Risk Factors for LGBTQ Youth

During the past decade, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender adolescents have become increasingly visible in our families, communities, and systems of care. Although strides have been made with regard to recognition, awareness, and sensitivity toward LGBTQ youth, there is still a significant way to go, as evidenced by the startling statistics below.

What Do We Know?
- There are an estimated 2.7 million school age LGBTQ youth in the US
- LGBTQ youth are more likely than their heterosexual peers to:
  - Experience depression
  - Attempt suicide
  - Be harassed at school and in the community
  - Experience verbal and physical violence
  - Abuse substances
  - Drop out of school
  - Become homeless

Education:
- 31% of LGBTQ youth reported skipping school each month because of fear for their own safety (4.5 times more than heterosexual peers).
- 28% of LGBTQ youth dropped out of school due to peer harassment (3 times the national average).
- 97% of all students report hearing anti-gay remarks in school.
- 18.8% have heard anti-gay remarks from faculty.
- 82.9% reported that staff never or only sometimes intervened.
- In one study of LGBTQ adolescents, half said homosexuality was discussed in their classes. 50% of the females and 37% of the males said it was handled negatively.

Violence/Bullying:
- 84% had been verbally harassed at school.
- 65.3% had been sexually harassed.
- 55% of transgender youth reported physical attacks.
- 100% of LGBTQ youth in New York City group homes reported verbal harassment while at their group home and 70% reported physical violence due to their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Over 39% of all gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth reported being punched, kicked, or injured with a weapon at school because of their sexual orientation.
• 77.9% of LGBTQ youth reported sometimes or frequently hearing anti-gay remarks. They reported hearing slurs such as “homo,” “faggot,” and “sissy” about 26 times a day or once every 14 minutes.

Substance Abuse:
• Youth who are harassed because of their real or perceived sexual orientation are more likely than non-harassed youth to use crack cocaine, cocaine, anabolic steroids, and inhalants.
• 68% of teen gay males and 83% of teen lesbians use alcohol.
• 46% of teen gay males and 56% of teen lesbians use other drugs.

Homelessness:
• Between 20-40% of homeless youth are LGBTQ.
• Homelessness increases likelihood of engaging in prostitution and alcohol and drug abuse, violence, suicide, and HIV and other STDs.
• 26% of LGBTQ youth who “come out” to their families are thrown out of their homes because of conflicts with moral and religious values.
• 78% of the LGBTQ youth were removed or ran away from their foster placements as a result of hostility toward their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Suicide:
• 33% of LGBTQ high school students reported attempting suicide in the previous year, compared to 8% of their heterosexual peers.
• LGBTQ youth are 4 times more likely to attempt suicide.
• 16% required medical attention as a result of an attempt compared to 3% of heterosexual peers.

Youth of Color:
• Stigma creates even greater risk for substance use, violence, and risky sexual behaviors.
• Youth of color often don’t identify as “gay” which may mean they will not seek services or hear messages designed for the White LGBTQ community.
• LGBTQ youth of color may not receive their community’s support regarding sexual orientation or transgender identity.
• LGBTQ Native American youth have increased risk for substance abuse, mental illness, and HIV infection due to racial/ethnic discrimination and to homophobia within native cultures.

Coming Out:
• The average age that youth come out is now 16.
• It is incredibly difficult and a huge personal risk.
• It can happen in stages.
• Personal timing is essential.
• It can create fear.
• There is danger in “outing.” More than 30% of LGBTQ youth reported suffering physical violence at the hands of a family member after coming out.
• Creating a support system of people (“family”) can help many to feel a sense of pride and understanding of who they are.

References