

Study examines sexual orientation and bullying among adolescents

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The act and victimization of bullying continues to be a problem among today's youth. While many children are experiencing this form of violence, it is more prevalent in children that are different from the social norm. As medical professionals continue to further their understanding of bullying, research shows a high rate of sexual minority youth who experience this harmful activity.

A new study conducted by doctors at Nationwide Children's Hospital found that sexual minority youth, or teens that identify themselves as gay, lesbian or bisexual, are bullied two to three times more than heterosexuals.

According to the study that is now available online in the [Journal of Adolescent Health](#), sexual minority youth are more vulnerable to a variety of physical and mental domains such as bullying or suicidal thoughts. Plus, the study found that many older adolescents reported being bullied.

"There is a need for health care professionals, and others who work with children, to be aware that sexual minority youth are more likely to be [victims](#) of bullying and other forms of violence," said Elise Berlan, MD, lead author and physician in Adolescent Medicine at Nationwide Children's Hospital. "Parents should also take time to communicate with their children about sensitive topics such as [sexuality](#), peer relations and violence."

Researchers examined the relationship between sexual orientation and bullying from the Growing Up Today Study (GUTS), an on-going study of American adolescents, which included information on more than 7,500 adolescents. While examining the results from the 2001 survey, the study also showed that youth identifying themselves as gay or lesbian were less likely to bully others and more likely to report being bullied than heterosexual teens.

Children that are different from the social norm often become targets of [social isolation](#), [harassment](#) and bullying. Recommended strategies to identify this type of abusive behavior include encouraging clinicians to routinely inquire about sexual orientation and their experiences with bullying, interpersonal violence and abuse; screening sexual minority youth for depression, suicidality and involvement in high-risk behaviors; and increasing the support of school policies to ensure a safe learning environment for all students.

"Students, parents, schools and community organizations can work to create environments that are supportive and accepting of all students, regardless of their [sexual orientation](#)," said Berlan, also a faculty member at The Ohio State University College of Medicine. "Schools, in particular, need to work to increase the awareness of bullying."

Provided by Nationwide Children's Hospital

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