Queer High Schoolers Suffer Considerable Violence and Depression

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Lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) high school students are subject to alarmingly high levels of physical and sexual violence, depression and suicidal thoughts and are much more prone to substance use than their heterosexual peers, The New York Times reports. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) researchers published in the agency's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report the findings from the 2015 National Youth Risk Behavioral Survey (YRBS), an ongoing research projec that for the first time asked two questions about sexual contacts and identity. The report focused on students in grades 9 through 12.

The YRBS is considered a highly reliable source of data on adolescent health. The 2015 survey found that an estimated 8 percent of high schoolers identify as LGB, which translates to about 1.3 million students.

Drug use, depression and sexual violence are all tied to HIV risk.

The researchers found that 42.8 percent of LGB high school students have seriously considered suicide (compared with 14.8 percent of heterosexuals) and 29.4 percent reported attempting suicide during the previous year (compared with 6.4 percent of heterosexuals). A total of 60.4 percent of LGB students said they had been so sad or hopeless they stopped engaging in usual activities, compared with 26.4 percent of heterosexuals. A total of 12.5 percent of LGB students said they missed school during the previous month because they were concerned for their safety, compared with 4.6 percent of heterosexuals.

The rate of reported illegal drug use was five times higher among LGB students than among their heterosexual peers.

A respective 17.8 percent and 5.4 percent of LGB and heterosexual students reported ever being physically forced to have intercourse. A respective 22.7 percent and 9.1 percent reported experiencing sexual dating violence, and a respective 17.5 percent and 8.3 percent reported experiencing physical dating violence. A respective 34.2 percent and 18.8 percent reported being bullied at school, and a respective 28 percent and 14.2 percent reported online bullying.

On the bright side, according to the CDC's press release on the study, "Research suggests that comprehensive, community-wide prevention efforts can reduce the risk of multiple types of

violence for these and other vulnerable youth. Studies suggest that parents can play a role in fostering resiliency by providing strong family support and teaching all adolescents non-violent problem-solving skills. Schools can also build an environment that provides a sense of safety and connection for all students, including lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth."

To read the New York Times article, click here.

To read a press release about the study, click here.

To see a CDC data chart on the study, click here.

To see graphics related to the study, click here.

To read the report, click here.

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