

Discrimination and Abuse Linked to Higher Rates of Pregnancy Among LGB Teens

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) teens in British Columbia are at a higher risk of pregnancy because of discrimination, sexual abuse and harassment compared to heterosexual teens, according to a University of British Columbia study.

The study, released today in the Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality, is based on the B.C. Adolescent Health Survey, which is conducted every five or six years in school districts across the province by the McCreary Centre Society. The survey includes questions about sexual health and risk behaviours, as well as questions about sexual orientation.

B.C. is the only province that tracks trends in sexual health for both LGB youth and heterosexual teens

"Teen pregnancy is declining, but the risk is still higher for LGB youth," says lead author Elizabeth Saewyc, an Associate Professor in the School of Nursing at UBC and Research Director at the McCreary Centre Society. "These results are linked to higher rates of discrimination and harassment among LGB teens at school."

According to the results, lesbian and bisexual teens involved in pregnancy were twice as likely to have experienced discrimination because of their sexual orientation. They also reported more kinds of harassment at school than lesbian or bisexual teens who hadn't been pregnant or caused a pregnancy.

"This issue is not unique to B.C.," says Saewyc, who also holds a Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) Applied Public Health Chair in Youth Health. "Population studies in other countries have also documented higher rates of teen pregnancy among sexual minority youth. We expect other provinces in Canada would report similar results if they conducted similar surveys."

The study identified trends in risk behaviours that lead to pregnancy, such as lack of condom use and early sex (before age 14), which is often due to sexual abuse. The pattern of these risk behaviours among LGB and heterosexual teens followed the same trends as pregnancy involvement.

Key findings:

-- Rates of early first sexual experience for bisexual male students increased in 1998 from 56.4 per cent up to 59.7 per cent, then down to 42.7 percent in 2003. Teen pregnancy rates followed the same trend, from 9.6 per cent up to 11.6 per cent before dropping to 7.4 per cent in 2003.

-- Rates of early sex for lesbian students increased between 1992 and 1998, from 64.6 percent up to 67.9 per cent, then dropped to 48.4 per cent in 2003. Teen pregnancy rates increased slightly from 6.9 per cent to 7.3 per cent, before dropping to 3.4 per cent in 2003.

-- Among heterosexual teens, early first sex declined steadily from 1992 to 2003. Among this group, teen pregnancy rates also declined from 2.2 and 3 percent in 1992 to 1.2 per cent in 2003.

"Despite declining rates, the results of the study demonstrate that a gap between heterosexual and LGB teen pregnancy remains," says Saewyc. In 1992, LGB students were two to seven times more likely to have been pregnant or caused a pregnancy than their straight peers; in 2003, they were still more than twice as likely to be involved in a pregnancy.

"Reducing the levels of stigma, harassment, and sexual violence that LGB youth face, and creating safer, more supportive schools for LGB youth is a key step," says Saewyc. "But sexual violence is linked to pregnancy for all teens, so interventions to reduce sexual harassment and sexual violence in adolescent relationships can have a positive effect

for teens of every orientation.”

“Exposure to violence and discrimination poses serious health threats. Dr. Saewyc’s research underscores how these threats place LGB youth at particular risk,” says Dr. Joy Johnson, Scientific Director, CIHR Institute of Gender and Health. “More must be done to protect the health of all youth.”

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Provided by University of British Columbia

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