DANE COUNTY YOUTH ASSESSMENT NEWS BRIEF:

HOMOPHOBIC VICTIMIZATION AND EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

Victimization, such as bullying, name calling, and physical attacks, are often ubiquitous within schools and pose a significant problem for students, parents, and educators. Emerging findings on *homophobic* victimization explore the effects of homophobic epithets and slurs on targeted heterosexual and LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning) students. How, as parents and educators, can we address the severity of victimization and its ramifications?
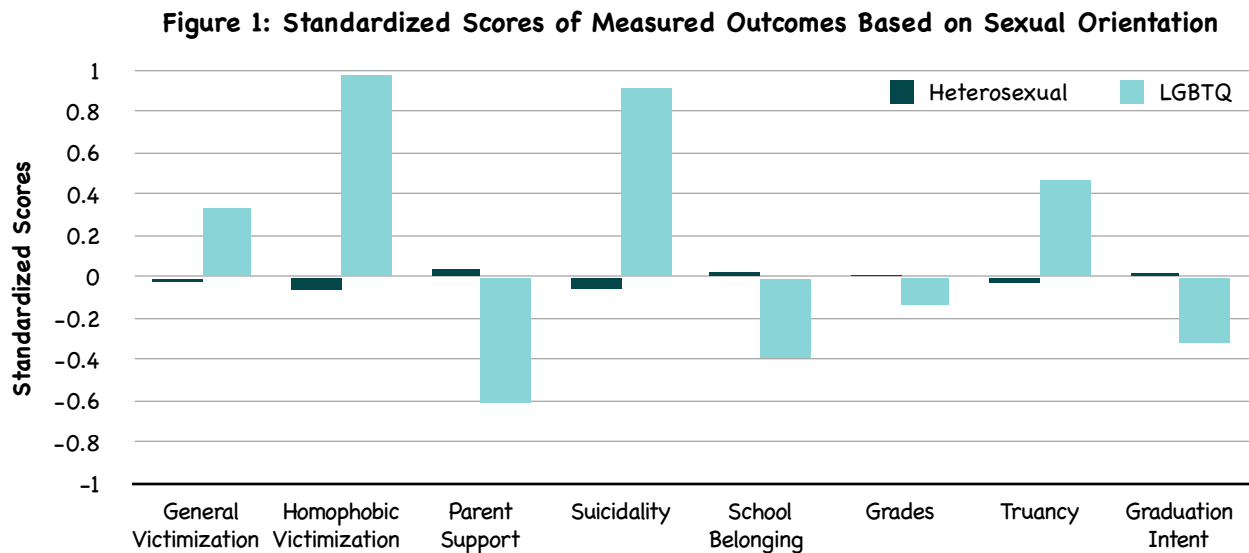
This report outlines the results of a recent study by examining:

1. **Education and health outcome differences based on youth sexual orientation.**
2. **The harmful role of homophobic victimization on youth suicidality and school belonging, and in turn, how this can lead to negative educational outcomes.**
3. **How parent support can buffer the negative effects of victimization.**

The data came from the Dane County Youth Assessment (DCYA), a county-wide survey taken by students in grades 7 to 12 in Dane County, Wisconsin. It included 45 public schools, 15,923 students aged 10 to 18; 94.2% identified as heterosexual and 5.8% identified as LGBTQ. The sample was racially diverse, with 76.4% identifying as White and 23.6% as racial/ethnic minorities. There was an equal split between boys and girls, as well as an even distribution across grade levels.

FINDING 1: LGBTQ youth report higher educational and health concerns.

As indicated in Figure 1, heterosexual youth reported higher general parent support, better grades, a greater sense of school belonging, and a stronger intent to graduate than LGBTQ youth. Meanwhile, LGBTQ youth reported higher general and homophobic victimization, suicidality, and truancy.

Figure 1: Standardized Scores of Measured Outcomes Based on Sexual Orientation
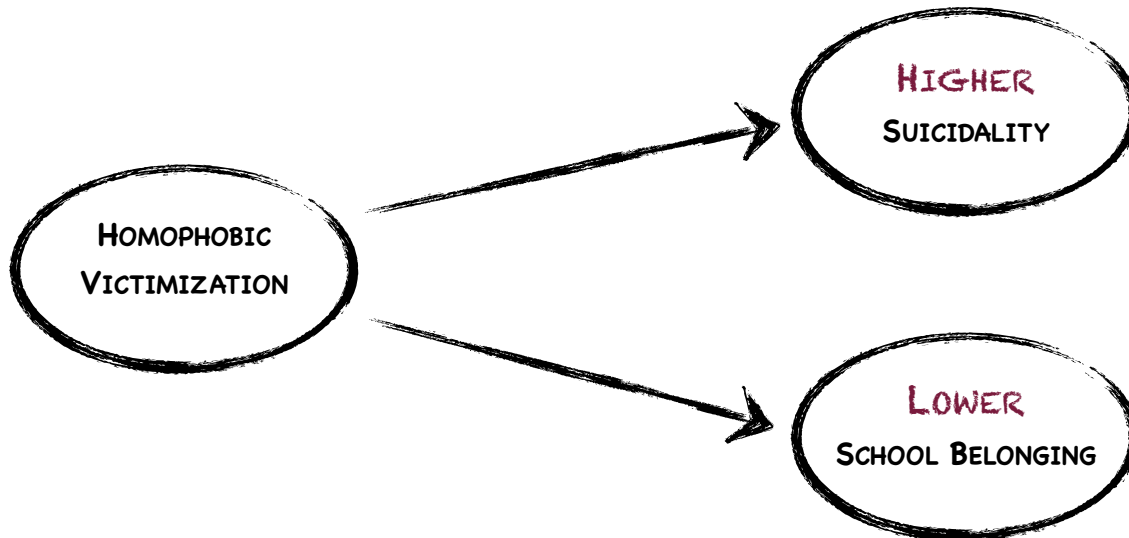
HOMOPHOBIC VICTIMIZATION

FINDING 2: Homophobic victimization can negatively impact youth regardless of sexual orientation or race.

LGBTQ youth experience more homophobic victimization than their heterosexual peers, ultimately leading to negative mental health outcomes and school related issues. Notably, homophobic victimization is also damaging to white and racial or ethnic minority heterosexual youth.
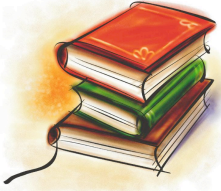
SUICIDALITY & SCHOOL BELONGING

Homophobic victimization is associated with higher suicidality and lower school belonging among all youth, independent of sexual orientation and race or ethnicity

HOMOPHOBIC VICTIMIZATION → HIGHER SUICIDALITY

HOMOPHOBIC VICTIMIZATION → LOWER SCHOOL BELONGING

RECOMMENDATIONS

✓ Take an active role in providing school-based programs to address homophobic victimization.

✓ Consult resources on how to provide affirmation and support for LGBTQ youth and heterosexual youth who experience homophobic victimization.

✓ Understand how youth with multiple minority identities (e.g., LGBTQ youth of color) can interpret and react to experiences of victimization.

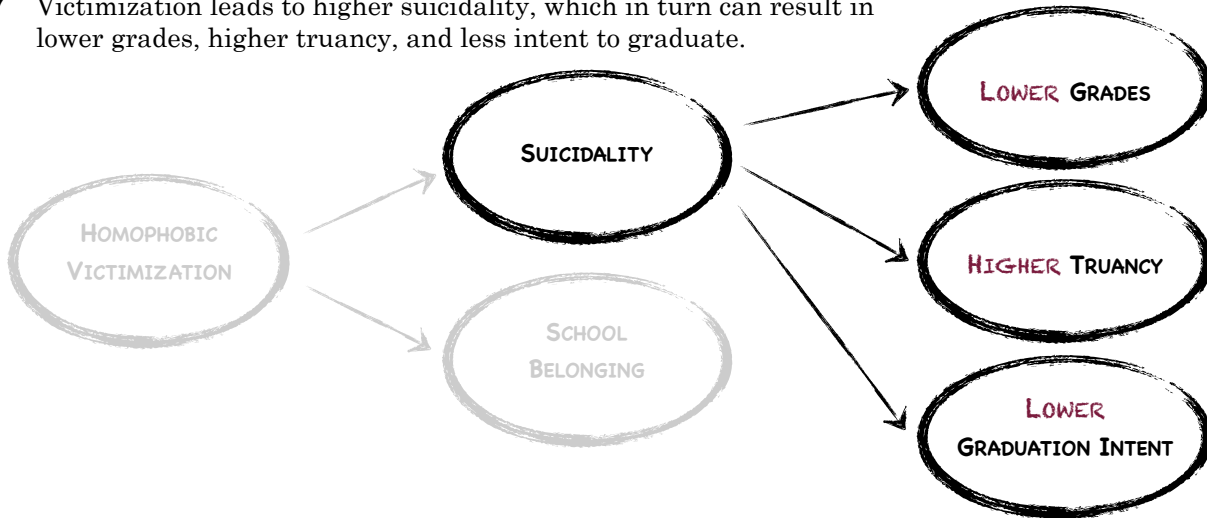✓ Address homophobic victimization so that it is inclusive to all students.

EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

FINDING 3: Higher suicidality and lower school belonging from homophobic victimization can bring forth educational concerns.
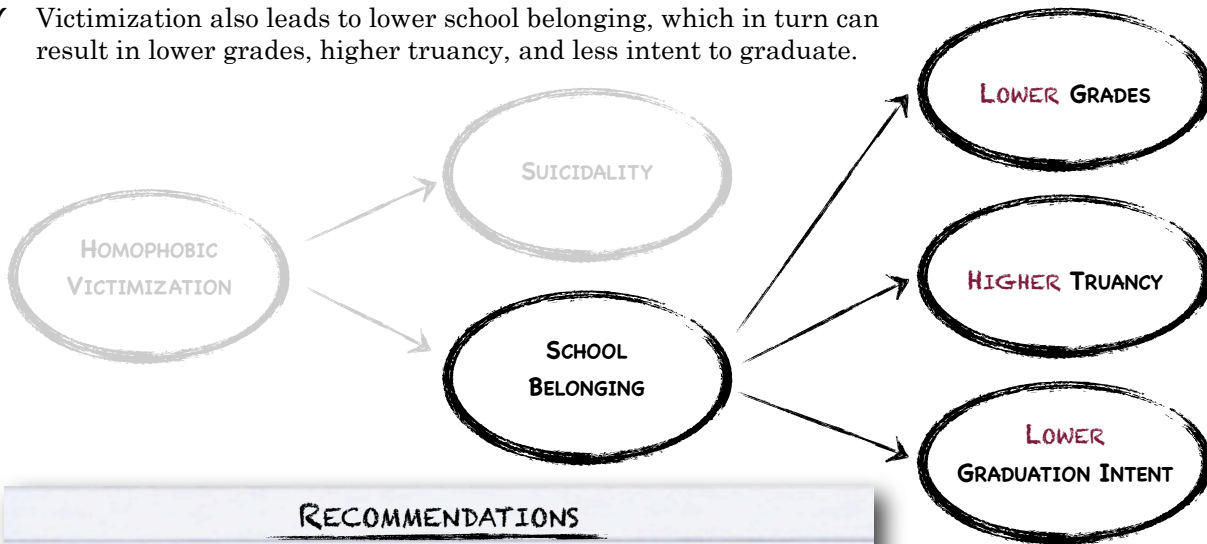
SUICIDALITY & EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

✓ Victimization leads to higher suicidality, which in turn can result in lower grades, higher truancy, and less intent to graduate.

HOMOPHOBIC VICTIMIZATION → SUICIDALITY → LOWER GRADES / HIGHER TRUANCY / LOWER GRADUATION INTENT
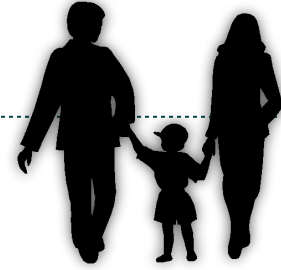
SCHOOL BELONGING

SCHOOL BELONGING & EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

✓ Victimization also leads to lower school belonging, which in turn can result in lower grades, higher truancy, and less intent to graduate.

SUICIDALITY

HOMOPHOBIC VICTIMIZATION → SCHOOL BELONGING → LOWER GRADES / HIGHER TRUANCY / LOWER GRADUATION INTENT

RECOMMENDATIONS

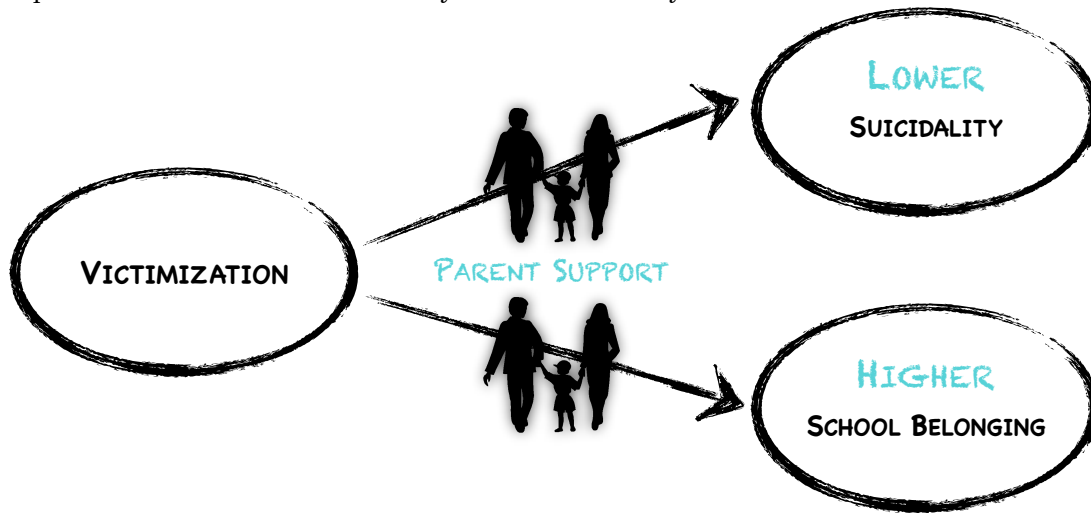✓ **Must address homophobic victimization, mental health, and school climate as part of efforts to improve academic performance.**

✓ **Understand how additional outcomes could emerge through suicidality and school belonging as the result of victimization, such as avoiding help-seeking, drug use, sexual risk behaviors, etc.**

RESILIENCY THROUGH PARENT SUPPORT

FINDING 4: Parent support buffers the impact of general and homophobic victimization.

In general, parent support led to lower suicidality and higher school belonging. In the presence of general victimization, parent support buffered its effect on suicidality. Parent support buffered the effects of homophobic victimization on suicidality for heterosexual youth.

VICTIMIZATION → PARENT SUPPORT → LOWER SUICIDALITY

VICTIMIZATION → PARENT SUPPORT → HIGHER SCHOOL BELONGING

RECOMMENDATIONS

✓ **Students, parents, and educators should collaborate together to develop appropriate interventions to combat homophobic victimization.**

✓ **Counselors should collaborate with parents to help equip them to understand and respond to general and homophobic victimization.**

✓ **Students in schools with GSAs (Gay-Straight Alliances) often report a more positive school atmosphere. Educators should continue to explore GSAs as an additional way to increase youth resiliency.**

Study Reference:
Poteat, V. P., Mereish, E. H., DiGiovanni, C. D., & Koenig, B. W. (2011). The effects of general and homophobic victimization on adolescents' psychosocial and educational concerns: The importance of intersecting identities and parent support. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 58*, 597-609 .

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