

Study finds schoolyard homophobia affects grades

October 12 2016, by Mark Smith

A Western Sydney University study investigating the experiences of gender and sexuality diverse high school students has found derogatory language and harassment is linked to lower academic and wellbeing outcomes.

To investigate the [links](#) between the wellbeing of gender and sexuality diverse (GSD) students and their academic outcomes, the [Free2Be?](#) project surveyed 704 students across Australia aged between 14 and 18 in an [online survey](#).

In keeping with the spread of students across the nation, 62% of respondents were from public schools, 22% from Catholic schools, and 16% from independent schools.

The survey found 94% of students had heard homophobic language at school, with 58% saying they hear such language daily.

In addition, 45% of respondents had witnessed school based physical [harassment](#) of classmates perceived to be GSD, with 12% saying it happened on a weekly basis.

Dr Jacqueline Ullman says participants overwhelmingly depicted a secondary schooling environment in which homophobic and transphobic language and behavior were rife.

"Comments such as 'that's so gay' are unfortunately still commonplace,

and the study clearly shows they're having a negative impact on gender and sexuality diverse students," says Dr Ullman.

"Students attending schools with regular instances of marginalising behaviors were unhappier at school and felt less good about their academic abilities."

"In contrast, students at accepting schools had higher reported school [wellbeing](#) and stronger [academic outcomes](#), including higher academic self-concept, greater intentions to attend university, and fewer reported incidences of truancy."

Dr Ullman says the study revealed a lack of teacher-led discussions about GSD issues.

"Only one quarter of participants could recall classroom learning about topics related to gender and sexuality diversity in any kind of formal capacity," she says.

"A mere 3% of students reported that it was 'definitely true' that they had learned about lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender identities during their Health and Physical Education instruction."

Dr Ullman says the report suggests new ways to help improve the school experience and allow gender and sexuality diverse students the chance to excel in a safe and welcoming environment.

"Most importantly, teachers must be trained and supported by their school leadership to consistently address – and work to prevent – the harassment of gender and sexuality diverse students," she says.

"Relevant guidelines need to come from the state and federal levels and must include parameters for curricular visibility of [gender](#) and sexuality

diverse individuals and a focus on educative responses to homophobic and transphobic bullying, as opposed to purely punitive measures which ignore the foundational issue."

Provided by University of Western Sydney

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