



Associations Between LGBTQ-Affirming School Climate and Intimate Partner Violence Victimization Among Adolescents

WHAT IS THE RESEARCH ABOUT?

Sexual minority youth are at higher risk of experiencing intimate partner violence, compared to their heterosexual peers. The minority stress model suggests that unique stressors, such as perceived stigma, internalized negative attitudes, and experiences with prejudice, may play a role in intimate partner violence. Addressing these stressors may thus have an impact on experiences of intimate partner violence. This research study examined the relationship between LGBTQ-affirming school climates and intimate partner violence.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

- Sexual minority youth were more likely to report experiencing physical and sexual intimate partner violence, compared to heterosexual youth.
- A more LGBTQ-affirming school climate was associated with less physical intimate partner violence among female students, and with more sexual intimate partner violence among gay male students.
- LGBTQ-affirming practices may help to promote healthy relationships for some students but additional work is needed to ensure they prevent violence for all students.

WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS DO?

The researchers surveyed over 33,000 high school students in 15 American jurisdictions. Participants answered questions about their sexual identity and behaviours and experiences of intimate partner violence. The researchers also collected information from school staff about practices for creating LGBTQ-affirming school climates, such as identifying safe spaces, prohibiting harassment based on perceived or actual sexual or gender identity; and providing materials on sexual health that are relevant to LGBTQ youth. The researchers examined the association between demographic factors, LGBTQ-affirming school climates, and experiences of intimate partner violence.



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WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS FIND?

Sexual minority youth reported more physical and sexual intimate partner violence compared to heterosexual youth. LGBTQ-affirming school climates were associated with less physical intimate partner violence for female students only. LGBTQ-affirming school climates did not predict lower sexual intimate partner violence, overall. Gay male students were at increased risk for sexual intimate partner violence in LGBTQ-affirming environments. The researchers theorized that in more affirming school climates, sexual minority youth may be more likely to date, which may lead to the finding of increased risk of intimate partner violence; such environments may also provide more comprehensive sex education, which may improve students' ability to identify intimate partner violence experiences.

HOW CAN YOU USE THIS RESEARCH?

Schools may be able to prevent physical intimate partner violence by creating LGBTQ-affirming school climates through policies and practices. However, further research is needed to substantiate this hypothesis and to identify how such climates can impact sexual intimate violence and promote healthy relationships for all youth. Educators can use this research to identify LGBTQ-affirming practices that may promote healthy relationships in their schools, such as including sexual health information relevant to sexual minority youth in their curricula and providing training and support to staff to establish safe spaces.

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