

# Education research shows LGBTQ-identified students at higher risk than straight-identified students

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New research findings reported in the October 2011 issue of Educational Researcher highlight differences between LGBTQ- and straight-identified youth in health outcomes and educational equity. The peer-reviewed scholarly journal is one of six published by the American Educational Research Association (AERA).

University of Illinois scholars Joseph P. Robinson and Dorothy L Espelage, who conducted the research, found that "youths who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ) are at a greater risk of suicidal thoughts, suicide attempts, victimization by peers, and elevated levels of unexcused absences from school."

Their rigorous analysis of LGBTQ subgroups showed that bisexual youths appear "to be particularly at risk." They also found that gaps in school [belongingness](#) and unexcused absences "are significantly greater in middle school, which suggests heightened early risk for LGBTQ-identified [students](#)."

From a policy perspective, Robinson and Espelage believe that their study lays the groundwork "for new research in the development, implementation, and effectiveness of programs and policies, aimed at improving the educational experiences of LGBTQ youth."

For their research, Robinson and Espelage surveyed a large, population-

based anonymous sample of more than 13,000 students spanning middle to high school in 30 schools in Dane County, Wisconsin. This sample was unique and more likely reflects "the full spectrum of LGBTQ students," they said, because it included [middle school students](#), not just [high school students](#), and students who identified themselves as transgender. "The sample recruitment methods did not specifically target [sexual minority](#) students," they added.

Schools have opportunities from an equity and opportunity-to-learn perspective to help LGBTQ students who have lower levels of belongingness and higher levels of truancy, particularly in [middle school](#), the researchers suggested. Early intervention may be crucial. In addition, they wrote that "incorporating discussions about sexual orientation and sexual identity in bullying prevention programs may contribute to safer environments and more positive outcomes for LGBTQ youth."

In the journal article, Robinson and Espelage cited other pertinent research findings about bullying that have been reported within the past five years. For instance, they wrote "that a large percentage of bullying among students involves the use of homophobic teasing and slurs" and that "the pervasiveness of antigay language in schools suggests that most school environments are hostile of LGBT students." Despite increasing interest, they noted that "very little is known about the rates of cyber-bullying among LGBT."

At the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Robinson, Assistant Professor of quantitative and evaluative research methodologies, focuses his research on causal inference and quasi-experimental designs, policy analysis and program evaluation, and issues related to educational equity and access. Espelage, Professor of Educational Psychology, concentrates her research on bullying and peer victimization, homophobic teasing, and sexual harassment among adolescents.

Through this study, which "goes beyond prior studies in identifying heterogeneity and differential developmental trends," the University of Illinois researchers hope to raise awareness of educational inequities related to LGBTQ and to pave the way "for interventions aimed at improving psychological and educational outcomes for these students."

Provided by American Educational Research Association

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