



Anti-Gay Bullying: What's the Big Deal?

Highlights from the American Association of University Women's **Hostile Hallways: Bullying, Teasing, and Sexual Harassment in School**¹

HOW COMMON IS ANTI-GAY SEXUAL HARASSMENT?

- Overall, 61% of students said they knew someone who had been called gay or lesbian. That's the biggest increase of any form of harassment students knew about, up from 51% in 1993. Most other experiences of sexual harassment have remained steady or decreased.
- When asked about their *own* experiences, 36% say they have "ever" been called lesbian or gay. That's the biggest jump among all the types of harassment students experienced, up from 17% in 1993.
- 19% of boys said they had been called gay "occasionally" or "often," double the rate in 1993 (9%).
- 13% of girls said they had been called lesbian "occasionally" or "often," almost triple the rate in 1993 (5%).

WHO IS AT RISK OF ANTI-GAY SEXUAL HARASSMENT?

- 61% of urban students said they knew someone who had been called gay or lesbian.
- 61% of suburban/rural students said they knew someone who had been called gay or lesbian.
- White boys are more likely than African-American boys to report having been called gay (45% vs. 30%).
- White girls were more likely than African-American girls to report having been called lesbian (32% vs. 20%).

Highlights from a 2002 report by Public Health – Seattle & King County: **Bullying and Biased-Based Harassment in King County Schools**²

HOW DOES BIAS-BASED HARASSMENT correlate with CARRYING A GUN TO SCHOOL?

- It is logical that students may feel compelled to carry weapons if they fear for their safety.
- Students who have been harassed or attacked at school because of their *gender* are more than twice as likely as non-harassed peers to report having carried a gun to school in the past month (3.9% vs. 1.4%).
- Students who have been harassed or attacked at school because of their *race* are more than four times as likely as their peers to report having carried a gun to school in the past month (4.6% vs. 1.1%).
- Students who have been harassed or attacked at school because *someone perceived them to be gay or lesbian* are more than six times as likely as their peers to report having carried a gun to school in the past month (10.4% vs. 1.7%).

HOW DOES BIAS-BASED HARASSMENT correlate with ATTEMPTING SUICIDE?

- Students who have been harassed or attacked at school because of their *gender* are more than twice as likely as non-harassed peers to report having attempted suicide in the past year (13.4% vs. 5.2%).
- Students who have been harassed or attacked at school because of their *race* are more than twice as likely as their peers to report having attempted suicide in the past year (12.4% vs. 5.9%).
- Almost a quarter of students who have been harassed or attacked at school because *someone perceived them to be gay or lesbian* report having attempted suicide in the past year – more than three times the rate their peers report (23.2% vs. 7.1%).



However, there is good news: Laws, policies, support programs, inclusive curricula all seem to make a difference.

- “States that enacted **antidiscrimination laws** had a reduction of 29.1 suicides per million non-Hispanic White boys per year relative to states that have never enacted these laws. Relative to the same states before enactment of protective laws, the rate reduction was 19.7 suicides per million boy-years.”³
- “[Belonging to school-based **Gay-Straight**] **Alliances** positively impact academic performance, school/social/and family relationships, comfort level with sexual orientation, development of strategies to handle assumptions of heterosexuality, sense of physical safety, increased perceived ability to contribute to society, and an enhanced sense of belonging to school community.”⁴

“[Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual] youths in schools with **gay-sensitive instruction** reported fewer sexual partners, less recent sex, and less substance use before last sex than did GLB youths in other schools.”⁵

Highlights from the Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network’s 2005 report:
*From Teasing to Torment: School Climate in America*⁶

HOW IS SCHOOL CLIMATE DIFFERENT in schools with harassment policies that specify sexual orientation or gender expression?

- Students from schools with an inclusive policy are less likely to report a serious harassment problem at their school (33% vs. 44%).
- Students from schools with an inclusive policy report that others are less often harassed in their school because of their sexual orientation (32% vs. 43%) or their gender expression (26% vs. 37%).
- Students from schools with an inclusive policy are also more likely to feel very safe at school (54% vs. 36%).

HOW DOES TRUANCY DIFFER in schools with harassment policies that specify sexual orientation or gender expression?

- Students from schools with an inclusive policy are significantly less likely to report having skipped one or more classes (5% vs. 16%).
- Students from schools with an inclusive policy are significantly less likely to report having skipped one or more whole days of school (4% vs. 10%).

¹ <http://www.aauw.org/2000/hostile.html>

² <http://www.metrokc.gov/HEALTH/datawatch/bullying.pdf>

³ Brown University researchers B.M. Jesdale and S. Zierler, Enactment of Gay Rights Laws in U.S. States and Trends in Adolescent Suicide: An Investigation of Non-Hispanic White Boys. *Journal of the Gay and Lesbian Medical Association*, Volume 6, Number 2 / June, 2002

⁴ C. Lee, The Impact of Belonging to a High School Gay/Straight Alliance. *The High School Journal*, Volume 85, Number 3, February-March 2002, pp. 13-26

⁵ George Washington University researchers S.M. Blake, et al, Preventing sexual risk behaviors among gay, lesbian, and bisexual adolescents: the benefits of gay-sensitive HIV instruction in schools. *American Journal of Public Health*, Vol 91, Issue 6 940-946

⁶ http://www.glsen.org/binary-data/GLSEN_ATTACHMENTS/file/499-1.pdf