

Victimization of Sexual Minorities on Campus: Marginalization and Discrimination

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ABSTRACT

This article, explores the types of discrimination experienced by sexual minority adolescents on campus and its impact on them. Through the textual and content analysis of previous studies, it concludes that the negative climate in schools including non-violent exclusion and physical violence are detrimental to the mental health of LGBTQ youth to some extent. Verbal abuse, threats and physical violence toward to these students are prevalent in schools and should be deterred. However, the campus does not currently make these LGBTQ students feel 'safe'. In addition to the need for more education and regulations to stop violence, it is also necessary to study and find a solution that will improve the school climate and make it truly equal and safe.

Keywords: *Discrimination, impact, sexual minorities, LGBTQ adolescents*

1. INTRODUCTION

Sexual minorities, are groups that differ from the majority of society in terms of sexual orientation, gender identity, sexual identity or sexual behaviour. Homosexuality, bisexuality, asexuality, transgenderism, intersexuality, etc. all belong to sexual minorities^[1]. Currently, the majority of people in the world today are heterosexual, regardless of their social and cultural backgrounds, heterosexuality is so far the most common type of sexual relations^[2]. Due to this stereotype, LGBTQ people always suffer from discrimination by public. Discrimination, in a sense, includes acts, practices, or policies that are unequal to a person or to a particular social group^{[3][4]}, so that in modern society, groups based on race, religion and gender can be the potential grounds for discrimination. This study focuses on LGBTQ adolescents, through the analysis of massive literature, it firstly discusses the discrimination they suffer at campus and its negative effect on them, then it provides feasible suggestions to prevent this phenomenon.

1.1. Discrimination in adolescence

Adolescents are curious about the world and have great energy to explore it. The World Health Organisation defines adolescence as the period of life between the ages of 10 and 19, marked by intense physical and psychological transformations that constitute a phase of

identity, values, and behaviors construction^[5]. Faced with traditional social attitudes and high social pressures, adolescents are more vulnerable to some emotional conflicts and psychological distress, especially when they perceive themselves as not conforming to heterosexual discourses. Moreover, they are not mature in judgment and independent thinking, more impulsive, and are more likely to discriminate against others. In this context, many adolescents have negative conflicts and emotional outbursts toward others, especially for minority disadvantaged groups. And this influences LGBTQ adolescents' mental health, exhibiting certain risky behaviours, such as some thoughts of self-harm and suicide attempts^[6].

1.2 Research methods

This paper used a combination of textual and content analysis. Based on a large body of literature on topics such as the mental health of sexual minorities, LGBTQ discrimination and violence in schools, types of discrimination and its impact were further summarized. It transformed the relevant studies into more systematic information.

2. RESEARCH SURVEY DATA

LGBTQ studies over the last decade have spanned the world, including countries such as in South Africa Homophobia was a daily experience for many of them and

they were often verbally and physically harassed ^[7], in Australia the research of Waling & Roffee shows that students often feel excluded and or feel inferior in terms of their queer identities, and encountered resistance and hostility on campus ^[8], in Hong Kong they may be subjected to enormous family, school and social pressure to either conceal or reject their LGBT identities ^[9]. In Canada survey participants expressed concerns about being targeted with prejudice and also reported having received anti-gay violence ^[10]. And Ellis's Data from 42 universities in the UK were surveyed and a quarter of those surveyed said they had been subjected to homophobic harassment at least once. ^[11]. All of these literature show that LGBTQ students are often subjected to verbal and physical threats on campus. Besides, these negative attacks could contribute to their mental distress. Valentine et al. ^[12] surveyed 4,205 staff and students at higher education institutions in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, in this study, LGBTQ respondents reported that they were often treated negatively by other students because of their sexual orientation (49.5%), which led to high levels of stress, loss of confidence and thoughts of self-exclusion ^[12]. Another study conducted by Hong et al. ^[13] in 2015 in U.S. showed the same picture. 952 LGBTQ students took part in this anonymous online survey. Participants cited a number of negative treatments as reasons to their psychological stress, including minor aggression, avoidance behaviours, verbal threats and physical threats.

Not only that, these discriminations from schools can lead to more serious situations and even to suicidal and self-harming thoughts and behaviours among LGBTQ adolescents. For example, in 2018, Woodford et al. ^[14] explored the impact of discrimination (minor one and distinct one) on students' depression and suicidal tendency. The participants in his survey were 776 self-identified LGBTQ students who were 18 years of age or older from 37 states in the United States, 214 of whom self-identified as transgender.

To determine depression, that study used the depression module of the Patient Health Questionnaire ^[15] to assess reported symptom levels. Victimization (e.g., verbal and physical threats and assaults) was assessed in two subsamples using a parallel scale (LGBQ/trans*) adapted from the Sexual Orientation Victimization Questionnaire ^[16]. The prevalence of LGBQ/trans* environmental microaggressions, LGBQ/trans* interpersonal microaggressions and LGBQ/trans* victimisation was also examined.

5% of all students surveyed reported attempting suicide in the past year, and 9.3% of trans students reported attempting suicide. This study showed that when controlling for each type of discrimination separately, each was significantly associated with an increased risk of depression, with interpersonal microaggressions remaining statistically significant in the full model. Thus

verbal and physical threats and assaults, as well as other forms of victimization, may be risk factors for depression and suicide attempts among LGBTQ students.

3. CATEGORIES OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST LGBTQ ADOLESCENTS

3.1 Non-violent exclusion

This attack not refers to physical touching, but mostly manifests as emotional and verbal attacks and insults.

3.1.1 Microaggression

Microaggression is a subtle form of discrimination experienced by members of marginalized groups, including sexual minorities ^[17]. Generally, it involves everyday insults and indignation, conveying hostile, derogatory and negative messages ^[18]. For example, Hong et al. ^[13] found that some LGBTQ students were told by people "don't do gay or lesbian behaviour." and "you're only being gay or bisexual now to be cool, you won't want to do it after this stage".

3.1.2 Avoidance behaviour

Avoidance behavior, known as avoidance conditioned reflex, is about individuals avoid anticipated unpleasant or painful situations, stimuli, or events ^[19]. On campus, when people know others are sexual minorities, they will not initiate verbal attacks and negative confrontations, but they will deliberately avoid them. For example, students will pick up their pace, move away, refuse to sit next to LGBTQ communities, etc. The marginalization of LGBTQ adolescents is clear.

3.1.3 Verbal threats

Using offensive language can put the person being attacked in an embarrassing and painful situation. Participants in the survey conducted by Hong et al. said that they were sometimes publicly ridiculed or even threatened due to their sexual orientation being known or assumed to be gay, lesbian or bisexual by others.

3.2 Physical violence

Physical violence is described as the use of a dangerous weapon or act of violence to physically harm a person, an act that causes damage to the physical health of another person. LGBTQ young people who are known or assumed to be gay, lesbian or bisexual are subjected to physical assault, such as beatings, being punched and kicked. Usually, physical violence is accompanied by some non-violent negative exclusion.

4. THE IMPACT ON LGBTQ ADOLESCENTS

4.1 Impact on academic performance and social integration

LGBTQ young people who experience mild negative exclusion may find it difficult to integrate into the team and feel being marginalized. Gradually, they may no longer choose to participate in group activities/work, so that their academic performance slides into decline. At the same time, they are subjected to prolonged negative treatment, which tends to cause them to develop unpromising psychological pressure, fear social integration when they grow up and close themselves off.

4.2 Creates self-doubt and affects self-acceptance

Some LGBTQ adolescents are still high school students, while others are just starting their college, i.e., they are not fully capable of mature independent thinking. When confronted with the negative behaviors by others, they are most likely to fall into a strong sense of self-doubt. This makes it difficult for LGBTQ students to accept their own thoughts and behaviors, putting them in a difficult situation where they are often in a state of repeated worry, anxiety, and breakdown.

4.3 Lack of friends and support, increased loneliness, pain and psychological problems

LGBTQ young people lack the support and understanding of their peers, as a result, they often feel unease and afraid to interact with others.. Besides, they often find it hard to ventilate their stress and emotions, and remain in an extremely isolated state for long periods of time. This can cause them extreme distress and make them more prone to some psychological problems than the average teenager.

4.4 More likely to think of self-harm and suicide

The persistence of discrimination, stigma and violence can greatly increase the negative feelings of LGBTQ young people and affect their mental health. Their psychological distress will continue to expand and negative emotions such as loneliness, fear, and sadness will accompany them in daily life. They also lack peers with whom they can communicate emotionally, which makes them unable to express their emotions and increases their psychological stress, making them particularly prone to self-violence and suicidal tendencies. Young people who have experienced intense discrimination feel extreme mental distress. Pacheco da Silva et al. described one of his LGBTQ respondents as "This is a trauma, a scar that will remain there, a huge scar

that prevents him from living in a social life. And he had already attempted suicide four times." [20]

5. CONCLUSION

School is a place for young people to socialize and learn knowledge, and it is also the place where they spend most of their time growing up away from their families. Teachers, students and staff on campus are the people they interact with the most. The above analysis leads to the conclusion that school has a significant impact on the mental health of young people.

In previous studies, it have been shown that LGBTQ adolescents were vulnerable to negative treatment on campus. This article analyzes the discrimination that sexual minority youth may experience on campus and its serious implications. Based on the bullying they suffer at school, it may lead to depression and even suicidal thoughts among them. Although there is still some debate about whether school experiences largely contribute to LGBTQ adolescents' tendency towards self-violence, this study believes that school education and campus experiences play a key role in the mental development of adolescents (especially for LGBTQ adolescents).

A more feasible method at this stage is to provide a safe space on campus where sexual minority youth can come together to discuss and learn, share their past experiences of discrimination, positive coping strategies and what changes can be made to further help to alter these situations [20]. Such spaces will improve LGBTQ students' academic achievement and social ability, however, this is a short-term response and will not fundamentally change the phenomenon. In the long run, it still requires the support of the school management and staff to create an inclusive campus environment with equal attitudes toward diverse gender and sexual orientations., which is a very difficult and ongoing task to explore.

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