

Gay, lesbian, bisexual youth bullied, abused more often than peers: study

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Young people who identify themselves as gay, lesbian or bisexual, experience same-sex attractions or engage in same-sex sexual behaviors are more likely to experience sexual abuse, parental physical abuse and bullying from peers than other youth, according to a University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health study.

In addition, these [adolescents](#) – identified as "sexual minority youth" in the study – are more likely to miss school due to fear. The American Public Health Association recently published the findings online; the study will appear in the August issue of the *American Journal of Public Health*.

"The higher rates of [abuse](#) experienced by sexual minority youths are clearly one of the driving mechanisms underlying higher rates of mental health problems, substance use, risky sexual behavior and HIV by sexual minority adolescents and adults," said Mark S. Friedman, Ph.D., assistant professor of behavioral and community health sciences.

"However, I cannot stress enough that these youth experience sexual and [physical abuse](#) and bullying because they identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual or experience same-sex attraction; abuse does not 'cause' sexual orientation or identification."

Friedman and his co-authors conducted a meta-analysis of 37 studies in 18 geographic areas that compared the likelihood of self-reported childhood [sexual abuse](#), physical abuse perpetrated by a parent or guardian or peer victimization between high-school aged sexual minority

and non-minority youth. The meta-analysis only included school-based studies conducted in North America of randomly sampled youth.

Many studies have suggested that young people who identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual, experience same-sex attractions or engage in same-sex sexual activity are more likely to experience sexual or physical abuse or bullying from peers than other youth. However, these studies vary in effect sizes, sampling and recruitment strategies, measurements and other issues. Therefore, Friedman and his team chose to conduct a meta-analysis, a complex statistical procedure that combines the results of multiple studies.

According to the meta-analysis, [sexual minority](#) youth are:

- Nearly three times more likely to report childhood sexual abuse, compared with other adolescents
- 1.3 times more likely to report parental physical abuse than other adolescents
- 1.7 times more likely to report being threatened or injured with a weapon, or otherwise assaulted as compared to their peers
- Nearly three times more likely to report missing school because they were afraid

Studies revealed a high rate of prior sexual abuse among bisexual female (40 percent), lesbian (32 percent), bisexual male (24 percent), gay male (21 percent) and heterosexual female (17 percent) [youth](#), compared to 5 percent of heterosexual male adolescents.

According to the report, children and adolescents who experience sexual

and parental physical abuse are more likely to suffer from psychological, substance abuse, behavioral and criminal problems. Those who are abused and assaulted by peers are more likely to experience poor school performance, delinquency, social isolation, psychological and substance abuse problems and other issues, the study said.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently released a study that found adolescents who identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual are more likely than their heterosexual [peers](#) to take unhealthy risks.

"We need to continue our research to examine how the abuse and mistreatment these young people endure is connected to the risky behaviors they might engage in and, of great importance, programs to prevent such abuse are urgently needed," Friedman said.

Provided by University of Pittsburgh Schools of the Health Sciences

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