

Workplace discrimination compromises health of sexual minorities

7 November 2013, by Laurel Thomas Gnagey

As Congress debates a bill that would end employment discrimination based on sexual orientation—perhaps as early as this week—University of Michigan School of Public Health researchers offer further evidence of workplace discrimination and its impact on the health of young sexual minorities.

José Bauermeister, the John G. Searle Assistant Professor of Health Behavior and Health Education and director of the U-M Center for Sexuality & Health Disparities, led an academic/community partnership that surveyed a diverse group of men who have sex with other men, ages 18-29. He and his research team wanted to find out if the men had faced [discrimination](#) at work and if it had an association with self-reported health status and health-related quality of life.

"What our study found was that young men had not only reported diverse events of work discrimination due to their sexuality, but also were more likely to report having poorer health outcomes than peers who had not experienced work discrimination in the prior year," Bauermeister said.

As part of an initiative funded by the Ford Foundation and the MAC AIDS Fund, Bauermeister and colleagues found that 15 percent of the nearly 400 Detroit-area men reported at least one experience of work discrimination based on their [sexuality](#). Incidents included not getting hired in the first place, being fired, having been denied a promotion or salary increase, or getting an unfavorable evaluation.

Using validated measures used by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the researchers asked respondents to describe their overall health, indicate how often in the last 30 days their physical or mental health was not good, and whether their health had kept them from usual activities.

Participants reported having a number of days when physical or mental health was not good, averaging 1.5 days when they were kept from their normal activities. Nine percent reported limited problems with functionality based on impairment or a health problem.

"Our findings, although specific to the Detroit area, suggest that work discrimination has both civil right and [public health](#) implications," Bauermeister said. "The absence of these work protections may also have economic implications for the community, as we are seeing that a group of young men who are ready and able to work may not be employed because of their sexual orientation or may have poorer health if they are experiencing discrimination at work."

While neither the state of Michigan nor the federal government offer protection to [sexual minorities](#), the city of Detroit prohibits discrimination. The U.S. Senate is set to take up the vote on the Employment Nondiscrimination Act as early as this week.

The U-M School of Public Health study was presented at the 2013 American Public Health Association meeting in Boston and will appear online in the publication *Sexual Research and Social Policy*.

Provided by University of Michigan

APA citation: Workplace discrimination compromises health of sexual minorities (2013, November 7) retrieved 19 October 2021 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-11-workplace-discrimination-compromises-health-sexual.html>

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