Published on *Gay-Straight Alliance Network* (http://www.gsanetwork.org)

Lesbian, gay and bisexual teens singled out for punishment

Lesbian, gay and bisexual teens singled out for punishment

Dec. 6, 2010
GSA Network

Study in leading pediatric journal finds unfair treatment nationwide

December 6th, 2010 - Lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) adolescents are about 40 percent more likely than other teens to receive punishment at the hands of school authorities, police and the courts, according to research published in the January, 2011 issue of Pediatrics and released online today (December 6, 2010) at http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/content/abstract/peds.2009-2306v1 [1].

The analysis, conducted at Yale University, found that the disparities in punishments are not explained by differences in misbehavior. Youth who identified themselves as LGB actually engaged in less violence than their peers, for example. Nonetheless, virtually all types of punishments?including school expulsions, arrests, juvenile convictions, adult convictions and especially police stops?were more frequently meted out to LGB youth.

For instance, adolescents who self-identified as LGB were about 50 percent more likely to be stopped by the police than other teenagers. Teens who reported feelings of attraction to members of the same sex, regardless of their self-identification, were more likely than other teens to be expelled from school or convicted of crimes as adults. Girls who labeled themselves as lesbian or bisexual were especially at risk for unequal treatment: they experienced 50 percent more police stops and reported about twice as many arrests and convictions as other girls who had engaged in similar behavior. Although the study did not explore the experiences of transgender youth, anecdotal reports suggest that they are similarly at risk for excessive punishment.

The study is the first to document excessive punishment of LGB youth nationwide. It was based

on the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) and included approximately 15,000 middle and high school students who were followed for seven years into early adulthood. The study collected details on subjects' sexuality, including feelings of sexual attraction, sexual relationships and self-labeling as LGB. Add Health also surveyed participants regarding how frequently they engaged in a variety of misbehaviors ranging in severity from "lying to parents" to using a weapon.

The study authors hypothesize that the excessive punishments of LGB youth may reflect authorities' reluctance to consider mitigating factors such as young age or self-defense in determining punishment for LGB youth. Moreover, they note that LGB youth frequently encounter homophobia in the education, healthcare and child welfare systems, and may therefore fail to receive services offered to other young people.

"The painful, even lethal bullying that LGB youth suffer at the hands of their peers has been highlighted by recent tragic episodes. Our numbers indicate that school officials, police and judges, who should be protecting LGB young people, are instead contributing to their victimization," said Kathryn Himmelstein, the study's lead author. Himmelstein, who initiated the study while a Yale undergraduate, currently teaches mathematics at a public high school in New York City. The research was supervised by Dr. Hannah Brückner, a Yale sociologist and nationally recognized expert on adolescent sexuality.

"We hope the study will serve as a wake up call for those whose job it is to protect youth," said Carolyn Laub, Executive Director of Gay-Straight Alliance Network, a national organization empowering LGBT youth to create safer schools. "These alarming statistics underscore the need for alternatives to punitive school disciplinary practices as well as the need for school, police, and court officials to receive comprehensive training about the serious consequences of targeting LGBT youth, whether the perpetrators are student bullies or the adults themselves."

Pediatrics is the world's leading journal of pediatric medicine. To request the full text of the study, contact Debbie Linchesky at dlinchesky@aap.org [2] (847-434-7084), or Susan Martin at ssmartin@aap.org [3] (847-434-7131).

"Criminal Justice and School Sanctions against Nonheterosexual Youth: A National Longitudinal Study," Kathryn E.W. Himmelstein, B.A., and Hannah Brückner, Ph.D. Pediatrics, January 2011 (published online December 6, 2010).

Contact:
Jackie Downing, GSA Network
510-333-9649 cell / 415-552-4229 office, jackie@gsanetwork.org [4]
Kathryn Himmelstein, Yale University
(617) 312-6826, khimmelstein@aya.yale.edu [5]
(unavailable 9:00 to 2:30 EST Monday through Friday; please leave message)

http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/content/abstract/p... [1]
.

GSA Network 1550 Bryant St., Suite 600, San Francisco, CA 94103 | 415-552-4229 | info@gsanetwork.org
Site Map | Copyright 2009

Source URL: http://www.gsanetwork.org/news/lesbian-gay-and-bisexual-teens-singled-out-punishment/120610

Links:
[1] http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/content/abstract/peds.2009-2306v1
[2] mailto:dlinchesky@aap.org
[3] mailto:ssmartin@aap.org
[4] mailto:jackie@gsanetwork.org
[5] mailto:khimmelstein@aya.yale.edu