

Gay-Straight Alliances are Associated with Student Health

A Multi-School Comparison

LGBTQ: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning

GSA: Gay Straight Alliance, an organization comprised of students and faculty that promotes tolerance and equality for all people focusing on LGBTQ issues.

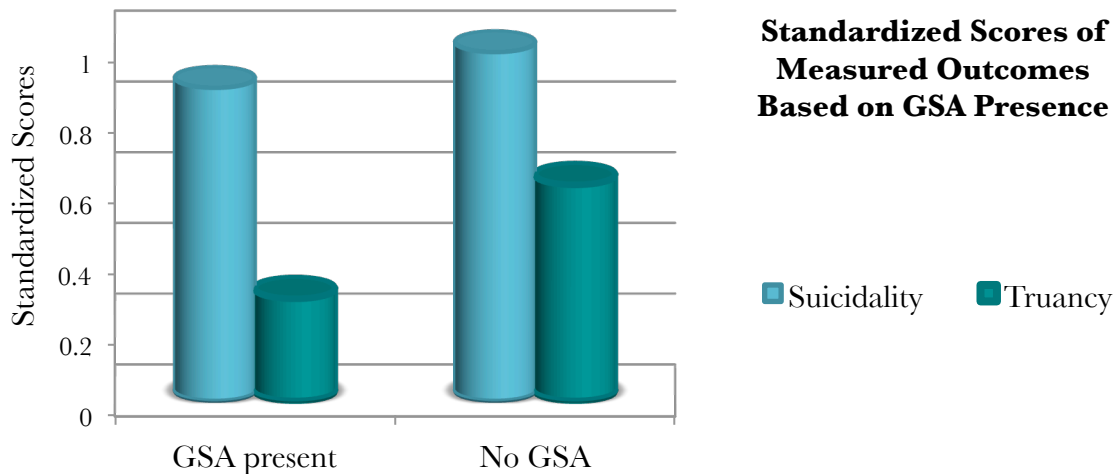
LGBTQ youth face **heightened risks**. Research shows that GSAs within schools provide a **positive impact** on LGBTQ youth. However, high-risk behaviors and GSAs have yet to be analyzed in connection with each other.

This study strove to identify the **effects** of GSAs on different behaviors and emotions of LGBTQ high school youth¹ as well as any effect on their heterosexual counterparts.

The **behaviors** included smoking, drinking, suicidality, and high-risk sexual behavior while the emotions included victimization, suicidal ideation, and school belonging.

GSA's & LGBTQ YOUTH

Finding 1: LGBTQ youth in schools with GSAs reported healthier functioning than those in schools without GSAs.



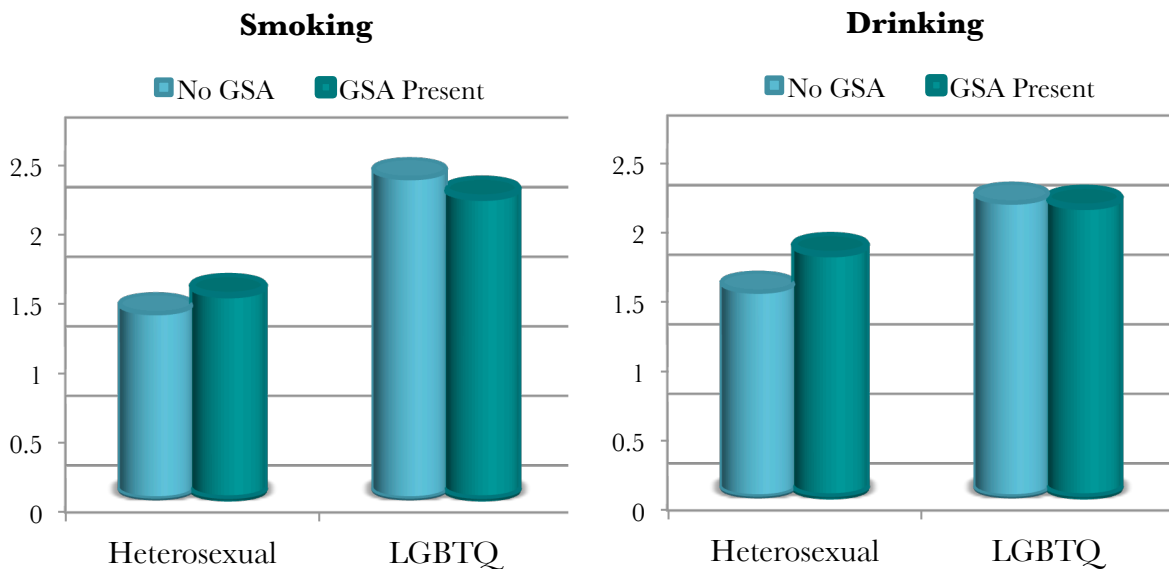
¹ Participants were 17,366 students in grades 7 to 12 from the 2009 Dane County Youth Assessment (DCYA). This produced a final sample of 15,965 students (50% males; 94.2% heterosexual). The sample was self-identified as 76.2% White and 23.5% racial/ethnic minorities. Finally, data from a statewide organization that supports LGBTQ youth were used to match schools in the DCYA with records of GSAs in Dane County schools during the 2009 school year (n = 14 with a GSA; n = 31 no GSA).

Recommendations

- Implementation of a GSA or similar organization that promotes those ideals of equality and tolerance
- Formal sexual health education that includes the issues of sexual minorities
- Self-esteem and tolerance workshops to build positive self-image to negate victimization and internalization of prejudice

GSAs, SMOKING, AND DRINKING

Finding 2: LGBTQ youth in schools with GSAs were less likely to smoke cigarettes and drink alcohol.



Recommendations

- Substance use workshops to educate youth on the detrimental effects of drinking and smoking cigarettes
- Self-esteem and tolerance workshops to build positive self-image to negate victimization and internalization of prejudice

Source:

Poteat, V. P., Sinclair, K. O., DiGiovanni, C. D., Koenig, B. W., & Russell, S. T. (under revision). Gay-Straight Alliances are associated with student health: A multi-school comparison of LGBTQ and heterosexual youth. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*.