Long-Term Effects of School Bullying on Academic Achievement and Social Integration in Sexual and Gender Minority Populations: A Longitudinal Review

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Abstract: *Sexual minority groups (LGBTQ+) face significantly higher risks of bullying in school environments compared to their heterosexual peers, with negative effects potentially lasting into adulthood. This article systematically reviews nearly 20 years of long-term longitudinal research globally, integrating the Ecological Systems Theory and resilience perspective, to reveal the mechanisms through which school bullying affects the academic achievement and social integration of sexual minority groups. The study finds that bullying experiences exert long-term damage to academic and social functioning through three pathways: psychological trauma, social isolation, and resource deprivation, yet individual resilience and supportive environments can mitigate these negative impacts. Future research should focus on cultural differences, long-term evaluations of intervention policies, and the impact of intersectionality (such as race, class) on outcomes.*

Keywords: School bullying; Sexual minority groups; Academic achievement; Social integration; Long-term longitudinal study.

1. INTRODUCTION

In terms of current data, according to a report released by UNESCO in 2019, approximately 60% to 80% of LGBTQ+ (sexual minority) students worldwide have experienced verbal abuse or physical bullying in their school lives. This data highlights the prevalence and severity of bullying experienced by sexual minority students in school environments, underscoring the urgency of protecting this group from bullying. Regarding long-term consequences, numerous studies have shown significant correlations between school bullying and academic disruption, mental health issues, and social exclusion in adulthood among LGBTQ+ students. Specifically, research by Russell et al. in 2014 indicated that bullied students are more likely to experience academic difficulties, such as declining grades and increased absenteeism, and may also face mental health issues like depression and anxiety. These problems not only affect students' academic achievement but also have profound and lasting negative impacts on their social interactions, career development, and mental health in adulthood. In terms of theoretical gaps, although numerous studies have focused on the short-term psychological impacts of school bullying on LGBTQ+ students, existing research still lacks an integrated analysis of the dynamic pathways to academic achievement and social integration. This means we need to delve deeper into how bullying behaviors affect students' academic performance and social relationships, thereby exerting complex and far-reaching impacts on their long-term mental health and social adaptability. Regarding the significance of the study, firstly, this research aims to provide robust evidence to support anti-bullying legislation and school support programs. By revealing the long-term negative impacts of school bullying on LGBTQ+ students, we can provide scientific evidence for policymakers to promote the introduction of more comprehensive and effective anti-bullying measures. Secondly, this study also seeks to uncover the cumulative oppression mechanisms of structural discrimination against minority groups, thereby promoting social equity and justice. By analyzing and discussing the social and cultural factors behind school bullying, readers can better understand the discrimination and oppression faced by sexual minority groups and promote societal attention and resolution of this issue. From the perspective of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, individual development is viewed as a multilevel, dynamically interactive systemic process. Regarding the phenomenon of school bullying experienced by LGBTQ+ students, this theory provides two key levels of analysis. This level focuses on the immediate environment of individuals, including peer relationships and teacher-student interactions. Within this framework, negative attitudes and behaviors among peers, such as ridicule, exclusion, or physical attacks, directly constitute the core components of bullying experiences for LGBTQ+ students. At the same time, the quality of teacher-student interactions also significantly influences students' bullying experiences, with teacher neglect, bias, or inappropriate handling potentially exacerbating the occurrence and persistence of bullying behavior. This level

focuses on the broader sociocultural environment, which shapes people's perceptions and attitudes towards sexual minority identities. Stigmatization, prejudice, and discrimination against LGBTQ+ groups in society not only provide fertile ground for bullying behavior but also exacerbate the risk of bullying through channels such as media, education systems, and social norms. The impact of this macro-level influence is profound and lasting, shaping society's overall attitude towards sexual minority groups and subsequently affecting individuals' sense of safety and belonging in school environments. Masten's resilience theory emphasizes individuals' positive adaptive capabilities and resilience when facing adversity. In the context of LGBTQ+ students experiencing school bullying, the emotional support and resources provided by the family, as the primary environment for individual growth, are crucial for mitigating the negative impacts of bullying. A family environment filled with love, understanding, and acceptance can help LGBTQ+ students build self-confidence and enhance their ability to cope with bullying. Teachers' active intervention and effective support are key to preventing and reducing school bullying. By providing counseling, mediation, and necessary protective measures, teachers can create a safer and more inclusive learning environment for students, thereby reducing the occurrence of bullying behavior. Joining communities with similar experiences and backgrounds, such as LGBTQ+ support groups or student organizations, can provide individuals with emotional support and a sense of belonging. This community connection not only helps alleviate feelings of loneliness and rejection but also promotes self-identification and positive coping in the face of adversity.

2. LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF BULLYING ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

2.1 Direct Effect on Academic Disruption

According to research by Kosciw et al. (2020), the dropout rate among frequently bullied LGBTQ+ students is 2.3 times that of their heterosexual peers. This data clearly demonstrates the severe disruption that bullying has on the academic continuity of LGBTQ+ students. A 10-year longitudinal study conducted in the United States by Toomey et al. (2018) revealed that the proportion of bullying victims who enroll in college after high school is reduced by 17%. This suggests that bullying not only affects students' immediate academic performance but may also have a profound impact on their long-term educational achievements. Frequent bullying can subject LGBTQ+ students to tremendous psychological and emotional pressure, which may interfere with their learning motivation and concentration, thereby affecting their academic performance. A hostile and discriminatory school environment can make LGBTQ+ students feel unsafe, leading them to avoid participating in school activities or even develop a tendency to avoid school altogether. Students who suffer from bullying may lack necessary support and protection in school, which can make them feel isolated and further increase the risk of academic disruption.

2.2 Indirect Pathway through Psychological Trauma

Depressive and anxiety symptoms lead to decreased classroom participation. Research by Irkett et al. (2015) indicates that LGBTQ+ students who experience bullying often exhibit higher levels of depression and anxiety. These symptoms not only affect students' mental health but may also further result in decreased participation in the classroom. Depressive and anxiety symptoms can cause students to lose interest in learning and lack the motivation to participate in classroom discussions and activities. This decrease in classroom participation can directly impact their academic performance and learning outcomes. PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) symptoms interfere with cognitive function, affecting academic performance. Research by Espelage et al. (2018) found that victims of bullying often exhibit PTSD symptoms, including persistent fear, flashbacks, and avoidance of trauma-related situations. These PTSD symptoms can severely disrupt students' cognitive functions. PTSD symptoms may lead to distracted attention, impaired memory, and decreased decision-making ability. These cognitive impairments can directly affect students' learning efficiency and quality, thereby impacting their academic performance.

3. LONG-TERM CHALLENGES OF SOCIAL INTEGRATION

3.1 Persistent Damage to Interpersonal Relationships

The psychological trauma caused by bullying to LGBTQ+ students is often profound and lasting, with one of the most significant impacts being the persistent damage to interpersonal relationships. According to research by Poteat et al. (2011), bullying experiences lead to avoidance tendencies in social situations among LGBTQ+ adults, stemming from a lack of trust in others. The isolation, rejection, and harm experienced during bullying make it difficult for them to establish and maintain healthy interpersonal relationships, leading to caution or even fear

towards social activities in adulthood. A cohort study conducted in Sweden by Björkenstam et al. (2017) found that LGBTQ+ bullying survivors experience an average delay of 3-5 years in establishing intimate relationships. This finding further confirms the long-term negative impact of bullying experiences on individuals' social and emotional development, making these individuals face more challenges in seeking and maintaining intimate relationships.

3.2 Career Development and Socioeconomic Status

Bullying not only affects the interpersonal relationships of LGBTQ+ students but may also have a profound impact on their career development and socioeconomic status. Research by Drydakis (2015) points out that the LGBTQ+ community often faces employment discrimination in the workplace, and to cope with this discrimination, they have to adopt strategies to hide their sexual orientation. Although this strategy may help them avoid direct discrimination in the short term, it limits their career advancement opportunities in the long run because they may not be able to fully demonstrate their abilities and potential. Research conducted in the United States by Badgett et al. (2019) shows that due to educational disruption and mental health issues, the lifetime earnings of the LGBTQ+ community are reduced by approximately $600,000 compared to the non-LGBTQ+ group. This astonishing figure not only reveals the direct impact of bullying experiences on individuals' economic situations but also reflects the systemic discrimination and inequality faced by the LGBTQ+ community in society.

4. PROTECTIVE FACTORS AND RESILIENCE MECHANISMS

When facing the challenges of school bullying, LGBTQ+ students are not alone. The existence of a series of protective factors and resilience mechanisms provides them with the possibility to cope with difficulties and achieve healthy growth. The following is a detailed analysis from two dimensions: individual-level resilience and environmental support.

4.1 Individual-Level Resilience

Research by Rosario et al. (2011) shows that for LGBTQ+ students, coming out and receiving community support can significantly enhance their social adaptation abilities. This process not only helps individuals establish a positive self-identity but also provides emotional support and coping strategies through increased sense of community belonging, thereby mitigating the negative impacts of bullying.

4.2 Intervention Effects of Environmental Support

Research by Greytak et al. (2016) found that implementing anti-bullying programs has a positive impact on the academic performance of LGBTQ+ students, improving their academic achievement by 14%. This indicates that positive interventions at the school level, such as providing anti-bullying education and establishing a supportive environment, can effectively alleviate bullying behavior and create favorable conditions for students' academic development.

4.3 Family Acceptance

Research by Ryan et al. (2010) emphasizes that family acceptance has a significant impact on the mental health and academic achievement of LGBTQ+ students. Parental support not only significantly reduces individuals' suicidal tendencies but also increases their college enrollment rates. This suggests that the family, as the primary environment for individual growth, plays a crucial role in the acceptance and support needed for LGBTQ+ students to cope with bullying and achieve comprehensive development.

5. RESEARCH LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

5.1 Methodological Challenges

Current research on school bullying experienced by LGBTQ+ students relies heavily on self-reported data. While this method allows for direct access to victims' experiences and feelings, it may also lead to survivor bias, where those who are able or willing to participate in the study may not represent all victims. Particularly, those who have suffered more severe harm or are in more disadvantaged situations may be unable or unwilling to participate, thereby underestimating the extent and scope of the actual harm. Existing research primarily focuses on Western

countries, with relatively little understanding of the situation of LGBTQ+ students experiencing school bullying in non-Western countries (such as Asia and Africa). Due to differences in cultural backgrounds, social norms, and legal systems, these regions may exhibit different forms and impacts of bullying. Therefore, the lack of longitudinal data from these regions limits our comprehensive understanding of the issue of school bullying among LGBTQ+ students globally.

5.2 Emerging Research Topics

As research deepens, more scholars are beginning to pay attention to the intersectional effects between sexual minority identities and other marginal identities (such as race, disability, etc.). This intersectional perspective helps reveal the complex experiences and mutual influences of different identity groups in school bullying, providing a theoretical basis for developing more effective intervention measures. Online support communities, as an emerging form of social support, may have a protective effect on LGBTQ+ adolescents in rural areas when coping with school bullying. These communities offer advantages such as anonymity, immediacy, and cross-regional accessibility, making it easier for victims to obtain emotional support, information exchange, and coping strategies. Future research can further explore the potential and mechanisms of online support communities in alleviating school bullying.

6. CONCLUSION

This study delves into the long-term impacts of school bullying on the academic achievement and social integration of LGBTQ+ students, revealing the severity and complexity of this issue. By synthesizing existing research, it is evident that school bullying directly leads to disruptions in the academic journeys of LGBTQ+ students, such as increased dropout rates and decreased college enrollment. Furthermore, bullying indirectly affects students' classroom engagement and cognitive function by triggering psychological traumas like depression, anxiety, and PTSD, further impairing their academic performance. The experience of bullying causes persistent damage to LGBTQ+ students' interpersonal relationships, manifested as social avoidance and delayed establishment of intimate relationships. Additionally, employment discrimination and income disparities in the workplace exacerbate the disadvantageous situation of LGBTQ+ students in terms of career development and socioeconomic status. In summary, the long-term effects of school bullying on LGBTQ+ students cannot be ignored. Future research and practice should strive to create a more inclusive, supportive, and protective environment for growth, fostering the holistic development and social integration of LGBTQ+ students.

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