

# Bisexual Teens at Highest Risk of Bullying and Suicide

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Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth and those questioning their sexuality are at greater risk of suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts, bullying by their peers and truancy, according to a new study by researchers at the University of Illinois.

The study, published in the October issue of the journal *Educational Researcher*, also revealed some striking differences among the various groups of sexual minority youth.

The study, based upon anonymous online surveys of more than 13,000 middle and high school students in Dane County, Wis., included a set of eight questions with low-probability responses that were used to screen

out mischievous responders, according to researchers.

Drs. Joseph Robinson and Dorothy Espelage, both educational psychologists, found that while the majority of LGBTQ students reported not being at risk of suicide, being bullied or skipping school, they were at greater risk than straight youth.

A little more than 7 percent of straight youth reported thinking about suicide during the prior 30 days, versus 33 percent of LGBTQ students. Bisexual youth were at especially high risk (44 percent), as were questioning youth (32 percent). Bisexual youth also were at elevated risk of suicide attempts, with more than 21 percent reporting that they had made at least one attempt during the prior year.

Nearly twice as many LGBTQ students as straight students — 39 percent vs. 20 percent — reported having been bullied, threatened or harassed over the Internet. Again, bisexual youth reported the highest levels of victimization — 49 percent — among sexual minority youth.

LGBTQ students reported a much lower sense of school “belongingness” — the feeling that they belonged at their school, that there were adults they could talk to when they had problems and that graduating was important — than straight youth, particularly during middle school, the study indicated.

About 22 percent of LGBTQ students reported skipping school during middle school, a rate that remained consistent through high school, far exceeding that of straight youth, who reported unexcused absence rates of 7 percent during middle school and 14 percent during high school.

"For some of the outcomes, such as unexcused absences, we found that LGBTQ were already at a heightened risk level by middle school," Robinson said. "We interpret that as a sign that we may need to intervene earlier for LGBTQ students. We can't look at what straight kids are doing and assume that LGBTQ kids are at the same risk.

"The fact that we see these large differences in risk patterns for LGBTQ students in middle school is cause for concern and points to the need for more research to understand why they have disproportionately poorer educational and psychological outcomes."

Including discussions about sexual orientation and sexual identity in bullying prevention programs could contribute to safer school environments and better outcomes for LGBTQ students, the researchers wrote.

Source: [University of Illinois](http://www.illinois.edu/) <<http://www.illinois.edu/>>