent of students in Ohio reported the existence of anti-bullying policies at their schools that are *comprehensive* (i.e., enumerate 'sexual orientation' and 'gender identity').[10,11]

WAYS TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

IMPROVE NATIONAL, STATE AND SCHOOL POLICIES

- Be familiar with pending legislation, such as the Student Non-Discrimination Act of 2015, a federal act that aims to outlaw LGBT discrimination in public schools.[20]
- Advocate for enumerated anti-bullying legislation.
- Advocate for school policies that include, protect and respect LGBT students (e.g., anti-bullying policies that prohibit harassment based on gender expression and dress code policies that are enforced equally for all students).

EDUCATION ABOUT LGBT PEOPLE, HISTORY AND ISSUES

- Contact the Buckeye Region Anti-Violence Organization (BRAVO) for free workshops and trainings on LGBT anti-bullying at www.bravo-ohio.org. This is a statewide resource that offers anti-bullying, hate, bias and violence trainings for educators, staff members, administration and students.
- Sign up yourself, your school or your district for professional development workshops on LGBT-based bullying, such as those available at http://www.glsen.org/educate/professional-development/workshops.
- Make your curricula more inclusive by checking out GLSEN's educator resources page at http://www.glsen.org/educate/resources.

SUPPORT LGBT STUDENTS

- Organize or join a gay-straight alliance (GSA) in your school: http://www.gsanetwork.org/get-involved. In general, gay-straight alliances help students feel more connected and supported by others in the school, which can increase engagement and lower feelings of hopelessness and isolation students may experience from bullying.
  - Contact Kaleidoscope Youth Center for gay-straight alliance support. This center oversees the Ohio GSA Network and Ohio GSA Summit (www.kycohio.org).
- Intervene in instances of bias-based bullying, and designate yourself as a supportive staff member who is willing to serve as an ally for LGBT students. For a guide on how to do so, visit http://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/SSK_2013_book.pdf.
- Be aware of personal attitudes and language used with LGBT students.
- Model positive and accepting interactions and support.
- Protect students' privacy regarding their sexual orientations or gender identities.
- Participate in school-wide prevention initiatives about LGBT bullying, respect and school safety.
- Advise student councils and school clubs to help them implement programs that advocate for respect and anti-bullying.

THE FIVE STEPS TO INTERVENING:

Act instantly → Pinpoint the behavior → Educate → Assist the victim → Use discipline

Information reproduced from GLSEN's Safe Space Kit (2013)

EVALUATE ANTI-BULLYING PROGRAMS IN TERMS OF EFFECTS ON LGBT STUDENTS AND LGBT-BASED BULLYING

- Conduct anti-bullying program evaluations that include data on LGBT student outcomes (including prior, during and after anti-bullying interventions), as well as types and frequency of LGBT-based bullying.

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