

HARASSMENT BASED ON SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Students in California report significant harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation. Data from the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS, 2000–2001), the largest study of students in California schools, shows that every year over 200,000 students are harassed because they are gay or lesbian or someone thought they were. This harassment is linked to:

- weaker connections to school
- higher levels of academic, health and safety risk
- unsafe school climates

Finding 1: Harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation is pervasive.

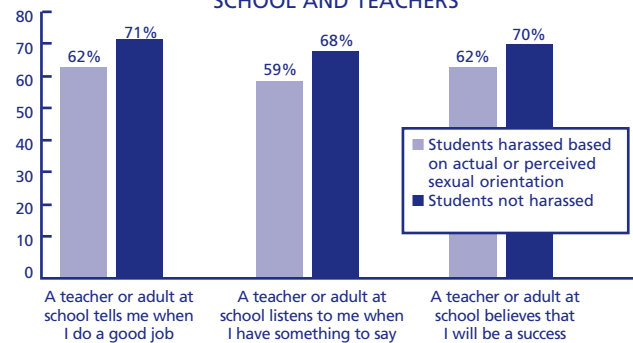
7.5 percent of California students reported being harassed on the basis of actual or perceived sexual

orientation. If the results of this survey are extrapolated to the statewide population of middle and high school students, over 200,000 California students are the targets of this type of harassment each year. Further, this type of harassment is often a repeat occurrence: 32% of student harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation were harassed more than four times in the past twelve months.

Finding 2: Students who are harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation report weaker connections to school, adults, and community.

Figure 1 shows that compared to other students, students harassed because they are gay or lesbian or someone thought they were reported fewer feelings of connections to their communities, schools, and to supportive adults; less support from teachers, family, and friends; and fewer resources for coping with problems.

Figure 1
STUDENTS HARASSED BASED ON ACTUAL OR PERCEIVED SEXUAL ORIENTATION HAVE WEAKER CONNECTIONS TO SCHOOL AND TEACHERS



Finding 3: Students who are harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation, reported higher levels of risk on a wide array of academic, health, and safety measures.

Victimization: Figure 2 shows that students harassed because they are gay or lesbian or someone thought they were compared to students who were not harassed were more likely to report being threatened or injured with a weapon, to be a victim of relationship violence, and to have their property stolen or damaged.

Low grades and missing school: Figure 3 shows that 24 percent of students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation reported that their usual grades are Cs or lower, compared to 17 percent of students who were not harassed. Also, although data on missing school are not directly comparable to data on other risk factors, students who were harassed on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation were more than three times as likely as students who were not harassed to miss at least one day of school in the last 30 days because they felt unsafe.

Figure 2
STUDENTS HARASSED BASED ON ACTUAL OR PERCEIVED SEXUAL ORIENTATION ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE VICTIMIZED AND TO CARRY WEAPON TO SCHOOL

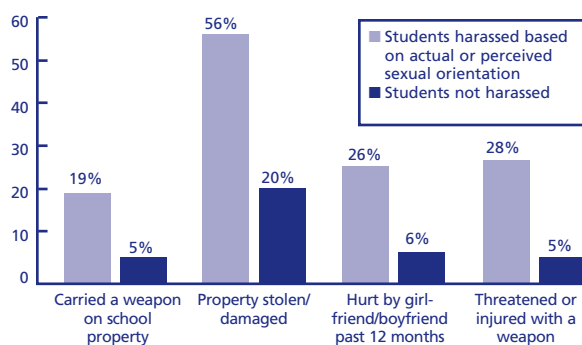
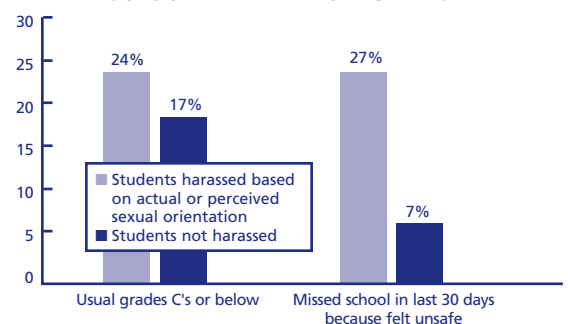


Figure 3
STUDENTS HARASSED BASED ON ACTUAL OR PERCEIVED SEXUAL ORIENTATION ARE MORE LIKELY TO MISS SCHOOL AND HAVE LOW GRADES



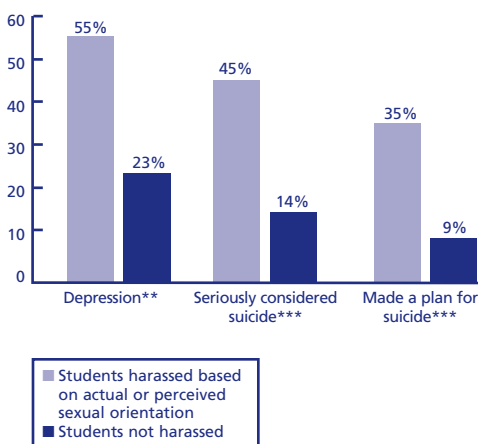
*Data on missing school are not directly comparable to data on low grades

Finding 3: continued

Depression and suicidality: Figure 4 shows that 55 percent of students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation reported feeling so sad and hopeless that they stopped doing usual activities for at least two weeks during the previous 12 months, compared to 23 percent of students who were not harassed. Also, although data on suicide are not directly comparable to data on other risk factors, students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation are more than three times as likely as students who were not harassed to seriously consider suicide, and more than three times as likely to make a plan for attempting suicide.

Substance use: Figure 5 shows that students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation were much more likely than students who were not harassed to report smoking, drinking alcohol, binge drinking, marijuana use, amphetamine or methamphetamine use, and inhalant use. For example, students harassed based on actual or perceived sexual orientation were more than twice as likely to use inhalants and nearly twice as likely to report binge drinking as students who were not harassed.

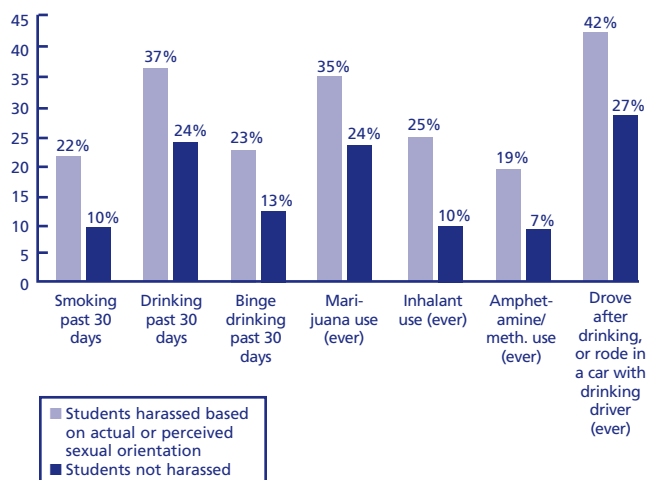
Figure 4
STUDENTS HARASSED BASED ON ACTUAL OR PERCEIVED SEXUAL ORIENTATION ARE AT GREATER RISK FOR DEPRESSION AND SUICIDE



**For at least 2 weeks during the previous 12 months, felt so sad and hopeless that they stopped doing usual activities.

***Data on suicide are not directly comparable to data on depression.

Figure 5
STUDENTS HARASSED BASED ON ACTUAL OR PERCEIVED SEXUAL ORIENTATION ARE AT GREATER RISK FOR SUBSTANCE USE



ABOUT THE RESEARCH

To document harassment and associated problems for youth and schools, we examined data from the 2001-2002 California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS). The CHKS is designed by WestEd under contract from the California Department of Education and administered by school districts. The 2001-2002 data analyzed for this study included 7th, 9th, and 11th graders: 237,544 students answered the question about whether they had been harassed or bullied at school because they were gay or lesbian or someone thought they were. In addition, the survey asked students how many times in the past year they had been bullied on school property and defined bullying as "being repeatedly shoved, hit, threatened, called mean names, teased in a way you didn't like, or had other unpleasant things done to you. It is not bullying when two students of about the same strength quarrel or fight."

Suggested citation:

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