QUANTIFYING THE PREVALENCE OF BULLYING AMONG LGBTQ YOUTH WHO DIED BY SUICIDE

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FUNDING ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

- APHA-CDC National Violent Death Reporting System New Investigator Award (2019)
Research Letter
May 26, 2020

Prevalence of Bullying Among Youth Classified as LGBTQ Who Died by Suicide as Reported in the National Violent Death Reporting System, 2003-2017

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DISPARITIES IN SUICIDE RISK DISPROPORTIONATELY AFFECT LGBTQ YOUTH

Sexual orientation disparities:

2019, Youth Risk Behavior Survey (n = 13,677)

- Seriously considered attempting suicide: 47% (Sexual minority), 15% (Heterosexual)
- Made a suicide plan: 40% (Sexual minority), 12% (Heterosexual)
- Attempted suicide: 23% (Sexual minority), 6% (Heterosexual)
- Suicide attempt requiring medical treatment: 6% (Sexual minority), 2% (Heterosexual)

Gender identity disparities:

2017, Youth Risk Behavior Survey (n = 131,901)

- Seriously considered attempting suicide: 53% (Transgender), 16% (Cisgender)
- Made a suicide plan: 39% (Transgender), 13% (Cisgender)
- Attempted suicide: 35% (Transgender), 4% (Cisgender)
- Suicide attempt requiring medical treatment: 17% (Transgender), 2% (Cisgender)

Johns et al., 2019, 2020
BULLYING IS ASSOCIATED WITH INCREASED SUICIDAL THOUGHTS AND BEHAVIORS AMONG GENERAL POPULATION\(^1\) AND LGBTQ YOUTH\(^2,3\)

(1) Kim & Leventhal, 2008
(2) Earnshaw et al., 2017
(3) Hatchel et al., 2021
CURRENT STUDY

**Aim:** Quantify whether bullying is more commonly reported among LGBTQ youth suicide death records than non-LGBTQ youth suicide death records.
YOUTH SUICIDE RECORDS (AGED 10-19) IN 2003-2017 NVDRS

NVDRS Collects Detailed Information from...

- Law Enforcement Reports
- Death Certificates
- Coroner/Medical Examiner Reports (Including Toxicology Reports)

Data are collected in all 50 states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia.

https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/datasources/nvdrs/index.html

- Restricted NVDRS to suicides aged 10 to 19 at death ($N = 9,884$)
- NVDRS: sexual orientation and transgender status added as codes in 2013
  - $n = 194$ LGBTQ records
- I did not want to be restricted to only analyzing years with coded fields (I’d miss 10 years of data!)
- Capitalized on narrative summaries included in NVDRS
  - 2 narratives per death record, ~one paragraph or more in length, summarizes circumstances of death from Law Enforcement and Coroner/Medical Examiner Report
- Adapted systematic search process\(^1\) using key words/phrases to search all youth suicide narratives for markers of: (1) LGBTQ status and (2) bullying

(1) Lyons et al., 2019
TEAM OF EXPERTS IN SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY RESEARCH DEVELOPED LIST OF POTENTIAL SEARCH TERMS AND SEARCHED YOUTH NARRATIVES
Team of experts in sexual orientation and gender identity research developed list of potential search terms and searched youth narratives.

Randomly selected 50 narratives selected in Step 1 and obtained additional search terms – finalized list of 102 search terms.
SYSTEMATIC SEARCH PROCESS OF NARRATIVES FOR LGBTQ INFORMATION

Team of experts in sexual orientation and gender identity research developed a list of potential search terms and searched youth narratives.

Step 1

Randomly selected 50 narratives selected in Step 1 and obtained additional search terms – finalized list of 102 search terms.

ES FOR LGBTQ

her girlfriend
her most recent girlfriend
her now ex-girlfriend
her wife
his bf
his boyfriend
his current boyfriend
his ex-boyfriend
his former boyfriend
his husband
his most recent boyfriend
his now ex-boyfriend
homosexual
hormonal
hormone
identified as a boy
identified as a female
SYSTEMATIC SEARCH PROCESS OF NARRATIVES FOR LGBTQ INFORMATION

**Step 1**
Team of experts in sexual orientation and gender identity research developed list of potential search terms and searched youth narratives

**Step 2**
Randomly selected 50 narratives selected in Step 1 and obtained additional search terms – finalized list of 102 search terms

**Step 3**
Searched youth narratives using finalized list – obtained 251 potential LGBTQ records
SYSTEMATIC SEARCH PROCESS OF NARRATIVES FOR LGBTQ INFORMATION

**Step 1**
Team of experts in sexual orientation and gender identity research developed list of potential search terms and searched youth narratives.

**Step 2**
Randomly selected 50 narratives selected in Step 1 and obtained additional search terms – finalized list of 102 search terms.

**Step 3**
Searched youth narratives using finalized list – obtained 251 potential LGBTQ records.

**Step 4**
Reviewer pairs double-coded 50 selected narratives for presence/absence of LGBTQ information (98% agreement; $\kappa = 0.96$) and then independently coded remaining narratives.
METHOD - INDEPENDENT & DEPENDENT VARIABLES

Independent variable: LGBTQ status

- (1) self-identified as LGBTQ; (2) was perceived to be LGBTQ by family, friends, or peers; or (3) accessed treatment for gender dysphoria (e.g., hormone therapy)
- 334 LGBTQ-classified records (3.4%)

Dependent variable: Exposure to bullying

- (1) the decedent self-reported being bullied (e.g., suicide note); (2) witnesses reported the decedent was bullied; or (3) postmortem investigation revealed bullying (e.g., text messages)
- 490 bullying-classified records (5.0%)
RESULTS (N = 9,884)

“LGBTQ-classified death records evidenced 4.92 times the odds of being bullied compared to non-LGBTQ-classified death records (95% CI: 3.58-6.82, P<.001)”

Clark et al., 2020, JAMA Pediatrics
LIMITATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

LIMITATIONS OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY INFORMATION AS REPORTED IN THE NATIONAL VIOLENT DEATH REPORTING SYSTEM

Kirsty A. Clark, PhD, MPH¹ and John R. Blosnich, PhD, MPH²

(1) Haas et al., 2019
(2) Mays & Cochran, 2019
TAKEAWAY AND DISCUSSION

- Bullying can be a **deadly antecedent** to suicide, especially among LGBTQ youth

- **Anti-bullying school-based interventions** are critical to support LGBTQ youth\(^1\)
  - LGBTQ students in schools with **LGBTQ-specific anti-bullying policies** report less harassment and more frequent and supportive intervention by school staff\(^2\)
  - LGBTQ students in schools with **gender-sexuality alliances** report more school safety, less anti-LGBTQ bullying, and less suicidality\(^3,4\)

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(1) Kull et al., 2016
(2) Hall, 2017
(3) Walls et al., 2013
(4) Ioverno et al., 2016
OTHER USES OF NVDRS-RAD FOR UNDERSTANDING LGBTQ POPULATION SUICIDE

Sexual Orientation and Disclosure of Suicidal Thoughts Before Suicide Mortality

Kirsty A. Clark, PhD, MPH, John R. Biosnich, PhD, MPH

Sexual Orientation Differences in Lethal Methods Used in Suicide: Findings From the National Violent Death Reporting System

Kirsty A. Clark, Vickie M. Mays, Onyebuchi A. Arah, Leeka I. Kheifets, and Susan D. Cochran
Research Letter

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EXTRA SLIDES
BULLYING DISPARITIES ARE CONSISTENT AND PERSISTENT

Proportion who experience bullying 'often' or 'very often' (n = 392 youth)

Pachankis, Clark, Klein & Dougherty, 2021, Journal of Youth and Adolescence
**DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS (N = 9,884)**

- **Legal sex**
  - LGBTQ-classified: Male 53.0%, Female 47.0%
  - Non-LGBTQ-classified: Male 76.4%, Female 23.6%

- **Age at death**
  - LGBTQ-classified: 10-13 9.3%, 14-16 37.7%, 17-19 53.0%
  - Non-LGBTQ-classified: 10-13 8.3%, 14-16 32.2%, 17-19 59.6%

- **Race/ethnicity**
  - LGBTQ-classified: White 80.5%, Black 8.4%, AI/AN 3.6%, Other 7.5%
  - Non-LGBTQ-classified: White 76.2%, Black 10.2%, AI/AN 3.3%, Other 7.7%

- **Depressed mood**
- **Mental health problem**
- **Suicide thought history**
- **Suicide attempt history**
- **School-related problem**
- **Intimate partner problem**
- **Family relationship problem**

Clark et al., 2020, *JAMA Pediatrics*
**TAKEAWAY AND DISCUSSION**

- Bullying can be a **deadly antecedent** to suicide, especially among LGBTQ youth.
- Anti-bullying school-based interventions are critical to support LGBTQ youth\(^1\)
  - LGBTQ students in schools with **LGBTQ-specific anti-bullying policies** report less harassment and more frequent and supportive intervention by school staff\(^2\)
  - LGBTQ students in schools with **gender-sexuality alliances** report more school safety, less anti-LGBTQ bullying, and less suicidality\(^3,4\)
- **Pediatricians** can play an important role in identifying, affirming, and preventing negative outcomes in LGBTQ youth experiencing bullying\(^5\)
- **Affirming and supportive mental health interventions** can help build coping skills and increase self-esteem to buffer mental health impacts of bullying and peer rejection\(^6\)

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(1) Kull et al., 2016  
(2) Hall, 2017  
(3) Walls et al., 2013  
(4) Ioverno et al., 2016  
(5) Earnshaw et al., 2017  
(6) Craig et al., 2021
LGBTQ+ students feel safer and more supported with:

- Comprehensive anti-bullying and anti-discrimination policies
- Teachers and school staff who are supportive of LGBTQ students
- Gender and Sexuality Alliances
- An LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum

Source: 2019 National School Climate Survey
Learn more at glsen.org