Medical Xpress

More bullying of LGBTQ+ students in politically conservative districts

July 19 2021

Students who identify as LGBTQ+ in Washington state school districts with conservative voting records reported experiencing more bullying than their peers in more politically liberal areas, according to a new study.

For the study in the journal *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy*, researchers explored the relationships among school district voting records in the 2016 presidential election, bullying experiences in schools and mental health outcomes of LGBTQ+ youth in the state.

The study shows LGBTQ+ students are at a higher risk for psychological distress and suicidality as a result of bullying, particularly in school districts that voted for former President Donald Trump in the 2016 election. Students in conservative voting districts also reported their teachers were less likely to intervene in instances of bullying than students who responded from more liberal voting districts.

"To my knowledge, nobody has really looked at this connection between a school district's political attitudes and the experiences of LGBTQ+ students in schools," said Paul Kwon, professor of psychology at Washington State University and coauthor of the study. "This project highlights an inequity that is not talked about a lot and shows the need for more explicit and inclusive anti-bullying legislation and policies that help mitigate the risks to LGBTQ+ youth regardless of district political attitudes."

Kwon and his colleagues' work supports previous research showing anti-LGBTQ+ prejudice is consistently related to political ideology and beliefs. For the current study, they analyzed the responses of nearly 50,000 students in 8-12 grades to the 2018 Washington State Healthy Youth Survey. The survey asks students about a variety of factors including sexual and gender identity, bullying and whether or not teachers intervened during instances of bullying. In total, 20% or nearly 10,000 students in the survey identified as being LGBTQ+.

According to the analysis, when teachers intervened "almost always" in instances of bullying, LGBTQ+ students reported experiencing bullying rates that were nearly identical to non-LGBTQ+ students.

When intervention did not occur, LGBTQ+ youth experienced more bullying, and subsequently, more psychological distress and suicidality.

"This was especially prevalent in more conservative school districts where LGBTQ+ youth report less teacher intervention despite experiencing more bullying," Kwon said. "Over 35% of youth in our study are students in a conservative leaning school district, possibly placing them at greater risk for more bullying experiences and higher psychological distress."

While each school district in Washington is mandated to enact policy that at minimum, complies with legislation prohibiting harassment, intimidation and bullying, Kwon and colleagues suggest individual school boards, regardless of political leanings, implement policy that goes beyond minimum protections for LGBTQ+ youth.

For example, the researchers suggest school policy should include explicit parameters for training and education for teachers regarding LGBTQ+ bullying as well as steps for teachers and administrators to intervene following LGBTQ+ bullying experiences. In addition, they

suggest that all school websites explicitly describe anti-bullying policies as they relate to LGBTQ+ youth using specific examples.

"We also recommend educators discuss anti-bullying policy with students and families at the start of each school year, while concurrently highlighting LGBTQ+ identities, particularly in conservative districts," Kwon said. "After all, students have little choice in the school they attend, almost no choice in the school district they belong to and are unable to vote until they are 18. Thus, they are subjected to the environment of the school and broader culture of the school district chosen for them."

More information: Steven Hobaica et al, Bullying in schools and LGBTQ+ youth mental health: Relations with voting for Trump, *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy* (2021). DOI: 10.1111/asap.12258

Provided by Washington State University

Citation: More bullying of LGBTQ+ students in politically conservative districts (2021, July 19) retrieved 6 May 2024 from https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-07-bullying-lgbtq-students-politically-districts.html

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.