



Depression in LGBTQ+ adolescents: The role of school connectedness

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August 2020

About the research

LGBTQ+ adolescents are underrepresented in current evidence based on social connectedness and mental health, despite being at increased risk to poor mental health and suicide.

School connectedness can be understood through student-teacher relationships and pupils' sense of the school community. It is vital to support students and their mental health as the majority of adolescence is spent in school.

The aim of this project was to understand the difference in the relationship between school connectedness and depression for LGBTQ+ and heterosexual adolescents.

This analysis used data from an online survey completed by 2,549 Year 9 students (aged 13-14) in 20 schools across south west England (Autumn 2019).

Implications

- Training is recommended for school staff on how best to support the mental health needs of LGBTQ+ students.
- Training should emphasize inclusion, respect and listening to all students.
- Schools should instil a safe, supportive and respectful environment for all.
- Further research is necessary to understand the role of the school environment in other mental health outcomes such as anxiety and self-harm.
- Further research could explore whether there are differences in the relationship between school connectedness and depression based on gender, ethnicity, disability or socioeconomic status.

About the School

The NIHR School for Public Health Research is a partnership between the Universities of Sheffield; Bristol; Cambridge; Imperial; and University College London; The London School for Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM); LiLaC – a collaboration between the Universities of Liverpool and Lancaster; and Fuse - The Centre for Translational Research in Public Health a collaboration between Newcastle, Durham, Northumbria, Sunderland and Teesside Universities.



This project is funded by/ supported by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) School for Public Health Research (Grant Reference Number PD-SPH-2015-10025). The views expressed are those of the author(s) and not necessarily those of the NIHR or the Department of Health and Social Care.



Key findings

For all adolescents in the sample, increased school connectedness was associated with lower reported depressive symptoms.

The association between school connectedness and depressive symptoms was stronger for LGBTQ+ adolescents.

LGBTQ+ adolescents reported lower average school connectedness compared to heterosexual adolescents.

- LGBTQ+ adolescents reported an average score of 2.77 out of 5, compared to 3.01 in heterosexual adolescents.

LGBTQ+ adolescents reported higher depression scores.

- Using the Hospital Anxiety and Depression scale ranging from 0 to 21, LGBTQ+ adolescents reported an average score of 6.52 compared to 4.83 in heterosexual peers.

Knowledge gaps:

A causal relationship cannot be established with a single wave of data therefore longitudinal studies are necessary. Studies can extend into other mental health outcomes such as anxiety or self-harm.

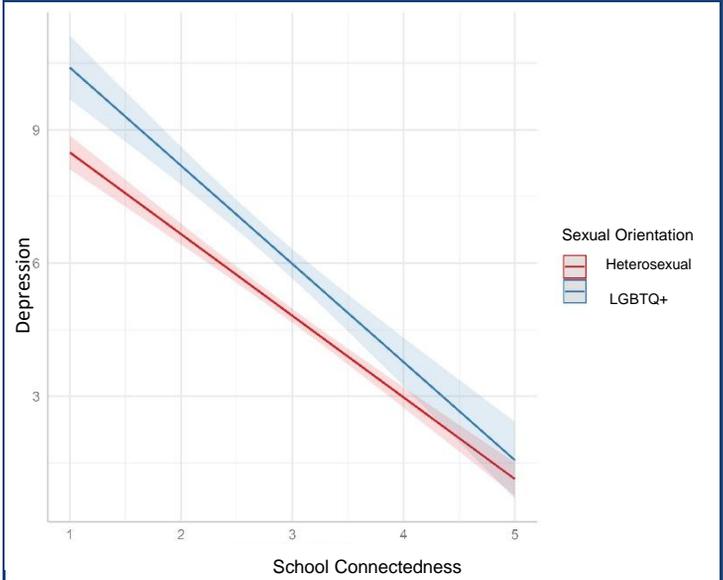
Further information

This work is related to the NIHR School for Public Health Research on young people's experiences of mental health. For further research: <https://sphr.nihr.ac.uk/news-and-events/report-reveals-young-people-felt-less-anxious-and-more-connected-to-school-in-lockdown/>

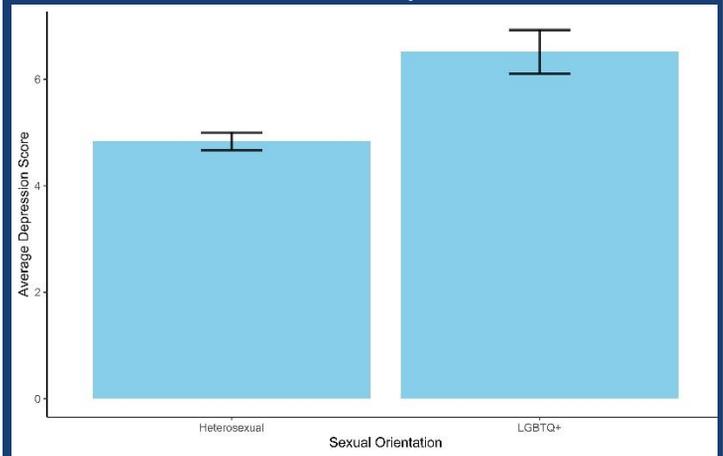
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Relationship between School Connectedness, Depression and Sexual Orientation



Average Depression Scores in LGBTQ and Heterosexual Adolescents (with 95% confidence intervals)



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