



SPR 18th Annual Meeting

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Location: Mt. Elbert (Atrium Tower/2nd Floor)

Time of Presentation: Jun 03 4:00 PM - 5:30 PM

Category/Theme: Context and Prevention

The Effect of Caregiver Support and Peer Victimization on Depressive Symptomatology among Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual (LGB) Youth

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Adolescent well-being is influenced by determinants at multiple ecological levels, including the family and school contexts. For lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) youth who may have difficult relationships in both settings, emotional well-being can be compromised. Although there is very little research on family support among LGB adolescents, evidence suggests that many caregiver-child relationships are strained when youth express a minority sexual orientation. A larger body of research on school context has shown that LGB youth are at increased risk of physical assault and bullying by peers. Lower levels of caregiver support and higher rates of victimization may coalesce to increase risk for depression among LGB youth. In this presentation, we compare the joint association of caregiver support and peer victimization with depressive symptomatology among LGB and heterosexual adolescents.

Data are from a school-based survey of 1,878 9-12th graders in Boston public schools. Students who self-identified as "mostly heterosexual", bisexual, "mostly homosexual", or gay/lesbian were coded as LGB (6.4%, n = 115). We assessed past-month bully victimization (teasing, electronic victimization, rumors/lies, sexual harassment, property theft), and past-year physical assault (hit, punched, or beaten up). Caregiver support was assessed using the 3-item Family Communication Subscale (Oman, et al. 2002). Thirty-day depressive symptomatology was assessed using the 5-item Modified Depression Scale (MDS; Dahlberg, et al. 2005).

Compared to heterosexual peers, a larger proportion of LGB youth reported physical assault (21.2% vs. 13.6%, $P < 0.001$), and bully victimization (68.8% vs. 39.0%, $P < 0.001$). Experiencing rumors and lies was the most common form of bully victimization reported by both LGB and heterosexual youth (38.4% vs. 20.9%, $p < 0.001$). Sexual harassment was the second most commonly reported type of bullying reported by LGB youth (36%), whereas teasing was the second most common form of bullying among heterosexual youth (16.2%). LGB youth reported lower levels of caregiver support than heterosexual youth ($M = 8.5$ vs. $M = 9.0$, $p = 0.04$), and higher levels of depressive symptomatology ($M = 16.0$ vs. $M = 13.1$, $p < 0.001$). MDS scores were high among all LGB youth, limiting the ability to examine whether caregiver support and victimization were associated with increased depressive symptomatology.

Compared to heterosexual peers, LGB youth experience lower levels of caregiver support and higher levels of peer victimization; they also exhibit higher levels of depressive symptoms. These findings underscore the importance of creating supportive social environments for LGB youth.

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