

Asian Canadian LGB teens face greater health risks as dual minorities: research

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(Medical Xpress) -- Asian Canadian teenagers who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual are 30 times more likely to face harassment than their heterosexual peers – a factor that is linked to higher rates of alcohol or drug use, according to University of British Columbia research.

Recently published in the *Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health*, this is the first study in North America to investigate the links between Asian teens dealing with “dual minority discrimination,” problem substance use and supports that can help reduce those risks.

“Discrimination for both ethnicity and sexual orientation is an important issue, especially in B.C., where at least 20 per cent of young people are of East Asian or Southeast Asian origin,” says Elizabeth Saewyc, professor of nursing and adolescent medicine in the UBC School of Nursing, and research director for the McCreary Centre Society. “It can create even greater stress than experiencing racism or homophobia alone.”

Saewyc, the lead investigator, says, “Our study shows schools need to consider cultural diversity in their strategies to reduce homophobic bullying in schools, and work to create school environments where all students feel safe and connected.”

The study also shows that social supports, whether from family, school, or peers, may help buffer the stress of [harassment](#) for Asian Canadian adolescents.

Saewyc's co-authors are Research Associate Colleen Poon at the McCreary Centre Society, and Weihong Chen, a former post-doctoral research fellow at the UBC School of Nursing.

The researchers analyzed data from the 2003 British Columbia Adolescent Health (BCAH) Survey, focusing on respondents who identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) or mostly heterosexual, and East or Southeast Asian, which includes Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese and Cambodian.

Six per cent of Asian Canadian boys and 11 per cent of Asian Canadian girls identified as LGB or mostly heterosexual, representing an estimated 4,389 students enrolled across the province. Conducted by the McCreary Centre Society, the BCAH survey was completed by more than 30,000 B.C. students in Grades 7-12.

“It may be culturally taboo for some Asian youth to speak about matters related to sex, sexual orientation and sexual abuse, so school and health professionals need to consider culturally sensitive services,” says Saewyc, adding that language barriers can also be an issue, as more than one-fifth of the adolescents in the study sample were recent immigrants, and more than half spoke a language other than English at home.

The study is funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research's (CIHR) Institute of Population and Public Health and Institute of Gender and Health.

“This study helps us not only to pinpoint who is most at risk for discrimination and bullying, but also what can be done about it,” says CIHR Institute of Gender and [Health](#) Scientific Director Prof. Joy Johnson. “The finding that connectedness and extracurricular involvement halved the likelihood of substance use for this group is remarkable.”

Key findings include:

- Asian Canadian LGB youth were 26 to 29 times more likely than their heterosexual peers to report being discriminated against due to their sexual orientation.
- Asian Canadian sexual minority students who experienced multiple types of bullying and discrimination were more than 10 times as likely to report problems because of alcohol or drug use as heterosexual peers.
- Among those who experienced high rates of stigma and abuse, their chance of problem substance use was cut in half if they had high levels of school or family connectedness, friends with healthy attitudes, or involvement in extracurriculars like sports or music.

More information: A copy of the full research paper can be downloaded at cjmh.metapress.com/link.asp?id=u22060617875

Provided by University of British Columbia

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