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Peer Relationships and Inclusion in High School

In their study, Joseph Robinson and Dorothy Espelage (2011) explored the inequities in educational and psychological outcomes between students who identify as LGBTQ versus those who are straight-identified. The study assessed many aspects of school related differences including mental health outcomes, victimization, social connectedness and sense of belonging, and problems with attendance and truancy.

The research sample consisted of 13,213 students total, 9,387 of which were high school students attending grades 9-12, and 654 students that identified with at least one LGBTQ category. These high schoolers completed an online survey, made up of 117 different items. Of these items, there were eight that served as central to the study and were found to have significant results. These survey items included LGBTQ identification, suicide ideation, suicide attempts, victimization composite, cyber-bullying victimization, preference of a school with no gay or lesbian students, a school belongingness composite and an item that assessed unexcused absences.

Analysis revealed significant differences between LGBTQ and straight students in these areas. Assessment of suicide ideation found that LGBTQ-identified students were more likely to seriously consider suicide rarely or some of the time. These individuals were also found to be more likely to attempt suicide once in the year prior to the completion of the survey. Evaluation of cyber bullying victimization reported that as a group, LGBTQ-identified students were significantly more likely to experience bullying in this form than straight students were. In terms of victimization other than cyber bullying, LGBTQ students were 17 times more likely to be

victimized in the school setting. When asked if they felt a sense of belonging at school, LGBTQ students were found to be 1.5 times less likely to feel like they belonged. There was not a significant relationship between LGBTQ identified and straight students in terms of truancy and school attendance or number of unexcused absences. It was found that middle school students who identified as LGBTQ skipped school equally in middle school and high school, where straight identified students experienced an increase in truancy issues from middle school to high school.

This study serves to highlight the different experiences of LGBTQ-identified students and serve as a tool to help high schools across the U.S. implement change. It is important to note that as with any study there were limitations, some of which included the format as a self-reported anonymous survey response, and the fact that a single item (item 6) served to identify students as LGBTQ or straight. The survey responses supplied by the study can be useful in identifying barriers to equal psychological and educational outcomes of middle school and high school students.

Reference

Robinson, J. P., Espelage, D. L., (2011). Inequities in educational and psychological outcomes between LGBTQ and straight students in middle and high school. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 40(7), 315-330. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X11422112>