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 youth\(^1\) 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.

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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:**