Victimization of Sexual Minority Youth

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February 21, 2008

Special thanks to Sarah Wylie and S. Bryn Austin for their contribution.
Presentation Outline

- Overview of sexual orientation and sexual identity
- Review of studies on rates of victimization in sexual minority youth
- Evidence of health effects
- Public response
Sexual Minority

- Term describing persons expressing some same-sex sexual orientation
  - Sexual attractions to same-sex individuals
  - Histories of sexual activity with someone of the same sex
  - Identification as lesbian, gay, bisexual (LGB)
- Pertinent to youth populations
- About 5-10% of youth are sexual minority
- A population with health disparities
Sexual Orientation

- An individual’s sexual and affectional preferences for males and/or females
- Multidimensional construct
Dimensions of Sexual Orientation

- Sexual attractions
- Self-identification
- Fantasies
- Emotional attractions
- Social preferences
- Sexual behavior
Minority Sexual Orientation Development

- Process generally involving 4 tasks:
  1. Recognition of same-sex attractions
  2. Initiation of same-sex relationships
  3. Disclosure of sexual orientation to others
  4. Identification as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, or something else

Minority Sexual Orientation Development

- May begin in childhood/early adolescence
- Feelings of a sense of difference from peers emerges early (average at age 8 yrs)
- Believed to occur in stages (Troiden, 1993)
- Considerable diversity in nature, timing, and duration of developmental trajectory
- By age 25 years, sexual orientation is fairly stable
Importance of Developmental Process to Health

• Useful in understanding health risks of sexual minorities

• Health experiences differ based on the developmental stage and timing

• Age of experiencing developmental milestones may be decreasing – greater health risks?
Gay-Related Victimization

- Victimization based on known or presumed minority sexual orientation status is one of the most common forms of bias-related violence.
- An estimated 17% of high school students experience gay-related name calling regardless of their sexual orientation (American Assoc. of University Women, 1993).
- Youth view gay-related verbal harassment as the most distressing type of verbal victimization.
- 80-90% of high school students regularly hear anti-gay remarks.
Victimization of Sexual Minority Youth

- Occurs across multiple contexts:
  - Family
  - Schools
  - Communities
- Multiple types – verbal, physical, sexual
- Multiple perpetrators – parents, peers, other adults
Some Early Studies

29 GB males, 15-19 years old

- Physical assault: 30%
- Physical assault at school: 15%
- Verbal abuse at school: 55%

> 2000 youth (12-21 years old) seen between 1983-1985 at a NYC social service agency

- Any violence: 40%
- Violence in family: 20%
- Sexual abuse: 22%

Remafedi G. *Pediatrics*, 1987
Martin AD & Hetrick ES. *J Homosex*, 1988
Lifetime victimization specifically because someone knew or assumed you were gay...

- Verbal insults: 80%
- Threat of attack: 44%
- Assault: 18%
- Assault w/ weapon: 9%
- Chased or followed: 31%
- Objects thrown: 33%
- Vandalism: 23%
- Sexual assault: 22%

Data from 194 male & female LGB youth aged 15-21 years recruited from gay community groups in 14 US cities;

- 73% male, 66% white
- Rates similar across gender, higher in white group

Pilkington NW & D’Augelli AR. J Community Psych, 1995
School-based Massachusetts YRBS (1993, 1995)

- Missed school b/c of fear
  - GLB: 10%
  - Non-GLB: 20%
  - Same-sex: 20%
  - Opposite-sex: 30%
  - * P<.05

- Threatened/injured w/ weapon
  - GLB: 10%
  - Non-GLB: 20%
  - Same-sex: 20%
  - Opposite-sex: 30%
  - * P<.05

- Property stolen/damaged
  - GLB: 5%
  - Non-GLB: 10%
  - Same-sex: 10%
  - Opposite-sex: 15%
  - * P<.05

- Physical fight at school
  - GLB: 5%
  - Non-GLB: 10%
  - Same-sex: 10%
  - Opposite-sex: 15%
  - * P<.05

- Physical fight needing medical tx
  - GLB: 5%
  - Non-GLB: 10%
  - Same-sex: 10%
  - Opposite-sex: 15%
  - * P<.05


- 1993 YRBS: 105 Same-sex; 1563 Opposite-sex students
- 1995 YRBS: 104 GLB; 4049 non-GLB
Bullying Experiences in Past Year

- Data from 7559 youth aged 14-22 years participating in the Growing Up Today Study

Males

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Heterosexual</th>
<th>Mostly Heterosexual</th>
<th>Bisexual</th>
<th>Lesbian/Gay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Victim</td>
<td>1.45*</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>1.98*</td>
<td>0.34*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perpetrator</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td>1.72*</td>
<td>1.63*</td>
<td>1.70*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Females

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Heterosexual</th>
<th>Mostly Heterosexual</th>
<th>Bisexual</th>
<th>Lesbian/Gay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Victim</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>3.36*</td>
<td>±</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perpetrator</td>
<td>2.41*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Numbers at top of bars are risk ratios adjusted for age, race, and weight status. Referent is heterosexual. ± No lesbians reported bully perpetration.

Manuscript in preparation: Berlan ED et al.
Whose at Greater Risk?

- Younger age of awareness of a same-sex sexual orientation
- Younger age of self-identification as LGB
- Younger age of disclosure to others
- Greater degree of “outness”
- Self-perceived obviousness as LGB
- Gender atypicality (HUGE!)
- Males
- Bisexually active vs. those with histories of only opposite- or same-sex sex (Robin L et al., 2002)
Health Consequences
Health Implications of At-School Victimization: Evidence from YRBS


- Data from MA & Vermont 1995 YRBS: 315 LGB, 8873 non-LGB
Health Implications: Evidence from YRBS

Sexual Risk

- LGB Male
- LGB Female
- Het Male
- Het Female

Victimization

- Low
- High

Suicide Attempts

- LGB Male
- LGB Female
- Het Male
- Het Female

Victimization

- Low
- High

Substance Use Implications: Evidence from YRBS

Tobacco

- # Cigs/day
- Low vs. High
- LGB Male, LGB Female, Het Male, Het Female

Alcohol

- # Drinks/mo
- Low vs. High
- LGB Male, LGB Female, Het Male, Het Female

Marijuana/Cocaine

- Times Used/mo
- Low vs. High
- LGB Male, LGB Female, Het Male, Het Female

Other Street Drugs

- Lifetime Use
- Low vs. High
- LGB Male, LGB Female, Het Male, Het Female

Mental Health Implications: Evidence from Gay Community Studies

• Largest predictors of negative mental health in a community sample of 206 LB females age 14-21 years (D’Augelli AR, 2003):
  – Fear of future sexual orientation victimization
  – Actual experiences of victimization

• Dahlia describing why she quit school in 11th grade:
  “…Mostly it was the fact that I was scared. It wasn’t even the verbal abuse. It was the fact that at any time people could walk up to me and knock the crap out of me because I am gay. I always had to watch my back.” (Human Rights Watch, 2001)
Suicide Attempts: Evidence from Gay Community Studies

- Strong predictors of a serious suicide attempt in a gay community sample of 528 youth ages 15-19 yrs:
  - Early parental psychological abuse
  - Parental discouragement of childhood gender atypical behavior
  - Gay-related verbal abuse
  - Gender-related verbal abuse (sissy, tomboy)
- More important than family history of suicide

Post Traumatic Stress: Evidence from Gay Community Studies

• Victimization experiences also found to predict traumatic stress & PTSD symptoms in the same sample
• Childhood gender atypicality was a contributing factor
• Average age of start of gay-related victimization:
  – Verbal – 11 years for males; 14 for females
  – Physical – 13 years for both males & females
  – Sexual – 13 years for males; 16 for females

Buffers of Negative Effects of Victimization

- Relationship quality with mother and friends buffered the link between victimization and depression (but not externalizing symptoms) in a high school sample (Williams T, et al., 2005)
- Family support in conjunction with self-acceptance associated with lower risk of suicide attempt (Hershberger & D’Augelli, 1995)
- More work need to be done – factors contributing to resilience not well described
Community Response

- Accelerated research in past 15 years
- Legal advancements protecting sexual minority students in public schools
- New policies and programs in schools
  - Nondiscrimination and anti-bullying policies
  - Personnel training
  - Gay-Straight Alliances – started in 1988 in Concord, MA; 3,000+ registered with GLSEN
  - School-wide diversity events – Day of Silence
  - MA Safe Schools Program – mandated state-wide program began in 1993
Evaluation of Massachusetts Safe Schools Program (SSP)

• Purpose of program:
  – Develop policies protecting sexual minorities from harassment, violence & discrimination
  – Train personnel in crisis & suicide intervention
  – Support establishment of support groups
  – Provide counseling for families w/ gay students

• Random sample of 35 schools & 11th graders in 99 classrooms (61% response rate at level of school)

### Evaluation of Massachusetts SSP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree of Implementation</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GSA only</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel training only</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel training &amp; policy</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GSA &amp; personnel training</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GSA &amp; policy</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Implementation</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Main Outcome: Perceived Sexual Diversity Climate – 19-item scale covering curricula, attitudes, and behaviors related to homosexuality
Evaluation of Massachusetts SSP

• Limitations
  – Limited causal inference: Do schools with a better sexual diversity climate have better implementation of SSP or vice versa?
  – Unanswered question: Is better sexual diversity climate associated with lower rates of victimization and more positive health in sexual minority students?
• Nonetheless, findings are compelling
### Protective Effects of LGB Programs & Policies among Sexual Minority Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Program/Policy</th>
<th>Threatened/injured at school</th>
<th>Skipped school b/c unsafe</th>
<th>2+ Suicide attempts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LGB Support Group (GSA)</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Staff Support</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Peer Support Group</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Bullying Policy</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All odds ratios (OR) significant at $P<.05$.

Other Areas of Research Not Covered Today

• Only touched on youth research; large literature using adult samples

• Sexual orientation differences in childhood maltreatment
  – LGB adults are more likely to report child abuse experiences (Corliss, Cochran & Mays, 2002; Austin et al., in press)

• Long-term effects of youth victimization on adult health & adjustment
Variation Across Studies

- Study design – sampling, cross-sectional vs. longitudinal
- Population – youth vs. adults (focused on youth studies; adult studies comparable)
- Measures of sexual orientation
- Measures of victimization – type, sexual orientation-specific, location
- Dates of studies – historical changes in societies’ views of homosexuality
- Diversity in research = diversity in findings
Conclusions Across Studies

- Despite diversity, common findings
- Victimization experiences are more frequent in sexual minority youth
- Negatively impacts physical & mental health
- Strong relationships with family & friends can buffer detrimental consequences
- Society is making progress, but more needs to be done
- Sexual minority youth have resilience – most are healthy and well adjusted